



# Work-Life at URI

*A newsletter from the URI Work-Life Committee*

WINTER 2012 Volume 1, Issue 1

## The Work-Life Movement and its Place at URI

Demographic shifts have re-shaped the American workforce. Increasingly, the intersection of work, family, and life responsibilities provides challenges for the majority of workers. Workplaces across the country are responding. This series will cover:

*Part 1. What Workers Need Today: Addressing the Workplace-Workforce Mismatch*

*Part 2. Work-Life Initiatives Across the Country and Here at URI*

*Part 3. Workplace Flexibility Close-Up: How One URI Office is Making it Work*



### Caring for the Caregiver

Do you have questions, worries, concerns about your role as caregiver?

#### One-to-One Consultation

for URI employees

Jan Berriochoa, M.Ed., Alzheimer's Association Facilitator and trained counselor, is available to meet with you or talk by phone

free of charge

(401) 874-4572  
or [jan464@verizon.net](mailto:jan464@verizon.net)

Funding provided by the  
URI Women's Center

## Part 1: What Workers Need Today: Addressing the Workplace-Workforce Mismatch

*By Barb Silver and Noel Burgess*

**T**his ain't your daddy's workforce. The workforce is looking dramatically different than it did a few decades ago, and today, the intersection of work, family, and life responsibilities provides challenges for the majority of workers. First, the workforce is nearly **gender balanced**: women comprise 49% of the workforce, and this includes 72% of mothers with children under the age of 18.<sup>1</sup> Fully 80% of married/partnered employees live in dual-earner couples, outnumbering breadwinner/homemaker households 3-to-1.<sup>2</sup> Second, it is **older**. By 2015, 20% of the workforce will be over 55, and between 2006-2016 labor force participation by workers 65 and over will increase a staggering 85%.<sup>3</sup> Third, it is more **ethnically diverse**. From 1980 to 2020, the white working-age population is projected to decline from 82% to 63%, but during the same period, the minority portion of the workforce is projected to double, from 18% to 37%.<sup>4</sup> Fourth, it is **working harder**. In 2006, middle-income families worked an average of 11 hours more per week than they did in 1979.<sup>5</sup> Men are contributing more to household and care giving responsibilities than in the past, and women less, but women are still doing more than men. Today, 59% of those caring for an elderly parent or friend are simultaneously managing work and care giving responsibilities. The number of unpaid caregivers for the elderly is estimated to reach 37 million by 2050, an increase of 85% from 2000, as baby boomers reach retirement age in record numbers.<sup>6</sup> Elder care is expected to be one of the most important issues facing American families in the coming decades.

### Contact us

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In short, this literally ain't your daddy's workforce, one that defined the time when traditional workplace policies and practices were created. Rigid workplace policies are still largely designed to meet the needs of a 1960s traditional breadwinner-caretaker family model, in which the ideal worker is someone (typically male) whose family or personal responsibilities do not interfere with work expectations or job performance. The mismatch between this traditional workplace and a workforce that is older,

more diverse, technologically savvy, and in which the majority of workers have (or will have) some care giving responsibilities, calls for a paradigm shift in how we define when and how work gets done.

**W**orkplace flexibility – a must. Fully 90% of employed mothers and 95% of employed fathers now report some kind of work-life conflict.<sup>7</sup> Workplace flexibility ranks among the top 2 or 3 most important job characteristics to employees, just behind compensation. In one poll, nearly 80% of employees said they would use and benefit from more flexible work options if there were no negative consequences at work.<sup>8</sup> Employees report that the ability to balance work and home significantly impact their career choices and influence their decisions to accept a position or to remain in one.<sup>9</sup>

It is well recognized by researchers and progressive businesses and organizations that attending to the work-life challenges today's workers face, including providing flexible working options, has become a business imperative and improves an organization's bottom

line. It is shown compellingly time and again that flexibility is an economic driver, increasing productivity, retention, job satisfaction, engagement and commitment, and improved physical and mental health.<sup>10a,b,c</sup> For example, businesses like Best Buy, Dow Chemical, IBM, American Express, Sun Microsystems, to name only a few, report increases in productivity between 32 and 50% with telecommuting programs.<sup>11</sup> Concurrently, it results in lower operational costs and a greener workplace, as well as less stress, absenteeism, presenteeism, and turnover.<sup>12a,b</sup> In short, there are

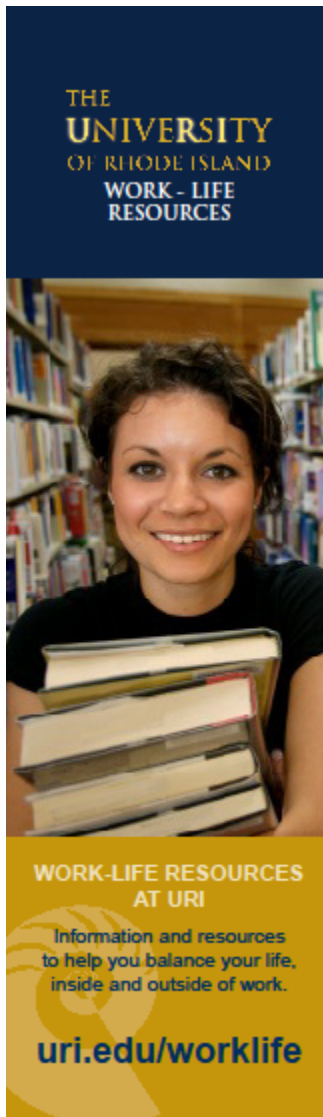
robust findings that support the many positive human capital and business outcomes that result from embracing a work-life integration agenda, and providing flexibility options to employees.

It is crucial to recognize that workplace flexibility and work-life integration efforts serve two parallel goals. They serve **economic goals**, producing significant positive business impacts and serving as powerful recruitment and retention tools. However, they also serve important **equity goals**. Traditional, rigid workplace practices disadvantage, among others, care givers (the majority of whom are still women), older workers, and lower wage workers. Indeed, it is the lower wage family that arguably has the most severe challenges meeting competing work and home demands, and the ones who often have the least access to flexible work options. As Joan Williams, noted work-life legal scholar has written, these are the workers who are "one sick child away from being fired."<sup>13</sup>

### 5 Tips for Better Work-Life Balance

1. **Build downtime into your schedule** - with family, friends and self - don't just wait for it to fit into your busy week—schedule it
2. **Drop activities that sap your time and energy** - think about the time spent on activities that add no value, or people who demand too much of your time
3. **Re-think your errands** - can you outsource some, combine them, do some online, trade services with friends?
4. **Get moving** - a little exercise boosts energy, alertness, and concentration
5. **A little relaxation goes a long way** - take a little time to re-charge your batteries - even just 10 or 15 minutes a day - read a book, take a bath or a walk, listen to some music

From Linda Stack's *SuperCompetent: The Six Keys to Perform at Your Productive Best*



**Supervisory support is key.** There are several perceived drawbacks to providing flexible work options, all of which have been effectively countered. These include cost, fear of abuse of policies, loss of productivity and absenteeism, difficulty in supervising employees, and others.<sup>14a,b</sup> Partly because of these perceived drawbacks, maintaining a traditional organizational culture and resistance to change on the part of supervisors and organizations presents perhaps the most challenging obstacle to promoting a flexible workplace. Even where policies may exist, in many workplaces they may be not well publicized or encouraged, producing a disconnect between policy and practices, or an "implementation gap."<sup>15</sup> And, along with managers, employees are also often resistant, fearing negative repercussions from using available leave policies. Indeed, the Families and Work Institute's 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce revealed that fully 39% of employees surveyed perceive the use of flexible work options as having a negative impact on their job advancement.<sup>16</sup> In one recent national poll from Workplace Options, a national work-life services provider, more than two-thirds of working fathers have experienced negativity or problems with their current employer due to conflicts between their job and duties as a caregiver.<sup>17</sup>

**Overcoming resistance.** While it may be challenging, manager resistance, employee skepticism, and cultural resistance to changing the old industrial work model can be overcome. A better understanding of the issues and the strength of the business case for flexibility, supervisory training in best practices, performance-based management strategies (rather than a reliance on "face-time"), and open, consistent communication between supervisors and employees will go a long way toward overcoming these obstacles. There are scores of ways work-life initiatives, policies, and practices can be implemented. Thinking creatively and tailoring options to meet the varying needs and job requirements of different categories of workers takes careful planning, but reaps rewards. There are many, many solutions, and they need not be cumbersome or costly. Employers must think flexibly about flexibility.

*Note: all references are available online at <http://www.uri.edu/worklife/homepages/home%20page%20images/docs/article%20WL%20Movement%20&%20URI.pdf>*

**Coming next: *Work-Life Initiatives Across the Country and Here at URI***

## The Value of *Appreciation*

The single highest driver of worker engagement, according to a worldwide study conducted by Towers Watson, is whether or not workers feel their managers are genuinely interested in their well-being. *Less than 40% of workers felt so engaged.* Feeling appreciated lifts us up, makes us feel safe, valued, and frees us to do our best work. Tony Schwartz, president and CEO of The Energy Project, says, "we're not fluent in the language of positive emotions in the workplace." We often have more experience saying nothing at all or expressing negative emotions. Many studies show the positive impact of showing employees appreciation. In one, among high-performing teams, the expression of positive feedback outweighed that of negative feedback 6 to 1. In contrast, low-performing teams had a ratio of .3 to 1.

**Make a regular practice of expressing appreciation to your co-workers, supervisors, or your staff members.**

From Tony Schwartz, Harvard Business Review Blog Network, 1/23/12

**Coming next: *Practical Steps to Using Appreciation to Build Performance***

### SPRING 2012 BROWN BAG LUNCH SERIES

#### WORK-LIFE WEDNESDAYS

Wednesdays 12:00 - 1:00 pm

Memorial Union

February - April (updated) topics:

- 2/15 Care Giving with Self in Mind, MU 301
- 2/29 Financing Long-Term Care, MU 202
- 3/7 Grief & Grieving, MU 301
- 3/14 Healthy Meal Planning on a Budget, MU 354
- 3/21 Child Care Choices & Info. Session, MU 301
- 3/28 The End of Breast Cancer, MU 301
- 4/4 Sleeplessness/Sleep Habits, MU 301
- 4/11 Elder Care: Home, Centers, Hospice, MU 354
- 4/18 Breastfeeding Matters, MU 301
- 4/25 Stress Relief, MU 301

**BRING YOUR LUNCH AND JOIN THE CONVERSATION.**

Sponsored by: URI Work-Life Committee and URI Women's Center

**ATTENTION URI Staff Employees:**

Please take the

**URI Work-Life Survey !!**

The survey will ask you to comment on such things as job satisfaction, supervisory support, care-giving responsibilities, stress, work-life conflict, and how useful various types of flexible work options might be for you. Supervisors should take the survey, too, and have been asked to allow time during the work day for their staff to do so, as well.

**The results of the survey** will provide valuable insight about the needs and attitudes of URI employees. This is an opportunity for you to identify your concerns and needs, while enabling us to formulate recommendations for ways to help employees better meet their work and life needs, on and off the job.

The survey will be available beginning **Thursday, Feb. 23**. Use the link below or call 874-5289 for a paper copy:

**[www.uri.edu/worklife/survey](http://www.uri.edu/worklife/survey)**

(FACULTY SURVEY COMING SOON)

**Did you know?**

In 1987, the Rhode Island Legislature enacted Chapter 36-3.1 of General Laws Title 36 to offer alternative work schedules to state employees. For more information, visit <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE36/36-3.1/INDEX.HTM>.

**URI WORK-LIFE COMMITTEE, 2011-2012**

Helen Mederer, Co-Chair	Bobbi Koppel
Barb Silver, Co-Chair	Mindy Levine
Laura Beauvais	Lexi Lyman
Sharon Bell	Doug Michael
Sue Bergen	Rick Scholl
Matt Bodah	Amber Scoufos
Noel Burgess	Karen Sherman
Patricia Casey	Jessica Sherwood
Roxanne Gomes	Carolyn Sovet
Laura Kenerson	Tammy Vargas-Warner

**The URI Work-Life Committee** includes a group of volunteer staff, faculty, and students who formed in 2003 through a collaboration between the ADVANCE program and the President's Commission on the Status of Women. The Committee promotes the development of policies and guidelines, sponsors workshops and informational programs, distributes literature, has a well-developed website ([www.uri.edu/worklife](http://www.uri.edu/worklife)), has helped individual employees navigate work-life challenges, and generally works hard to increase awareness about the importance of workplace flexibility and the needs of a changing workforce. In 2012 the Committee will be focusing on several policy initiatives. As well, in collaboration with the Schmidt Labor Research Center, we are conducting a staff survey, to be followed by a faculty survey, and will be providing the Administration with important information about URI employees and their needs. **We always welcome new members!**



**This publication is sponsored by the Schmidt Labor Research Center and the Vice President of Administration & Finance**



*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 grows outward from its center in perfect 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 renews us, enabling us to maintain our equilibrium and balance amidst all of life's challenges. (adopted from Annie Harrison Designs: <http://www.sacredwatersculpture.com/index.html>)*