



FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS SHOULD ALSO APPLY TO MEN

Nine times out of 10 my initial contact with an organization to either consult or speak on work+life fit and flexibility is through the women's initiative. This is the natural place for an employer to see the impact of inflexibility because the cause and effect are visible—high potential female employee gets pregnant, then she needs to manage her work and life differently. Unfortunately, what that employer doesn't see are all of the other people who need to work differently:

- The fathers in dual-earner couples*
- The men and women who care for aging and disabled relatives*
- The people who want to go back to school*
- The individuals with a chronic illness*
- Or everyone who has a life outside of work that matters to them.* - Cali Williams Yost ¹

Increasingly, organizations are having to realize that their workforce composition may be changing in several different ways, often because of gender-based transformations:

- ☞ In the U.S. today, over half of the workforce is comprised of women; while in Canada the share of the workforce by women is also quickly approaching the 50 percent level.
- ☞ Men are increasingly becoming more active in family care and in helping out with household activities, including looking after sick children, schooling and extracurricular activities.
- ☞ In today's society, parental leave has become as important to men as it is for women.
- ☞ The dramatic increase in dual-earner couples during the last four decades has been accompanied by a gain just as dramatic in the number of wives who are the primary breadwinners according to a 2006 Statistics Canada study. In 1967, an estimated 11 percent of Canadian wives earned more than their husbands did. By 2003, this proportion had nearly tripled to 29 percent.²
- ☞ Statistics Canada reported that 18 percent of Canadian women were the primary breadwinners in their families in 2009, up from 14 percent in 1997. In the same time-frame, the proportion of women matching or exceeding their husbands' earnings climbed from 37 percent to 42 percent.³
- ☞ According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the trajectory in the U.S. looks much the same as in Canada, with 27 percent of women out-earning their employed husbands in 2008. That's up from 18 percent in 1987.⁴
- ☞ According to a 2006 Statistics Canada study, the proportion of Canadian families with stay-at-home fathers increased from 4 percent to 11 percent between 1986 to 2005, and more than one in 10 fathers now take formal employment leave to be home with their newborn.⁵

¹ *How to make workplace flexibility about all of us (Not just women):* Cali Williams Yost, Forbes Magazine, May 13, 2011

² *Wives as primary breadwinners – 2003 – StatsCan Study:* The Daily, StatsCan, August 23, 2006

³ *More women bringing home the bacon, more men cooking it:* Shannon Proudfoot, Postmedia News, October 7, 2010

⁴ *Ibid:*

⁵ *Housework is becoming less the domain of women:* Shannon Proudfoot, Postmedia News, The Ottawa Citizen, May 16, 2011

- ☞ The current recession has particularly hit blue-collar industries, such as manufacturing and construction, which predominately employ males. Prior to the recession, about 13 percent of American men between 30 and 55 had dropped out of regular work by 2006.⁶
- ☞ The high cost of private child care arrangements often means that couples must more equally share daily child-care responsibilities.

What the changing workforce means for men.

*One of the most remarkable transformations over this period (i.e. last thirty-odd years) has taken place on the university campus. In 1960, 39 percent of under-graduate students were female. Now 58 percent of American university students are; indeed, women outnumber men on college campuses throughout the developed world. ... Professional degree programs in law, medicine, pharmacy, and biology, all fields formerly dominated by men, are now evenly divided or admit more women. Two highly competitive fields—clinical psychology and veterinary medicine—are now between 70 and 80 percent female. Clearly, girls and women are excelling in the classroom and making significant inroads outside it, so efforts to narrow the gender gap have succeeded in Western countries. Fifty-six percent of all high-paying professional jobs are now held by women, and women hold more than half of all professional and managerial positions in Canada and Britain. ...*⁷

As professionals and with many sought after skills, women are now finding themselves in higher-paying jobs with better benefits than their spouses, thereby more frequently resulting in stay-at-home fathers where the economics and employment benefits so warrant. In addition, in certain professions, such as commission-based employment, there is greater flexibility in working arrangements, including better possibilities to work from home (e.g. telework). With the number of knowledge workers who increasingly are represented by professional couples, with or without children, organizations need to take into consideration not only the work-life balance needs of women, but also those of men.

More men are taking advantage of paternity leave and family care provisions.

A number of countries have implemented policies allowing men to take parental leave in the event of having a newborn child or in cases where a child is temporarily sick and requires parental care. For example, Canada's policies on paid parental leave have changed considerably in recent years. In 2001, the federal [Parental Benefits Program](#) * under the federal Employment Insurance scheme increased the length of shareable paid parental leave benefits from 10 weeks to 35 weeks, and eliminated a second two week unpaid waiting period for co-sharing parents. Studies by Statistics Canada subsequently revealed that shortly after these changes were made, mothers increased the time they stayed at home and fathers increased their overall participation rate from 3 percent in 2000 to 10 percent in 2001.⁸ How can one expect that a new father will be able to fully concentrate on their work and commit to their job without some kind of consideration by their employer for their immediate and possibly longer-term family needs?

* Through the doubling of Employment Insurance (EI) maternity and parental benefits from six months to one year, the Government of Canada provided families with the support they need to ensure that their children get the best start in life. As a result of the EI changes, a growing number of working parents can better balance their work and family responsibilities by staying at home with their new child without fear of losing their job. In the Federal Government's 2003 budget, a historic [Compassionate Care](#) benefit was introduced which came into effect in January 2004. The Compassionate Care benefit allows workers and their families to share six weeks of leave when a spouse, child or parent is dying or falls gravely ill.

⁶ *Men Not Working, and Not Wanting Just Any Job*: Louis Uchitelle and David Leonhardt, New York Times, July 31, 2006

⁷ *The Sexual Paradox (Extreme Men, Gifted Women and the Real Gender Gap)*: Susan Pinker (Random House Canada, 2008) pp. 10-11

⁸ *Study: Fathers' use of paid parental leave – 2006*: The Daily, StatsCan, June 23, 2008

“Healthier organizations mean more productive employees.”

What flexible working arrangements should organizations implement.

Use research like the *National Study of the Changing Workforce* or our nationally representative *Work+Life Fit Reality Check* studies to show that:

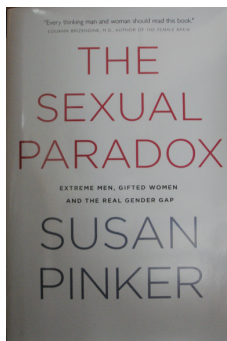
- Men report the same or higher levels of work+life conflict than women, and
- Men are just as likely as women to have or want all types of flexibility. - Cali Williams Yost⁹

If organizations want to retain highly-skilled and highly-educated male employees, they are going to have to implement generic and gender-neutral flexible working arrangements. Such arrangements can include everything from family leave (esp. paternity, parental) provisions, flexible working hours, working from home options, sabbaticals, etc. For example, employees may increasingly want to work from home in light of telework capabilities, changing technologies and types of client- and project-based employment (e.g. insurance, tech assistance, retail, marketing, financial services, etc.).

Annual and holiday leave provisions must be respected, especially where families are involved. The health benefits of taking annual leave have been proven by numerous studies. Failure to allow and even encourage an employee to take vacation time can lead to serious physical and mental health consequences such as depression, burnout, heart disease, chronic anxiety, etc. Studies showed that those who failed to take annual vacations had a 21 percent higher risk of death from all causes and were 32 percent more likely to die of a heart attack.¹⁰

All in all, the more flexible working arrangements that an organization has for all its employees—both men and women—the better. There is little doubt that the current economic recession in North America has led to heavier work loads and longer working hours for many employees, many of whom are fearful of losing their jobs. However, by ignoring work-life conflicts, organizations risk the possibility of eventually losing valuable and talented employees to illness, and in some cases even fatal illnesses.

Recommended Reading:



“The Sexual Paradox”
(Extreme Men, Gifted Women and the Real Gender Gap)
 by Susan Pinker
 (Random House Canada, 2008)

- ◆ [Work + Life: Finding the Fit That's Right for You](#): Cali Williams Yost (Riverhead, 2005)

Recommended Web Sites:

- ◆ The Vanier Institute of the Family (Canada): <http://www.vifamily.ca/>
- ◆ Families and Work Institute (U.S.): <http://www.familiesandwork.org/>
- ◆ Center for Work & Family (Boston College): <http://www.bc.edu/centers/cwf/>
- ◆ Center for Work-Life Policy (U.S.): <http://www.worklifepolicy.org/>

⁹ *How to make workplace flexibility about all of us (Not just women)*: Op. Cit.

¹⁰ *Vacations Are Good for You, Medically Speaking*: Alina Tugend, New York Times, June 7, 2008

“Healthier organizations mean more productive employees.”