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# New Options for Women Balancing Work and Family

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According to the Center for Women and Work, “In 1900 women made up 18.4 percent of the working population. Today, women make up 46.4 percent of the labor force.” Nearly 72 percent of women with children younger than 18 are in the workforce, many of whom do not have a choice about whether or not to work. A study conducted by three professors (Shapiro, Ingols, and Blake-Beard) at the Simmons School of Management showed that the majority of women (86 percent) in their sample “reported providing more than half of their household incomes, with over a third totally responsible for paying the bills” (2007, p. 2).

While women take on additional responsibilities away from home, their household duties often remain the same. Women often multitask, such as doing laundry while cooking dinner, to complete household tasks. According to Mattingly and Bianchi, “women typically feel somewhat more time-pressured than do men; 34.4% of women report that they always feel rushed, while only 28.8% of men do” (2003, p. 1022). In addition, Milkie et al. found that “a significant percentage—almost half—of American parents residing with their children feel that they spend too little time with them” (2004, p. 757). Given these conditions, it is not surprising that Raskin (2006, p. 1374) found that

work-family issues accounted for 43% of the variance in turnover intent, suggesting that family friendliness and supervisor support for working mothers is most important in predicting turnover intent . . . Working mothers were less likely to intend to quit their jobs when they worked at supportive organizations that were sensitive to and responsive to the needs of working mothers.

Employers are beginning to realize the importance of helping employees balance their work and family lives. Cullen et al. (2003, p. 12) said that some family-friendly policies and practices that have been found to be helpful include:

childcare allowances, childcare voucher schemes; paid family, special or career leave, paid paternity leave; enhanced maternity leave and benefits; phased return from maternity leave; job sharing; flexible starting and finishing times; voluntary reduced-hours working; unpaid leave during school holidays; family access to learning resources; guaranteed Christmas leave for employees with families; and homeworking and teleworking arrangements.

These arrangements are beneficial to employers because such policies tend to reduce absenteeism, reduce employee turnover, improve recruiting efforts, and improve employee morale and productivity.

Some families try to create a balance by having one parent work from home. New technology has made it easier for some to work from home, which can allow workers the opportunity to have more control over and flexibility in their schedules. Referred to as teleworking, telecommuting, flexible work arrangements or flexiplace, this arrangement allows employees to perform “work away from the traditional centralized office environment. Modern technological advances have made it easier to work anytime, anywhere, and anyplace” (Shore, 1999, p. 1). Teleworking is an example of a move “away from a ‘face-time’ business culture to a ‘results-oriented’ business culture” (Hill, Martinson, & Ferris, 2004, p. 291).

Working from home allows parents the ability to: spend more time with children, spouses, friends, and family; participate in children's school and extra-curricular activities; and enjoy hobbies. Parents can also arrange their schedules around children's needs, such as doctor's appointments. It also decreases the need for and cost of taking children to a babysitter. When employees work from home, they do not have to spend time or money commuting, which allows for more family time.

However, teleworking can also have negative affects on the workers' and their families' lives. Cell phones, Blackberries, widespread Internet access, and other technological advances have created the possibility of a "24/7" workplace. It can be difficult to separate work time and family time when working from home. It is easy for the worker to slip away from family activities and work for hours when work is at home. Though some choose to work from home in an effort to reduce their work hours, they may work longer hours (Cullen et al., 2003). Family members may not understand that when the worker is working, he or she is not available for long personal conversations, just as they would not be available if they were working in a traditional office setting (Cullen et al., 2003).

It is interesting to note the different reasons why men and women choose teleworking, according to Cullen et al. (2003):

Studies have found that the motivation for teleworking is the same for men and women without children or with grown-up children. They wished to reduce commuting time, be able to work without interruptions and wished to make choices about when and where they worked. The motivation to telework for couples with younger children however, shows that there are significant gender differences. It would appear that women may choose to telework in order to achieve flexibility in coping with work and family and as a way to balance childcare, whereas men opt for telework

to increase productivity, escape the environment of the corporate workplace and free themselves from conventional working hours.

No matter what type of working arrangement employees and employers have, it is clear that many women today are striving to create a balance between work and family life through alternative working arrangements.

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