

# The Boston Globe

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## TOP PLACES TO WORK

### The Work-Life Balance Two-Step

Whether employees are on the job, or cutting a rug after hours, companies want to offer their support.

By Dana Gerber

**A**lexia Pico has harbored a passion for dance since childhood. These days, she leaves her evening ballroom lessons in Dedham relaxed and clearheaded — and ready for another day at Kymera Therapeutics, the Watertown bio-pharmaceutical company where she works as senior manager of quality systems.

“It’s almost like I have two jobs,” Pico says. “One is here, and one is on the dance floor.”

When Pico first started at Kymera in April, she had a torn meniscus that left her unable to dance. But she was able to pay for a personal trainer to rebuild her strength using the \$125 wellness stipend the company gives each of its 170 employees every month, no questions asked. By midsummer, she was back on the dance floor.

“It just makes me realize that they care about me as a person as well as an employee,” Pico says. “Sometimes I’m just in my head thinking about work, and when I’m on the dance floor, I can’t do that. So it definitely helps me a lot [to] balance myself, which makes me a better employee.”

Kymera’s wellness stipend, instituted at the beginning of the year, is designed to let workers know “we care about them, and want to give them a way to care for themselves,” says Karen Weisbach, vice president of people and culture.

During the pandemic, workers suddenly found their personal lives on



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**Athenahealth opened a health center in the lobby of its Watertown headquarters in June 2021.**

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display in the virtual office. Employers saw the art on their employees’ living room walls, their kids bursting in on Zoom meetings, their dogs barking in the background. By the same token, work began to creep into more of employees’ home lives, with kitchen tables turning

into workstations and log-on and log-off times growing fuzzier.

As these boundaries blurred, benefits supporting employee well-being — be it physical, mental, social, or otherwise — have grown all the more critical. Sixty-one percent of workers now view work-life balance and well-being as “very important” when considering a job offer, compared with 53 percent in 2015, according to a Gallup study released in February.

It’s crucial to invest in “taking care of the whole person,” Weisbach says. “The pandemic has shifted permanently how

we think about work, how we think about life.” Companies are “in a bubble if they’re not really actively engaging in this stuff.”

For some companies, this is nothing new. At Newburyport-based bank Institution for Savings, employees receive a \$50 American Express gift card each time they get a preventative health screening, such as a mammogram or colonoscopy. This program has been in place for over a decade, but it was expanded recently to include screenings for diabetes and vision.

Since 2016, the bank has given out more than \$40,000 worth of gift cards in conjunction with the program, which it hopes will also serve to drive down health care costs, says Mary Anne Clancy, the senior vice president for marketing and communications. While participation waned in 2020, it’s back up again.

“It’s just heartwarming to know that my employer cares about me like that,” says Sandra Terry, a part-time assistant manager at one of the bank’s Newburyport offices, who gets most of the eligible screenings. “That they want you to go get these things done.”

**“We want our employees to be excited about their jobs and their lives. We want them to be healthy and happy in general,” says athenahealth chief operating officer Bret Connor.**

Health care software company athenahealth takes its commitment to employee well-being a step further with a health center in the lobby of its Watertown headquarters. There, employees and their dependents can receive primary and urgent care at a time when health care appointments can still be hard to come by.

Though discussions about opening an on-site health center began in 2018, and it opened in June 2021, the pandemic played a part in its development. There is a dedicated room for telehealth appointments, so employees can receive care from anywhere.

“We want our employees to be excited about their jobs and their lives. We

want them to be healthy and happy in general,” says chief operating officer Bret Connor. “Having access to an on-site health center, and the virtual telehealth services that we offer, we believe gives them peace of mind.”

Engineering manager Eran Spira has been to the on-site health center several times — for his yearly physical, blood work, and to get flu shots for his kids. “If I have time between meetings, I can schedule a quick appointment ... that’s much more convenient and a lot easier than to go to a doctor’s office somewhere,” Spira says. “It made keeping up with my health a lot more doable.”

Supporting working parents — 66 percent of whom reported burn-out amid the pandemic, according to a survey from The Ohio State University published in May — has also become a big focus for employers. At the Cambridge biotech Relay Therapeutics, many employees are at an age where they may be starting or expanding their families, says Jeanne Gray, chief people officer. So this year, the company began offering new parents a year’s supply of free diapers.