



Great Day Houston with Debra Duncan
Thursday, June 5, 2008
Segment: Stay at Home Moms
Featuring: Kathi Crawford, SPHR and People Possibilities CEO

So what is the history of women entering the workforce over the last 100 years?

In 1900, 20% of women in the workforce were married. Only in minority, immigrant, or destitute families were married women likely to be engaged in paid work. Employed mothers were even rarer. Over the course of the next 100 years, though, a variety of forces drew more women, including mothers of very young children, into the labor force.

Throughout the last century, employers sought women for several rapidly growing occupations, including clerical duties, teaching, and nursing. These were jobs that men usually declined, in part because they were relatively low paying and offered little chance for advancement, and in part because these jobs were known as "women's work." At the same time, more and more women completed the high school or college degrees necessary to hold these jobs. In the last 25 years, fields have opened up that virtually had been closed to females and vast numbers were educated in law, medicine, business, and engineering. Women's earnings increased commensurate with their education, making employment even more attractive.

Women became interested in paid employment because, as the economy became more complex, they and their families began to want new products and services. This required additional income. In the latter part of the century, women found yet another reason to seek paid work. Specializing in childrearing and homemaking became too risky. In a climate where half of all marriages ended in divorce, and one out of three children spent a part of his or her childhood in a single-parent home, wives no longer could trust that their husbands would support them financially "'til death do us part." Some women also saw paid employment as insurance in case they wanted to initiate a divorce or leave an abusive or loveless marriage. As single mothers increased in number, they, too, found their way into the job market.

By the end of the century, women had come to see paid work as a standard part of their lives, even if they were married and raising young children. As of 2000, 61% of women over the age of 16 were in the work-force (as compared to 74% of men), including nearly 80% of mothers with kids aged six to 18, almost 75% of mothers with children aged three to five, and slightly more than 50% of mothers with infants. These figures reflect an extraordinary change throughout the entire century, particularly over the past 30 years. In 1970, only about 25% of mothers with a child under the age of three were in the work force.

What are flex time and job sharing?

- Flextime allows an employee to select the hours he or she will work, generally based upon limits set by the employer. Employees on a flexible schedule may work a condensed work week or may work a regular work week. Those working a condensed week may work four ten hour days, rather



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than five eight hour days. Those who work a five day week may work hours other than the typical "nine to five."

- Job-sharing is a way for two people to both fill one job. Each person has a permanent part-time post. They split the hours, pay, holidays and benefits between them according to how many hours they each work. There are three main types of job share: shared, divided or unrelated responsibility.
 - Shared responsibility means there is no division of duties. In this case, the partners are interchangeable. It requires a high level of communication and coordination yet it can bring great continuity of the role to the organization.
 - Divided responsibility means that projects and/or clients are split between the partners. Because of this division, each partner can work independently and choose their own hours and they don't have to know each other well.
 - Unrelated responsibility is where the partners do completely unrelated work while working in the same department. It's almost like two part-time jobs running in tandem and works when the partners have different skills both of which are needed by the employer.

If you work, how do you convince your boss to let you work in a flexible work arrangement?

- Today employers are jumping on the band wagon to offer flextime in the form of compressed work weeks and location flexibility. One of the primary reasons is a concern with the rising gas prices. I just spoke to one of my prior employees this week and found out that her company has just offered flex time to its corporate employees as a way to help employees who are traveling over 30 miles to and from work every day reduce their fuel expenses. These employees can now choose a four day work week and work ten hours a day.
- HP, a company with operations here in Houston, has been credited with inventing flextime. It was a radical idea in the 1950's when HP first introduced it, but now it's a standard offering for many employers. Technology companies have been a leader in providing a flexible workplace. I have a friend who works for HP that worked for them here in Houston and, when her husband was offered a great opportunity in Reno, NV, she was able to continue working for HP out of her home. She also shares her job with a co-worker so HP receives the benefit of a full time employee and they both enjoy better flexibility and time with their spouse and children.
- They key thing you need to do is to talk to your boss about the **pros and cons of flex time or job sharing**. You will need to articulate the benefits to your department and company and how to overcome the perceived limitations.



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Pros

- Certainly for the employee, a flexible work arrangement can offer more balance between work and family obligations. It can increase job satisfaction and reduce overall commute expenses.
- For the employer, offering a flexible work arrangement to its employees can lead to greater productivity and better health and well being. It can also be used as a recruiting advantage and a retention tool for key skills.
- One more benefactor of flexible work arrangements is the communities we live in. Many cities, including Houston, have programs to reward companies for offering flexible work arrangements. The city benefits by reducing peak hour traffic flow, reducing fuel consumption needs and improving air quality. Over 140 Houston area businesses participated in the 2006 Flex in the City program and an estimated 20,000 employees eliminated at least one additional peak time commute.

Cons

- The challenge for the employee is that the line between work and home can become blurred. An employee working at home can find it difficult to STOP working on a project. Employees may end up working all hours of the day and night because of the proximity of the office being in the home. Also, employees are concerned they may lose “face time” with their boss and co-workers.
- Managers tend to find it difficult to change their mind set and manage remotely. Traditionally, managers are more comfortable when they “see” their employees working and know they didn’t take a two hour lunch or arrive at the office an hour late. To deal with this concern, a manager needs to set productivity and performance standards and hold the employee accountable to them. Frequent one-on-one calls can help facilitate concerns for priority setting and review of deadlines. To address the loss of “face time”, the manager can arrange periodic meetings in the office with the team. It’s important for the manager to share the results the remote employee is achieving with the team so they know there is “fairness” in the work load.

If you stay at home, how do you find an employer who offers it?

The easy answer is RESEARCH! Look at the employers enrolled in the Houston Flex in the City program. They will be open to flexible work arrangements. Identify your key skills and work that you



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do and think about how you can do this work within a flexible work arrangement. Then it goes back to “selling” the idea to the employer.

Is working part time a good option?

Working part time is a great option in many ways. There are jobs at all levels that can be performed on a part time basis. Look at Starbucks, for example. Many of their employees work on a part time basis, including their front line managers. The really great thing about Starbucks is that these part time employees are eligible for health benefits. This can be a perfect option for someone that can only work 20 to 30 hours a week and needs the health benefits. There are other companies that offer what Starbucks offers. Keep in mind that most companies categorize a part time employee as working less than 32 hours per week. So, if you work a 32 hour per week schedule, you may be eligible for benefits with the company yet you are working less than the standard 40 hour work week.

Another option is taking on project work. A spouse of one of the leaders I supported at my last company is a writer. They are raising two girls and mom works at home taking on writing projects. She can flex the level of project work based on the girls’ schedule. When they are in school, she can take on more projects. In the summer, she will lighten the load a bit. There are probably some projects she turns away or provides to a fellow writer when she can’t fit it into her schedule.

If you’re concerned about the loss of benefits by working part time or on projects, talk with a financial planner and research options to buy the insurance you need. Your spouse’s benefit plan may be sufficient. You can invest in an IRA if you do not have access to a 401k. And there can be tax benefits for working at home that you will want to look into.

Are there any other flexible work options out there?

According to a spring 2006 study conducted by Boston College’s Simmons School of Management, it was found that the participation in flexible work arrangements by women varied across industries. Younger women used them less frequently, possibly because they were at the stage of ramping up their careers. Among respondents, the technology industry had the highest overall participation rate (96 percent), followed by the nonprofit (92 percent), medical (88 percent) and finance (86 percent) industries. Arrangements included not just flex-time, telecommuting and part-time work, but also limits on travel or evening or weekend work.

What about the notion that Stay at Home Moms have no useable skills to enter the workforce after the kids go to school?

This is a great question and a great concern for many women. My recommendation is that if you have been out of the workforce for some time or are contemplating a stay at home option, identify the



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skills you have developed prior to leaving and during your leave. How can you leverage what you've done during the time away from "traditional work"? I can only imagine all of the great things you have done in support of your children's interests. Did you serve on the PTA? Did you lead a campaign to raise funds for football uniforms? Did you "volunteer" for a church project or coach the softball team? All of these activities are a demonstration of how you work with others and achieve results. They are activities you can articulate on your resume and talk about in an interview.

Last year, as VP HR for Talent Tree, I hired a Corporate Recruiter who had been out of the job market for over ten years raising her children. I hired her because of her success as a recruiter before she left the workplace and the experiences she shared with me that she was involved in as a stay at home mom. It didn't matter to me that she hadn't really used the computer for work in over ten years because I could teach her that. What mattered to me was her passion for the work that she could do and the impact she could make as the recruiter for our company. She is a fantastic recruiter and held true to her word and her passion by bringing immediate results.

What should Stay at Home Moms do to stay prepared for having to work (i.e., divorce, death of spouse, etc.). Can working moms take a "leave" for a few years and be competitive when they want to return to the workforce?

It's really tough when a situation like this comes up and sometimes it can happen very suddenly. It is a good idea to talk to you spouse about "what if" scenarios. Okay, maybe not the divorce scenario, but certainly the death scenario. Let's be real – it can happen, so we need to take ownership of our future. Many of us put off writing a will or taking care of the financial details because we can't imagine something like this happening to us. You owe it to yourself and your family to think ahead and be prepared.

To stay competitive when you return to the workforce, keep your skills current and be open to learning new skills. Again, in the ways I described, you can volunteer in the activities that your children are involved in and/or take on projects for the work you feel passionate about. Pay attention to what your kids are learning using technology. They will certainly keep you current! Read the business section of the newspaper and keep track of what's going on. Write research articles in your field of study. Take a class now and then in your field and make connections. It can be a fun family project to support mom to keep her in touch with her work "abilities".

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