

Sept 15, 2008: Jobs – What Works for Mothers and What Doesn't™

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Today there are more mothers in the workforce than ever before – and not always for the reasons people may generally think. While there are more options for women, women don't have more choices. Some women work because they have the opportunity and because they want to. But more work because they have to keep up with the financial demands of raising a family. And still other mothers want to work, but have difficulty finding a job that will provide them with the flexibility or salary to ensure that their children will be properly cared for. The answers today are not simple.

Employers can tap a wealth of skills and talents by making their company a more attractive place to work for mothers. What does it take to attract mothers and others who make family time a priority in their lives as employees? We asked some of our Mothers' Center members and here is what we found.

What does NOT work

- Lack of flexibility in terms of work schedule
- Jobs that involved intense competition, tight deadlines
- Frequent travel requirements
- Culture that is lean and mean
- "Workaholic" culture
- Management that rewards based on face time as opposed to accomplishments
- Jobs that are less family-friendly
- High pressure sales or sales support positions

What it takes to attract mothers and those concerned with work-life balance:

Flexibility – the ability to work part-time and work their hours around their children's school schedule and other activities, the ability to take off when their child is sick, the ability to work from home and even job sharing. Mothers who are afforded a flexible schedule are reported to be more focused in the time they are in the office so that they can maximize their productivity.

Management and colleagues who are family-oriented and supportive of employment policies that favor flexible options while also fairly evaluating mothers for hire, promotions and salary increases based on performance and accomplishments

Fair salary – respondents cited that fair pay for the work they do is important. Whether working part time or full time, women want to know they are being compensated fairly for the work they are doing.

Growth opportunities – eventually the children will grow up and become more independent. A job that has growth potential could allow a mother working part time to transition into a fulfilling full time career.

Best types of Jobs

The responses were not as clear cut and often have to take into account the individual culture of the company. Some accounting firms, for example, recognize that the talent pool is limited and mothers often make some of their best employees. While accounting can be a high pressure job and one of the less-than-family-friendly options, some accounting firms have been able to turn that around so that they can attract the skilled staff they need to serve their clients.

Some of the best jobs include:

Freelancing – there are many specialties that lend themselves well to freelance work such as graphic artist, web developer, courseware designer, trainer, Marketing and PR, writing and editing – or geographic information systems analyst (from one respondent)!

Teaching – grade school level – provides mothers with a schedule that is closer to that of their children with the possibility of summers off.

Teaching for a community college or university

Administrative work for a school or childcare center

Counseling

Non-profit work – non-profit organizations are around to make the world a better place so they are likely to have a culture that caters to families. As pointed out by one respondent, this cannot be taken for granted. You need to ask some questions since not ALL non-profits will fit this description.

For mothers who work at home full time caring for their family, volunteer work is a great way to keep your skills honed and learn new skills that you can then include on a resume when you are ready to return to full or part time employment. Many mothers who responded said, when money wasn't the issue, volunteer work gave them that sense of contribution and fulfillment they needed in addition to raising children.

What can an employer expect in return for offering flexible options?

Loyal, productive employees
Employee retention
Improved morale
Improved customer service

The culture needs to be inclusive of working mothers, fathers and people who do not have children. The more the culture can promote acceptance of the variety of needs employees may have for flexibility while also providing clear performance expectations and guidelines, the greater the chance that everyone can work together for the success of the business and the team. This can have a positive impact on morale, loyalty and ultimately the outward face the company presents to its customers, partners and vendors.