

# WORKING MOTHER

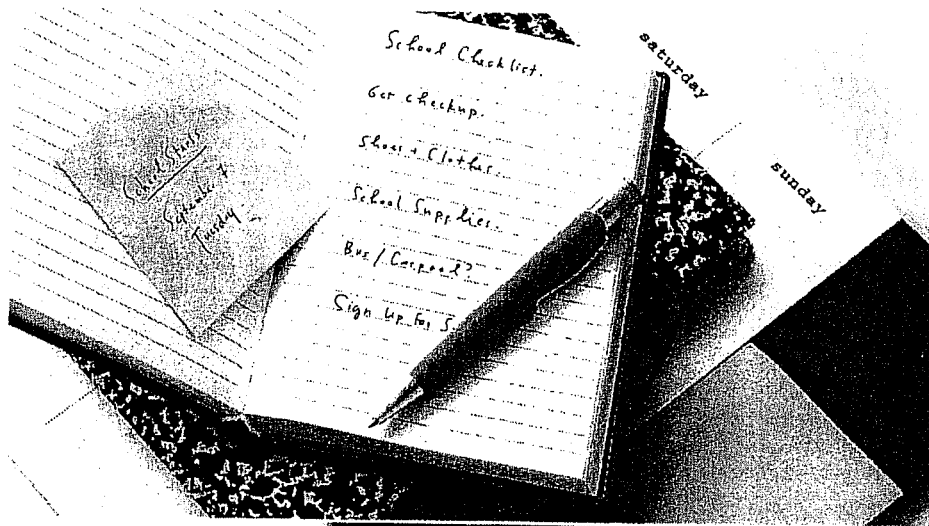
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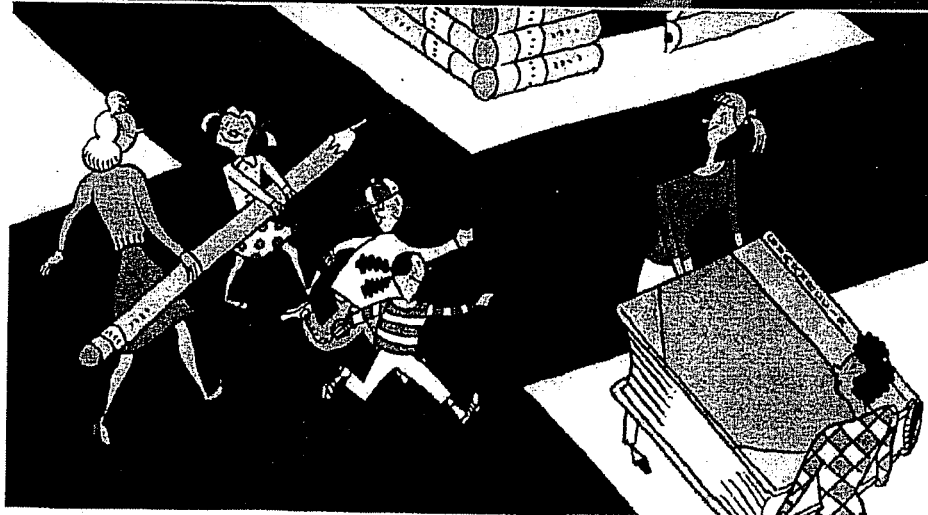


## Get Active in Your Child's School

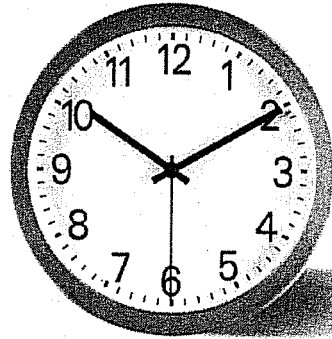
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WORK



The ultimate guide to

# flexibility

Wherever you work, whatever you do, there's a way to make your job fit into your life. Here's how you can get control, set your hours, make your case, close the deal. A step-by-step primer to what working moms need most.

By Maggie Jackson

## You want flexible work. Your boss won't dream of it.

This story could end right there, but it doesn't need to. The great move to flexibility is gathering steam, as companies and fields that once barred the door finally come around—whether it's law firms in Philadelphia, a hair salon in Seattle or an assembly line in Mason City, IA. And flexibility itself is morphing—from old reliables like part-time work to a "seasonal schedule" like working mom Bobbi Yusko's at Applied Creative Technologies in Germantown, MD. Bobbi works 8:00 to 4:00 during the school year and 7:00 to 3:00 in summer.

Even politicians are catching on to the idea: Don't worry about where workers are or how they work, as long as the work gets done. A truly flexible workplace would address many problems—from latchkey kids to gaps in health insurance. A Senate hearing this spring attracted buzz. (See "NewsBreak," page 67.) Big philanthropic money is chiming in also: The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation is funding new action. It's not about perks or programs, says Ellen Galinsky of the Families and Work Institute. It's about "giving workers more authority and responsibility."

Flex has been evolving since the early 1970s, when it was inspired by the Clean Air Act (staggered hours to cut pollution) and the women's movement (new ways to work and parent). Today, 43 percent of workers, up from 29 percent in the early 1990s, can vary their start and end times at work, for example.

Even as CEOs and legislators join the movement, though, there's widespread fear that asking for flexibility can be dangerous to your career. That's justified. But the hard truth is that we get flexibility only if we demand it. And a host of brave, creative people have figured out how to do that, so it's no longer uncharted territory. You have to do plenty of homework and venture off the beaten path. And when you hit a rough patch, picture this: a day when "punch the clock" and "9-to-5" will sound quaint, even cruel. Flexibility won't be a benefit or a tool but the way we work. That time is coming. Here's your guide to getting there.

### FLEX 101

**DESK-SHARE**  
People taking turns working remotely.

**TELEWORK**  
The new term for "telecommute" means working from home, satellite office or the road.

**JOB-SHARE**  
Splitting one job; days can overlap.

**COMPRESSED WORKWEEK**  
Doing a full-time job in fewer than five days; for example, working four long days with Fridays off.

**PHASED LEAVE**  
Gearing back up to full-time by going part-time or by doing some telework.

## Chart Your Course

• **What do you really want?** Before you take a single step toward flexing, spend time thinking through this new arrangement: what it can be, what it can't. Do you want to get home sooner or banish work worries on weekends? Flexibility won't turn a bad job golden or cure your workaholicism. Do you need more time to care for a sick parent? Are you drained by a torturous commute? Flex is for you.

• **Confront your fears.** Flexibility demands initiative—and that's scary. "I think a lot of people sit back and wait for a manager to

come and say, 'You can leave at five,'" says Cali Williams Yost, author of *Work + Life Finding the Fit That's Right for You*. You have to take the risk by asking, then by carving out new ways of relating to bosses or colleagues, and maybe even a new definition of success. Courage!

• **Define your price.** Let's face it. Flexibility can be "priceless," but it often demands sacrifices. Part-time work may not pay benefits. Promotions may take longer. One seven-year study shows that moms with certain flexible deals suffered up to a 27 percent wage gap with peers. Be realistic: What can you afford?

• **Think long term.** After weighing the day-to-day, month-to-month trade-offs, put them in context. Do you want to change your workstyle for the next six or 18 months, or do you want this to be a permanent change?

## Do Your Homework

• **Don't just wing it.** No matter how frustrated you are with the daily drill, don't rush into anything. Pat Katepoo, a consultant in Kaneohe, HI, once narrowly talked a new executive mom out of accosting her boss and wailing, "I need to work at home. I miss my baby!" Says Katepoo: "Don't wing it. You'll set yourself up for a knee-jerk no."

• **Define your terms.** Flexing comes in lots of forms and flavors. (See "Flex 101.") It can mean choosing where you work, when you work and how you work. It can be as small as working from home on days your elderly father has doctors' appointments or as major as a shift to telework when your second child is born. Flexible work can bring dramatic changes to your life. But remember, you don't have to ask for the moon. Small adjustments—a monthly telework day, a 35-hour week—can make a difference.

• **Wise up.** Get the scoop on the latest options—in your field, in your city. First stop: your company's HR manual. Best overall (and up-to-date) source: the Web. Try [www.whenworkworks.org](http://www.whenworkworks.org), from the Families and Work Institute and other groups; [www.vault.com](http://www.vault.com), which has independent reports on various companies; and [www.workingmother.com](http://www.workingmother.com) for our 100 Best Companies list. One good book for any mom changing gears: *Going Back to Work: A Survival Guide for Comeback Moms*, by Mary W. Quigley and Loretta E. Kaufman.

• **Talk to people.** Ask friends or colleagues who have gone down this road what went right or wrong. Info about what others are offering can help you, whether it's to get more leverage where you are or to change jobs.

• **Find your fit.** Think carefully about your own style and the work you do. Are you a self-starter? Then you'd make a good teleworker.

Are you a good collaborator? Job-sharing could work. Next, tailor your flex plan to your job. Before proposing a compressed workweek, Lori Niehues-Schneider, a senior IT business analyst at The Hartford Financial Services Group, pored through her emails and calendar to find how to cause the least disruption for her coworkers. Lori, a mother of two boys, 15 and 11, in Prescott, WI, ended up with an every-other-Wednesday-off schedule, leaving room for others to have an occasional Monday or Friday free.

## Make Your Case

• **Think two-way street.** Now it's time to prepare the "business case" that will show your boss, partner, colleagues or HR department how your company will benefit from the new arrangement. That's your employer's



Computer giant IBM now hosts "huddles." These are regular regional conference calls for far-flung employees, part of a campaign called "Make IBM Feel Small Again." Workers phone in from virtual workplaces to trade news, updates and (we hope) some friendly gossip.



## Flex Partners Lay Down the Law

Deborah Epstein Henry, Philadelphia area, three kids

In mid-1999, struggling to keep up with her part-time law career and two toddlers, Deborah Epstein Henry looked around the Philadelphia area for other flexing lawyers. She figured they could network—and help each other counter the isolation and stigma they felt. Law, a traditional up-or-out field, where each hour is logged, had long been unfriendly to the flex idea.

But when these women began to meet, the support group soon morphed into a change agent, now called Flex-Time Lawyers LLC. The lawyers share notes and teach each other to craft flexible deals. Best negotiating line: Other firms are doing it! Success story? One mom of three, Lisa Carney Eldridge, was part-time when she became partner. Deborah, who's had a third child herself, does all her work flexibly: She runs the venture and brings in new business for her firm, among other things. Monthly meetings draw several dozen lawyers—and those looking to hire them. Even the most high-pressure markets seem receptive. A Flex-Time chapter in New York City, begun in 2002, draws 75 or more women to its meetings. Early on, some NYC firms grumbled about Flex-Time meetings in their offices. Now they send reps to learn how to keep female talent. For more info, go to [www.flextimelawyers.com](http://www.flextimelawyers.com).

**Lesson learned:** There's strength in numbers—especially when you want to challenge tradition. Sharing info and tactics will get you further, faster, than going it alone.



At Colgate-Palmolive, the first day back to school is a red-letter day. Recognizing that it's hard to get a day off right after summer when work is gearing up, the company gives parents who need it the morning off, so they can shepherd kids into class for those first happy (or tearful!) hours.

biggest interest. You need to argue, and back up with evidence, the idea that the organization will profit from the flexibility it grants—and get more out of you. This is a must!

● **Cite the research.** Collect numbers and case studies. Last year, for example, JPMorgan Chase found out that only 23 percent of employees said their managers were not sensitive to work/life, but 38 percent of those didn't plan to be working for the company within a year! The financial giant didn't want to see that kind of turnover, so it moved more aggressively to get flexible options to employees and to hold managers accountable for supporting work/life arrangements. Your boss needs to see (or show her boss) this kind of information. Tell her that flexibility has been shown to boost productivity and retention and cut health-care costs. (Hint: Bolster your case with lingo from the company mission statement.)

● **Map it out.** Be clear and detailed, and put it in writing. Don't dump your request in a boss's lap and expect him to figure out how to make it happen. Anticipate questions such as: How will the office find you? What equipment do you need? Will clients worry? How will your work be evaluated if you're less visible?

● **Consider your audience.** Whom should you approach? Depending on your firm and its culture, you may choose to go first to your partner, your boss or HR. Whomever you approach, work with her style. Some people prefer to get a memo and warm up to an idea in private. Others may be able to think out loud if you air the idea informally at a lunch or during a quiet moment when the two of you are reviewing the day's work.

● **Time it right.** Rosalie Seiler, former office manager for a resorts sales firm, didn't get far when she asked about part-time work right at

## Cutting Hair, Sculpting Hours

Kay Hirai, Seattle area, two kids (28 employees)

**K**ay Hirai, owner of two Seattle-area hair salons, had struggled with her own schedule while raising her two kids, now grown. So when her working-mom staffers needed flexibility, she tried, case by case, to provide it. Then she'd get grief from nonparents; they wanted flexibility, too. She couldn't always make exceptions; one case of an always-late single mom "broke her heart." So Kay decided to start from scratch.

Last fall, she asked the 28 workers at Studio 904 to tell her their ideal hours—and surveyed customers on when they'd like appointments. Much data-crunching and many negotiations later, she had a schedule that does it all: Workers have everything from six short days to four long ones. The salon is open more hours. Sales jumped 20 percent the first three months. And that single mom is now a mentor to others.

Kay likes to upend the status quo. Years ago, she dumped the usual salon pay system, in which stylists earned tips and commissions on cuts, because that set everyone on edge and penalized moms who took leaves. Studio 904 workers get wages, benefits and team bonuses. "If employees are happy, the customers will be happy," says Kay.

**Lesson learned:** Trying to please everybody in a small business sounds impossible. But it's favoring a few that doesn't work. The goodwill you create can go straight to the bottom line.



PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN STAAL

## Flexibility on the Factory Floor

Ginger Kraft, Mason City, IA, one child

For Ginger Kraft, who works the snack-food line in Kraft's Mason City, IA, plant (but is not related), a doctor's appointment or her son's ball game used to mean sacrificing a day off. It's the rare assembly-line worker who can slip out early or run late. Rank-and-file workers in the U.S. have helped pioneer many changes in the workplace. But at Kraft, higher-level workers were gaining flexibility through the 1990s while many factory workers were not. Some plants gave time off by the hour. Others required workers to take vacation a week at a time and schedule it a year in advance. But thanks to feedback from employees and line supervisors, flexibility began coming to more plants, creating a small but real revolution in workers' lives. Ginger can now take a half day off—or even an hour—to take Garret, 6, to karate or see him play T-ball. "It's wonderful," she reports, "to say, 'I have something going on. I have to leave early.'"

**Lesson learned:** Flexibility can work at any level of a company. Think outside the calendar, the clock—and the hierarchy.



PHOTOGRAPH BY DOUG SMITH

the beginning of the spring-summer busy season. That fall, however, Seiler's boss let her switch to a compressed four-day week. "They were very willing to work with me," says the Anaheim, CA, mother of two boys.

- **Prepare for push-back.** Practice answers to common objections, advises Katepoo. Two of the most frequent are: "We've never done this" and "Everyone will want it." Have a back up plan in case your first proposal is rejected. If a four-day week won't work, what about a telework day? Propose an initial pilot (three to six months) so that everyone involved knows that problems can be addressed.



- **Think maintenance.** How do you make sure that your pilot turns into a long-term arrangement? Even if all goes well, don't assume that the work is done.

- **Be, uh, flexible.** "There needs to be give-and-take from both parties," says Kim McManus, a mother of 6-year-old triplets and Accenture's

U.S. recruiting director for financial services and business consulting in Florham Park, NJ. Kim works three days a week but switches around her days off as needed. "If I can't make a meeting or a call, I take the onus for whatever I miss," she says. She'll be the one to get materials that were distributed or ask colleagues, when convenient, to fill her in on a discussion.

- **Take it public.** Don't treat your flexible work arrangement as a secret deal. Find a champion to support you, especially at levels above your own. But also make sure that your work is designed to meet the needs of clients, colleagues and those who work for you.

- **Get feedback.** Don't wake up at the end of your pilot and find out that half the office is roiled with resentment. Keep communicating, ask questions, build support.

- **Celebrate.** Congratulations. You've joined the ranks of the flexible! You're helping revamp how we all think about work. Sure, this is a big shift, says Debra Meyerson, author of *Tempered Radicals: How People Use Difference to Inspire Change at Work*. But expectations also change "when small experiments work." ■



Deloitte & Touche wants to keep its talented women. Many moms want to stay home for a while and then opt back in. They can take advantage of a pilot program that gives training and online access to 20 senior Deloitte alumnae who promise to come back within five years. Now *that's* taking the long view.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN SWALE