

## FAMILY ISSUES

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

My name is Debra Schwartz, and I'm here today from the Families and Work Institute to share some of the knowledge about work and family issues that our non-profit research organization has amassed. I have come to this field from the corporate world, and possess a background in organization development. The broad focus of the Families and Work Institute is to develop new approaches for balancing the changing needs of U.S. families with the continuing need for workplace productivity. Our research agenda focuses on understanding work-family problems, developing work-family policy recommendations, and evaluating work-family solutions. Most of the information and observations I will share with you today come directly from the Institute's research and consulting projects.

Examples of our work include the *Corporate Reference Guide to Work-Family Programs*<sup>1</sup> which profiles the work-family policies of 188 Fortune 1000 companies and provides a benchmarking index of family-friendliness. We have also published a study of the impact of legislated parental leave in four states,<sup>2</sup> and are currently working on a national study of the changing workforce.

In addition, we work with clients to conduct employee needs assessments and develop work-family policy recommendations. To give you an example, a company contacted us because they are projecting an upcoming labor shortage and, knowing that work-family policies are quite important to employees, they want to assess the work-family issues their employees confront. The Institute has been hired to conduct employee focus groups, design, administer, and analyze a company-wide survey, and develop work-family policy recommendations.

In our most recent research project, we've been funded by the Sloan Foundation to study the barriers and opportunities for women in science and engineering careers, focusing on what role work-family issues may play. Thus, I am participating in this conference not only as a presenter, but also as a researcher gathering data.

Today I will give you an overview of the history of employer-sponsored work-family programs, and I will outline the forces which are fueling the growing attention to work-family issues. I will also outline some of the most common measures employers are instituting in an effort to recognize and minimize the work-family conflict experienced by their employees.

Because the most prominent activities in the work-family field have evolved in the corporate world, this will be the model to which I refer, the laboratory from which most of my data is drawn. As I describe the motivations and the initiatives demonstrated by corporations which embrace work-family measures, I would like you to be thinking about applications to your own institutions—what motivations will strengthen your employer's commitment to develop work-family policies and what initiatives are most

needed to mitigate the work-family conflicts that you and your co-workers face? We will brainstorm on these two questions in small discussion groups, in order to develop a list of action items.

Finally, I will outline the strategies that have been used successfully for introducing and sustaining work-family measures. I will also discuss how work-family issues relate to the larger concern of this conference—diversity in the field of astronomy.

## 2. OVERVIEW

Historically, companies responded to family needs in times of national emergency. The first on-site child care center was created during the Civil War by a manufacturer of soldier's clothing as a way to get women to help in the war effort. A similar rationale prompted the development of government-assisted child care centers during World Wars I and II. When wages were frozen during World War I and the Korean War, benefits expanded and new forms of family coverage were offered.

Industry's interest in benefit expansion and family supports waned during the 1950's, despite the growing labor force participation of women. During the 1960's, a handful of corporations created child care centers and supported family services in the community as a way to satisfy demands for corporate social responsibility.

Limited experimentation with child care occurred during the 1970's, but it wasn't until the 1980's that serious attention to child care, elder care, and parental leave emerged. As distinct from the 1960's concern with social responsibility, the current impetus for involvement is a recognition of fundamental changes in the workforce and the implications of these changes for ongoing competitiveness and the bottom line.

## 3. CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

*Workforce 2000*,<sup>3</sup> a report commissioned by the Department of Labor and published by the Hudson Institute, predicts both slower labor force growth and an increasing proportion of women in the workforce. By the year 2000, women will comprise 47% of the labor force, and will account for over 60% of net new entrants to the workforce. Eighty percent of these women will become pregnant at some point in their work lives. Thus, employers must pay attention to work-family concerns, as they often impede the recruitment, development, and retention of this growing segment of employees.

The labor force participation of women with pre-school children has more than quadrupled from 1950 to 1990. Fifty-eight percent of women with children under age 6 are in the workforce. Seventy percent of women with children aged 6–17 work for pay. The percentage of U.S. families with both mothers and fathers working was 63% in 1988, up from 43% in 1975.

An estimated 20% of workers will be responsible for aging relatives by the year 2000. This number will continue to grow as the over 85 age group is the country's fastest growing population.

Women are not the only members of the workforce grappling with work-family issues. Sixty percent of men have wives who work and men are increasingly shouldering more family responsibility. Between 1978 and 1989, the proportion of men who reported significant work-family conflict increased from 12% to 72%. Thus, employer sponsored work-family measures are needed by, and benefit men as well as women.

#### **4. PUSH TO BREAK THE GLASS CEILING**

Spurred on by egalitarian and competitive imperatives, employers want to break the glass ceiling which continues to limit women's career development. The changing demographics discussed indicate that women *must* succeed in the workforce in order for our nation to remain competitive. However, women cannot succeed when the rules are designed for male breadwinners with full-time wives tending the homefront. Women cannot succeed in an environment where they are penalized for taking advantage of the flexibility policies which exist. Work-family policies aim to create a level playing field by reducing the strains and penalties which are experienced disproportionately by women.

#### **5. GROWTH OF GOVERNMENT MANDATES**

The U.S. and South Africa are the only major industrialized nations that do not guarantee some form of job protected parental leave. In 1990 and 1991, President Bush vetoed the Family and Medical Leave bill. A revised version of the bill was recently passed by the Senate, and calls for employers with 50 or more employees to provide 12 weeks unpaid leave and continued health insurance coverage for the birth or adoption of a child, or the serious illness of a family member. Although the President [Bush] threatens to veto this federal legislation, experts predict a veto will increase the number of states which pass parental leave legislation. Presently, 25 states and the District of Columbia have mandated parental leave. In anticipation of the growth of such mandates, many employers have instituted or improved their own leave policies.

#### **6. INCREASED EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS**

During the 1980's, individuals accommodated most of the changes created by the increase in employed mothers. They redefined relationships, revised expectations, and pieced together a unique set of community services and family supports in order to get to work and raise a family. In the 1990's, families feel pushed to their limits, and employees expect corporations, government, schools, and religious institutions to redefine their relationships and expectations, and to experiment with new services.

#### **7. PRODUCTIVITY LOSS**

A growing body of research indicates that a lack of support for family responsibilities—usually dependent care—damages employee productivity. The focus of most of this research has been on child care, an area which confronts parents with a series of problems.

First, child care is difficult for many employees to locate. A nationally representative survey conducted for *Fortune Magazine* found that one of every three parents of infants and toddlers, and one of every four parents of preschoolers had a difficult or very difficult time finding child care. Learning about available sources of child care represents only part of the process. Parents may be unable to obtain child care because of long waiting lists, expense, the commute, or unsatisfactory choices. Fifty-four percent of parents who participated in needs assessments of employees in three New Jersey

companies reported that it had been difficult or very difficult to make their current child care arrangements. In these studies, difficulty finding and obtaining child care were correlated significantly with overall absenteeism.

Second, some child care arrangements are more satisfactory than others. Studies have found that employees with children in self-care—at home alone or with siblings—miss more days of work per year than the average employee.

Third, parents are often forced to put together a patchwork child care system that tends to fall apart. Studies have found that employees report an average of 1.7 arrangements for each child age 13 and under. Unfortunately these arrangements are tenuous. The Fortune Magazine survey found that one in four employed fathers and mothers had to scramble to make last minute arrangements two to five times in a three month period because their regular arrangements had broken down.

When regression analyses were conducted, it was found that breakdowns in child care were significantly correlated with tardiness and absenteeism, spending unproductive time at work, stress levels, and stress-related health problems.

Although there has been less research on the impact of elder care on productivity, studies indicate employees who care for elderly dependents have higher stress levels and stress-related illness than other employees, even those with children.

## 8. EMPLOYER RESPONSES TO WORK-FAMILY ISSUES

### 8.1. *Leave*

All of the 188 Fortune 500 corporations which participated in our study of work-family policies and programs provide paid maternity leaves, which are covered by short-term disability insurance. However, many employees in this country are not covered by disability insurance. In addition, extended leave is often desired by one or both parents to care for the newborn. In other instances, an employee may require a leave period to care for an adopted child, or a seriously ill child or parent. For all of these reasons, attention to the concept of parental and family leave is increasing. Approximately 25% of the companies we surveyed offered specially designated “parenting,” “family,” or “childcare” leaves.

The critical components of a leave policy include:

- Available for parenting/adoption/illness of child, parent, or self
- Job protection
- Continued health insurance coverage during leave

The more variable components of a leave policy have to do with:

- Length of time available
- Pay
- Eligibility

The Families and Work Institute’s study of the impact of legislatively mandated parental leave in four states found that implementation was easy and substantial costs did not result for the majority of employers, regardless of company size.

### 8.2. *Child Care*

Among the range of family supportive policies and programs, child care has received the most attention and experimentation, with an estimated 5,600 employers nationwide

providing some form of child care support, up from 110 companies in 1978. While, at first, on-site child care centers were thought to be the only way to respond to child care needs, this is one of the least prevalent options today. Rather, employers are interested in helping their employees find or pay for child care within the community child care system. Components of child care assistance chosen by employers should take into account the needs of their employee population, the resources of the company, and the nature of the local child care market.

Child care assistance may take a number of forms:

- Informational Assistance (Resource and referral services)

If a range of child care services exist, the problem that parents may face is finding them. Three hundred resource and referral agencies exist across the country to help parents find appropriate care and make them wiser consumers of the care they purchase. About 1,500 companies contract with these local agencies to provide counselling and referrals to their employees. The effectiveness of R&R depends on the adequacy of the child care supply.

- Financial Assistance (Discounts, Vouchers, DCAPS)

To help employees reduce the costs of purchasing child care services, employers may contract with individual vendors to create a discount at specific programs. Other companies implement voucher programs to subsidize child care costs at a program of the employee's choosing.

The most popular form of employer support for child care is a Dependent Care Assistance Plan (or DCAP) offered within a flexible benefits program. DCAPS allow employees to use pre-tax dollars to purchase dependent care services; the only costs to the employer are administrative. More than 2500 companies provide DCAP's in response to employee child care needs.

- Creation of New Services (On-site, Near-site, Family Day Care, After School, Sick Child Care)

Companies may increase the availability of care by creating an on- or near-site child care center, expanding the supply of family child care, or funding after-school or sick child care programs.

Employers may develop these programs exclusively for their own employees, in consortium with other local employers for use by the combined labor pool of the participating firms, or as a community investment that is available to employees as well as the community at large.

There are approximately 1400 on or near-site child care centers sponsored by employers—with the majority being sponsored by hospitals which need to address a nursing shortage and round the clock hours. However, the on-site center is not feasible for the majority of employers, who often lack the resources or the labor pool to fill a center. The commuting patterns of employees and the costs of downtown space make it difficult for companies in large urban areas to create centers employees want to use or can afford. Some worksites, such as chemical plants may be inappropriate locations for children.

Experimental studies show the primary benefits of an employer sponsored child care center to be reduced turnover and improved recruitment. Managers perceive improved morale, reduced absenteeism, and improved productivity.

### 8.3. Elder Care

While only a few hundred companies have responded to the elder care needs of their employees, the number is likely to grow dramatically as aging baby boomers become responsible for their aging parents. Caring for elderly relatives can be more complex than child care because it involves the coordination of a variety of social services—transportation, medical, legal, housekeeping, and personal services. Caregivers must conduct research, confer with doctors, find home health care, visit nursing homes, and apply for medicare. Company responses to elder care needs include:

- Providing information and counselling services
- Using Employee Assistance Programs to reduce stress
- Contracting with a community based or national referral service
- Providing limited DCAP use
- Providing access to long-term care insurance

### 8.4. Flexibility

While child care and elder care supports may be necessary to get to work, the greatest stress that employees feel may be caused by the *rigidity* of their work day and of their supervisors. Employee surveys clearly indicate a preference for more flexibility, over and above specific child care or elder care programs. Flexibility initiatives vary widely, and corporations are trying a range of measures, including:

- Flextime
- Flexplace
- Phased-in return from maternity leave
- Phased retirement
- Part-time
- Job sharing
- Compressed work weeks
- Personal days
- Leaves of Absence
- Management Training/Culture Change

Flexibility, broadly defined, is the *essence* of an effective approach to work-family issues. Flexibility is achieved not only by developing policies, but perhaps more importantly by gaining the cooperation of supervisors in developing creative solutions. Flexibility may take a variety of forms, and is intended to serve the interests of *both* employer and employee. Flexibility is also perhaps the most difficult work-family proposal for which to win acceptance, because it often confronts a long-standing organizational culture, and challenges that culture to change in fundamental ways.

In academic institutions, concern with work-family issues is on the rise, for largely the same reasons that are compelling to corporations.

At this point we broke into small groups of about 7 and reflected on the motivations and the work-family initiatives exhibited by corporations to propose a number of answers to the following questions:

- What will motivate academic institutions to respond to work-family issues? (Competition, social responsibility, recruiting, retention, etc.)

- What work-family initiatives are most urgently needed within your own institutions?

Academic institutions are interested in the role work-family policies may play in improving faculty recruitment and retention, and in supporting faculty productivity and professional development. However, flexibility takes on a different form in the academic world. Policies and programs being tried include:

- Reduced teaching loads after childbirth
- Extension of the tenure clock
- Tenure-track for part-time jobs
- Employment assistance for spouses
- On-campus child care
- Expanded maternity and childcare leaves

## 9. TAKING ACTION—STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING A WORK-FAMILY AGENDA

Despite the growing recognition of work and family issues in the workplace, every organization must go through a process of self-examination and questioning to justify the appropriateness of a response to family needs within its culture. Typically, the creation of work-family programs and policies proceeds through a series of developmental stages:

1. Getting initial support to investigate work-family problems and possible solutions
2. Developing internal support for specific recommendations and policy options
3. Maintaining support for the continuation of existing work-family policies and programs
4. Expanding work-family programs to create culture change

Throughout each stage, the following strategies are recommended for success:

- Have a respected champion
- Involve a broad group of people in the process
- Identify allies and antagonists
- Gather hard data and supporting information
- Know what competitors are doing
- Define *institutional* objectives and connect work-family issues to an institutional strategy
- Create a vision, but work incrementally
- Consider both the short and long-term implications of what is being proposed
- Communicate continually
- Provide feedback on success

At every stage, the “tone” of the strategy will depend on the level of resistance and the style of the champion. Some of those who have been through the process feel that “guerilla tactics” are absolutely necessary to get work-family issues heard. Other experienced leaders feel it is more important to be straightforward and put the issues on the table simply and clearly.

Another consideration is whether one uses an economic justification or one of social responsibility. It need not be an either/or question—both strategies apply. Knowing the rationale for various commitments within the institution may help reveal whether

the moralistic high road is more appropriate. Even if asserting that work-family issues are the “right” thing today, remember that the relevance of work-family issues to *institutional objectives* must be clearly stated as well.

A stated objective of this conference, which may be viewed as a temporary “institution” representing the field of astronomy, is to promote the creation of a culturally diverse workplace—one which attracts, recruits, develops, promotes, and retains the *best* talent, regardless of race or gender. The themes of diversity and work-family reinforce one another:

- Both challenge a one-size-fits-all style of management. They expand the definition of equitable treatment from doing the same thing for everyone to doing something for everyone.
- Both emphasize the need for a flexible and systemic approach. Supervisors must learn to implement broadly stated policies in a flexible manner as diverse situations require.
- The ultimate goal of both work-family and diversity initiatives is to foster an organizational culture and structure which enable *all* employees to make their best contribution to the institution.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Galinsky, Ellen, Friedman, Dana E., and Hernandez, Carol. (1991). *The Corporate Reference Guide to Work-Family Programs*. Families and Work Institute.
- <sup>2</sup>Bond, James T., Galinsky, Ellen, Lord, Michele, Staines, Graham L. and Brown, Karen R. (1991). *Beyond the Parental Leave Debate: The Impact of Laws in Four States*. Families and Work Institute.
- <sup>3</sup>Johnston, William B. and Packer, Arnold H. (1987). *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century*. Indianapolis, IN: Hudson Institute.

## ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

- Friedman, Dana E. and Galinsky, Ellen. (1991). *Work and Family Trends*. Families and Work Institute.
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