Mastering the Balancing Act

How to Find Work-Life Balance amidst the Unbalancing Demands of a Faculty Position

Barb Silver, Ph.D.
University of Rhode Island

West Chester University
March 31, 2011
“There is a structural mismatch of how the workplace is organized and the needs of the current workforce. Now the workforce expects the career path to mimic a life lived.”

Dr. Kathleen Christiansen, Director Alfred P. Sloan Foundation’s Workplace, Work Force and Working Families Program
This isn’t your daddy’s workplace . . .

- Workforce demographic shifts
- Attitude shifts
- Workplace shifts
- 1 in 4 US families tag team to manage child care
- 1 in 4 US families care for elderly relatives
- 75% of adults say they have no control over their schedule
- 80% or workers are dual earner couples
- 70% of all children live in households where all adults are employed
- 40% college-educated men work 50+ hours
- Among working class, 87% of families say they have 2 weeks or less of vacation and sick time combined

Source: Joan Williams, One Sick Child Away from Being Fired
A Cultural Contradiction

- Ideal Worker Norm
- Institution of work versus the institution of family
  - Both are vital and interdependent
  - Both are linked to economic vitality
- A structural, societal issue, not a personal issue
  - Next generation of workers
  - Example: the “opt-out revolution” myth
  - Example: National breastfeeding movement
Traditional Ideal Worker

- Available to work 24/7
- No caretaking or household responsibilities
- Breadwinner/caretaker family model
- Linear career path - steady employment from age 22-65
- Co-workers were mostly men
- Being at the job ("face time") was crucial
- Work was a priority—long hours and total commitment was the norm for advancement

New Ideal Worker

- Both men and women integrate work, caretaking, & household responsibilities
- Women and men equally represented in workforce; dual earner couples the norm
- Women and men equally represented in workforce; dual earner couples the norm
- Recognize value of family/personal lives as important as work lives
- Utilize flexible work arrangements to meet personal, community & family commitments
- Balance job advancement with health & quality of life
- Non-linear career paths - on-ramps and off-ramps common; how, when, where work gets done varies
- Will spend more time total caring for aging parents than in raising children
Why is Work-Life a Diversity Issue?

- **Class**
  - Low wage women much more likely to be single mothers
  - Low wage earners much more likely to depend on relatives or friends for child care
  - More likely to provide unpaid assistance to elderly and disabled
  - Low wage earners spend 22% of their income on child care, versus 9% middle wage earners, and 6% high wage earners
  - Less job flexibility (78%), health insurance, paid sick days, standard daytime working hours
  - Lack of public transportation, health insurance
  - More likely to have mandatory overtime

Why is Work-Life a Diversity Issue?

Gender

- Highly educated women more likely than others to seek a “part-time” 40-hour/week schedule
- Part-time work is devalued and pays less: women working 45 hours/week earn twice what those working 35 hrs/week earn
- Economically vulnerable if divorced (tag team families 3-6x more likely)
- Maternal Wall – mothers are 79% less likely to be hired than non-mothers and 100% less likely to be promoted (Correll, Bernard, & Paik, 2007)
- Family Responsibilities Discrimination
- Men are compelled to achieve the ideal worker norm and retain “breadwinner” as a primary identity
- As men take on more and more caregiving and household responsibilities, their work-life stress has increased significantly more than women’s
- Tenure-track coincides with parent-track

Source: Joan Williams, One Sick Child Away from Being Fired
The Workplace Flexibility Movement

- Department of Labor Women’s Bureau Workplace Flexibility Forum 2010
- Families and Work Institute and many other organizations, such as CUWFA
- Corporate leadership
- Academic Institutions
BENEFITS TO THE EMPLOYEE

**Increased:**
- Job Satisfaction
- Intention to Stay
- Job Commitment
- Physical Health
- Emotional Health
- Family Health
- Community & Personal Care Needs
- Time Management
- Energy Savings

**Decreased:**
- Stress
- Absenteeism
- Presenteeism
BENEFITS TO THE EMPLOYER

Increased:
- Productivity
- Efficiency
- Bottom Line
- Energy Efficiency
- Engagement
- Loyalty
- Morale
- Retention
- Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

Decreased:
- Absenteeism
- Employee Resentment
- Attrition
Public utility experiment - generalizes to about a $15 billion annual savings if implemented wholesale

Figure 8
Average Absence Rates With and Without Flexible Work Scheduling

Sources: Dalton and Mesch (1990); CEA estimates.
Work-Life in the Academy

- Often 60-80+ hour work weeks
- Path to tenure coincides with parent track
- Women on highly competitive academic tracks are less likely to marry and have children than men or women in lower posts
- More disciplinary endogamy (both partners in same discipline) in academia, especially sciences
- Water-cooler culture and lack of “fit” for some
- Ideal worker norm – highly competitive – both men and women who take caregiving leaves receive fewer rewards and lower performance ratings
- Married mothers 50% less likely to gain faculty positions than married fathers or single women (Mason & Goulden (2004))
Components of Work-Life Integration

- Taking Time Off
- Financial Planning & Retirement
- Professional Development
- Family Care
- Workplace Flexibility
- Culture & Community
- Health & Wellness
Work-Life Resources at URI

Today, the intersection of work, family, and life responsibilities provides challenges for many workers. Personal and family responsibilities, including children and aging parents, are impacting the work lives of an increasingly diverse workforce. Research shows that workplaces thrive and remain competitive when they respect and are responsive to the complex life and family needs of their workers. URI is committed to providing a workplace that respects the needs of its employees.

Tell Me More About Work-Life
Philosophical Framework
The URI Work-Life Committee
History & Accomplishments
What About Me?

The nautilus was chosen as the symbol of the efforts of the URI Work-life Committee to promote professional growth while maintaining equilibrium, harmony and balance in the lives of members of the URI community. The chambered nautilus grow outward from its center imperfect mathematical proportions: We see this spiral form throughout the natural world, expressing balance, regeneration, growth, and evolution. The key to this pattern lies in the relationship of the parts (the individual chambers) to their center, the still point at the very core of the spiral. This core sustains and renew us, enabling us to maintain our equilibrium and balance amidst all of life's challenges. (adopted from Anne Harrison Designs: http://www.sacredwatersculpture.com/AnIndex.html)

NEWS & EVENTS

Workplace Flexibility Administrators' Breakfast,
December 16, 2010, 8:30-10:00 a.m., MU Atrium 1. RSVP to work-life@uri.edu

FALL 2010 BROWN BAG LUNCHES
Nov. 5: Student Parents' Group, 12:00 pm, M354
Nov. 17: Caring for the Caregiver, 12:00 pm, M354
Dec. 10: Caring for the Caregiver II, 12:00 pm,
M354

NEW PRIVACY ROOM FOR NURSING MOTHERS OPENING THIS WINTER IN THE URI LIBRARY!
A Simple Model

1. Formal Policies
2. Supportive Informal Culture
3. Supervisory Support

Awareness and Use of Options → Work-Life Fit → Work, Health, Family Outcomes
What Do Faculty Need?

**Formal Policies and Programs**

- Flexibility & broadening of hiring protocols and standards
- Flexibility about what faculty do (split positions, teaching professorships, etc.)
- Dual career hiring assistance
- Paid parental leave
- Active service, modified duties
- Opt out tenure clock stops
- Sick leave usable for family members
- Child/elder care assistance/subsidies
- Transitional support programs
- Tenure and promotion review
- On-ramps and off-ramps
- Phased retirement
What Do Faculty Need?

A Supportive Informal Work Culture

1. Know the Culture – is it warm? Open? Family-friendly?
2. Promote a Culture of Coverage
3. Discourage Bias Avoidance Behaviors
4. Provide Mentors who are aware of WL issues
5. Broaden awareness – do you know what is available to you? Why not?
6. Reward flexibility initiatives
What Do Faculty Need?
Supervisory Support

Gatekeepers: Where the rubber meets the road
Supervisors (chairs, heads, deans, etc.)

- Interactional dynamics → passive resistance
- Promote use of policies without negative career repercussions or promote bias avoidance behaviors?
- Managerial “allowance decisions” factors?
- Doubt about the business case?

Supervisory support?

- asking about employee’s family (+)
- scheduling late-day meetings (-)
- disseminating new WL policy info (+)
- added workload after a leave (-)
- promotion denial because of flexwork (-)
- helping to solve a work-life challenge (+)
- Embracing ideal worker norm (face-time) (-)
Social Perception Bias: Assessments of Positive Efforts by Supervisors

- Kossek & Hammer, 2008
- Families & Work Institute, 2005
- URI Mentor Survey, 2008
3-Level Model of Barriers to Change

**INSTITUTIONAL**
- Are administrative offices in support of policy?
- Do administrative offices provide resources for implementation?

**INTERACTIONAL**
- Do Chairs, HR, etc., offer information and help proactively?
- Does a culture of coverage exist among colleagues?

**INDIVIDUAL**
- Are employees using the policy openly and without fear of negative repercussions?
- Do non-user colleagues endorse the policy?
Mentoring Early Stage Faculty

- Today, it is impossible to responsibly mentor early stage faculty without taking into consideration their life/family responsibilities and challenges.
- Talk about family and life outside the university.
- Assess your own attitudes (traditional or not?) about workplace flexibility and accommodating life and family needs in the workplace.
- Evaluate your assumptions and stereotypes, e.g., about gender, age, combining parenting, or other life interest, and career, etc.
- Mentors can’t be all things – find an additional mentor who is comfortable discussing work-life issues if you are not.
• Know and share the policies & practices – formal and informal – at the university and in mentee’s department
• Younger faculty can be more outspoken about these issues, more resentful if they are not respected, and more likely to leave for another institution that offers a more life/family-friendly environment
• Be wary of unfair evaluations due to intervening work-life challenges and be prepared to advocate for extensions, etc.
• Connect mentees with other similar faculty
• Be on the lookout for bias avoidance behaviors
• Silence doesn’t mean there aren’t issues – be proactive
Thank you!
Questions?

Contact information:

Barb Silver, Ph.D.
Schmidt Labor Research Center
University of Rhode Island
36 Upper College Rd.
Kingston, RI 02881
t. 401-874-5289 f. 401-874-2954
silver@uri.edu