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The New Mommy Track

More mothers win flextime at work, and hubbies' help (really!) at home

By Kimberly Palmer



Lawyer Lindsay Androski Kelly (above) holds daughter Vivian as son George, 2, plays. Right, Rachel Thebault at her bakery with 2-year-old daughter Marin



On a Tuesday evening in early summer, a very pregnant Lindsay Androski Kelly walked in her door to exuberant shouts of "Mommy! Mommy!" from her 2-year-old son, George. She dropped her laptop in her home office and listened to the boy tell her about his adventures on the playground.

Kelly, a 30-year-old lawyer on track to become partner at her Washington, D.C., law firm, is now on maternity leave with her baby daughter, Vivian. But when

she returns to the office, she'll also go back to working part of her 55-hour week at home so she can spend as much time as possible with her children, who have a nanny. And she'll resume her old routine: rising at 5 a.m. to put in a couple of hours before the kids wake up and logging in for an hour or two after they go to sleep. She'll eat breakfast with her family and be home in time to make dinner.

A generation ago, a lawyer in Kelly's situation would probably have felt pressure to put in early mornings



and late nights at the office. But Kelly's firm allows employees to work flexible hours. "As long as you get everything done and meet the clients' needs, you can work whatever time of day you like," she says.

Kelly represents a new generation of American mothers who are rejecting the "superwoman" image from the 1980s as well as the "soccer mom" stereotype of the 1990s. Mothers today are more likely to negotiate flexible schedules at work and demand fuller participation of fathers in child raising than pre-

vious generations did, giving them more time to pursue their own careers and interests. Some so-called mompreneurs start their own businesses. Nearly 26 percent of working women with children under 18 work flexible schedules, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, compared with 14 percent in 1991.

"Fifteen to 20 years ago, women in suits and sneakers . . . were playing by the traditional rules of the game, trying to live in a man's world. Now women are saying, 'Screw the rules—the rules didn't work,' " says

Kellyanne Conway, president of the Polling Co., a research firm. Conway, 40, the mother of twins who are almost 3 years old, started her business in 1995, allowing her to set her own hours and occasionally work from home.

Not that it's always easy. Heidi Leigh, 34, a former theater sales manager and mother of a 1-year-old in South Plainfield, N.J., tried to shift her schedule a half-hour earlier in the day so she could get home in time to pick up her son from day care and make dinner. Her boss said no. "He wouldn't allow it, because he didn't want other people to do the same thing," she says.

"More and more companies are hip to [flexibility], but it's still not the norm," cautions Michelle Goodman, author of *The Anti 9-to-5 Guide: Practical Career Advice for Women Who Think Outside the Cube*.

Art of the deal. While balancing work and family is never simple, Goodman and others who have studied the issue say mothers can increase their chances of getting onto this new mommy track by choosing certain careers, partners, and companies. While a handful of workplaces are making it easier for mothers (and fathers) to meld work with family, many women report that they often need to take matters into their own hands, through skillful negotiation with supervisors or, in some cases, quitting office life and starting their own businesses (box, Page 44).

On the company front, 31 percent of organizations allow employees to work from home or off site on a regular basis, and 73 percent allow extended career breaks for family responsibilities, according to a survey by the Families and Work Institute. Best Buy allows some of its corporate employees to set their own

The company did not start the program out of a spirit of generosity: In 2001, it faced a 24 percent turnover rate. Allyn estimates the cost of losing a client services' employee, which most are, to be around \$80,000. So if Full Circle enables one person to return to the firm, she says, the program has paid for itself. Allyn says the turnover rate has already fallen to 15 percent.

Gina Thoma, 43, one of the 25 female participants in the Full Circle program, worked as a senior manager in PricewaterhouseCoopers's San Francisco office until she had three children, including twins, in less than two years. After a series of nannies didn't work out, she and her husband decided one of them needed to stay home, at least temporarily, to restore order to their home life. Despite her time out, Thoma is still on track to become partner after

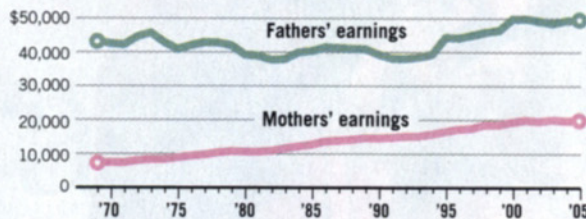
she returns in 2008 or 2009. "I'm determined to make it work," she says.

Thoma's promise of a job after years off is unusual, and even at a company like PricewaterhouseCoopers, participation in the Full Circle program is highly selective. That's what inspired Cathleen Benko, managing principal of talent for Deloitte & Touche, which provides consulting services, to develop a new model that views flexibility as the norm, instead of an exception.

Deloitte's new approach, laid out in *Mass Career Customization: Aligning the*

Mama Brings Home More Bacon

While fathers continue to outearn mothers on average, fathers' earnings have held relatively constant compared with the rise in mothers' income.



Source: Calculations by Dan Black and Jesse Bricker, Maxwell School of Syracuse University, based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Minnesota Population Center. Earnings are reported in 2005 dollars.

hours and work entirely from home. Last year, PricewaterhouseCoopers, a public accounting firm, launched Full Circle, a program for parents that enables them to temporarily stop working for the company but stay in touch through networking and training events. Keeping connected makes it easier for moms to return to work when they're ready. "The thing we know for sure is that women need choices. Our careers are not as linear as men's," says Jennifer Allyn, managing director in the office of diversity.

The Age of the 'Alpha Mom'

A new wave of advertising is showing women in control

Madison Avenue has created a new kind of mother to reflect the latest work-family trends. Dubbed "alpha moms," they project independence, balance, and competence at both work and home, in contrast to past images of harried working moms and über-domestic stay-at-home moms.

"Alpha moms are women who are in control of their own destiny. She sometimes works and sometimes doesn't. . . . The idea is that you can be good at both [motherhood and career] now," says Kristi Bridges, creative director of the

Sawtooth Group, a marketing firm in Woodbridge, N.J.

The Leo Burnett advertising agency first noticed the group in 1999. It labeled them "mothers of invention," after their reliance on hands-on husbands, flexible work schedules, and new technology to successfully combine motherhood and work. At the time, they made up about one quarter of mothers; the agency says the percentage is probably significantly higher today.

Marketers are paying more attention



to mothers partly because they're earning more money: The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that between 1973

MOMPREENEUR. Lori Johnson designs and sells car seat covers to be able to spend more time with her daughter, Avery, nearly 2.

Workplace With Today's Nontraditional Workforce, coauthored by Benko, personalizes employees' careers to fit their lifestyles. For example, young 20-somethings might have few travel restrictions or work limitations and then add restrictions during childbearing years. Deloitte has already rolled out the program to about one fifth of its workforce; next year it will apply to the whole firm.

Many agencies within the federal government encourage employees to work from home and to have flexible hours. Daniel Green, deputy associate director in the Office of Personnel Management, says such arrangements increase loyalty and motivation among staff. By January 2005, over 140,000 federal employees, or 19 percent of the workforce, teleworked, almost double the number for 2001.

Opting out. Most women don't have access to such corporate and federal programs, and that leads some of them to decide combining motherhood and work is impossible. A recent survey of almost 2,500 high-achieving women by Sylvia Ann Hewlett found that 37 percent of women stop working for a period, or temporarily "opt out" of the workforce. Most of those women would have preferred to have taken a job with reduced or flexible hours if it had been available, says Hewlett, author of *Off-Ramps and*



Only 3% of companies let most employees work part of the week at home sometimes.

On-Ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success.

Leigh, the former theater manager, exemplifies that dilemma. She eventually decided to quit her job to sell advertisements from home on a commission-only basis. She works in the mornings, before her husband leaves for his afternoon shift at a pharmaceutical company. While she'd like to continue to stay home, she isn't sure that will be possible. "Living in New Jersey is really difficult on one income," she says.

Through interviews with women who

chose to leave the workplace, Pamela Stone, author of *Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home*, found that sometimes just small differences, such as the ability to work from home one or two days a month, would have made it possible for women to stay in the workforce. Often, she says, women's flexible arrangements were based on handshake agreements with supervisors; new bosses meant no more flexibility.

Partly as a result of those continuing difficulties, a growing number of moth-

This ad for Ford's Lincoln MKX aims to appeal to busy women in their 40s.

and 2003, working wives' contributions to family income grew from 26 percent to 35 percent, and almost one third of women outearn their husbands. According to the Minnesota Population Center, the

average mother with a college degree earned \$34,344 in 2005, compared with \$17,520 (in 2005 dollars) in 1980.

Maria Bailey, coauthor of *Trillion Dollar Moms* and chief executive of BSM Media, a marketing firm that specializes in reaching mothers, calculates that U.S. mothers spend \$2.1 trillion a year. Isabel Kallman founded Alpha Mom TV to cater to the demographic after tiring of seeing images of perfect mothers in the media. Online videos feature discussions on fashionable maternity wear, breastfeeding, and involving men in child care and housework. "Every mom can be an alpha mom in her own way," explains Kallman.

A recent television ad for Ford's Lincoln MKX exemplifies the image: It features a woman in a bikini top and surfing shorts stepping out of the sports utility vehicle with her

surfboard while male surfers stop to stare. "My dream was always to catch the perfect wave. Then I realized, I caught three," the woman says, as her three daughters step out of the car to join her on the beach. The target customer for the Lincoln MKX, which has extra safety features and space, is a woman in her mid-40s who runs a busy life, balancing her family, career, and personal life, says Mike Richards, Lincoln's general marketing manager.

Politicians are also trying to woo alpha moms, much as Bill Clinton appealed to "soccer moms" in the 1990s. Bailey co-founded the MomVote.com website after several 2008 presidential candidates asked for her help in reaching contemporary mothers. —K.P.

IN THE SWING. Gina Thoma has taken leave to be with her kids, but she is still on the partner track at PricewaterhouseCoopers.

ers are deciding that starting their own business is the answer. On a cool evening in May, dozens of women gathered in lower Manhattan to celebrate the launch of a new magazine, *Hybrid Mom*. It caters to women who are balancing work and motherhood with a special focus on mompreneurs, or mothers who launch their own businesses. Linda Shapiro, co-founder of Moms-for-Profit, the company that publishes the magazine, says that two thirds of stay-at-home moms start their own businesses, and they want a place to talk about it.

Low-tech solution. Lori Johnson, 34, is one of those moms. After working more than 80 hours a week as a sales account executive in the semiconductor industry, she quit after having her daughter, Avery, just over two years ago. Not willing to return to such a hectic lifestyle, she decided starting her own business out of her home in Concord, Mass., was a "happy medium." She now designs and sells car seat covers. The idea for Hot Toddlers Baby Gear came to her after she became frustrated when people mistook her daughter for a boy because she could find only blue seat covers.



73% of employers allow some workers to take long career breaks for family reasons.

Rachel Thebault, 31, started a bakery, Tribeca Treats, in lower Manhattan after realizing that her investment banking job wasn't conducive to being a mother. "I felt like in the long term that was not going to be a job where I

felt like I could commit to being successful at my job and also happily raise a family," she says.

Even though she spends up to 80 hours a week working, she does it according to her own schedule. If her

How Moms Get on Track

You'll need to pick jobs carefully, pay dues, then negotiate

A full-time job doesn't have to destroy all hope of family dinners or afternoon playtime. Women can increase their chances of getting on the new mommy track through successful negotiation both at work and at home.

After lawyer Lindsay Androski Kelly, 30, decided she would work only at a firm that allowed flexible hours, she specifically asked about family-friendly policies during job interviews. At her current firm, Kellogg, Huber, Hansen, Todd, Evans & Figel in Washington, D.C., she was told there were no face-time requirements, as long as the work got done.

While Kelly's approach worked for her, Michelle Goodman, author of *The Anti 9-to-5 Guide: Practical Career Advice for Women Who Think Outside the*

Cube, warns against asking for flexibility too early, before proving oneself on the job. "You do need to pay your dues a little bit," she says. She recommends researching companies ahead of time to find out whether they're known for family-friendly arrangements.

Pat Katepoo, founder of WorkOptions.com, which offers guidance on achieving customized work arrangements, suggests first pitching a trial period. "Even if [supervisors] are nervous about a nontraditional arrangement, they will feel some sense of control if there's a backdoor option for stopping it." Putting the proposal in writing with clear explanations of how the job will still get done also helps, Katepoo says. In her experience, if employees have worked for a manager for at least one to

two years, are reliable performers, and have a trusting relationship with their manager, they have an 80 percent chance of at least getting a trial period.

Regardless of the schedule, setting boundaries—such as having a policy against meetings after 5 p.m.—is key, says Mary Ann Mason, coauthor of *Mothers on the Fast Track: How a New Generation Can Balance Family and Careers*. She also urges women not to wait too long before having children. For some fields, especially those that require extensive training such as academia or medicine, it's easier to have small children earlier, rather than during what Mason calls the "make or break" years between ages 30 and 40.

No leverage. Women working in low-skilled jobs, on the other hand, usually find flexibility only by lucking into employers who accept it, says Leslie Morgan Steiner, editor of *Mommy Wars*. "Men and women at the lowest income levels don't have any leverage," she says.

Women across the economic spec-

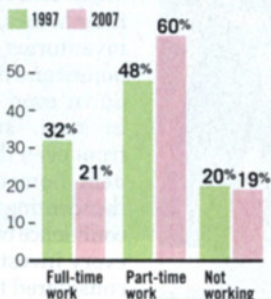


USNEWS

The Part-Time Ideal

Working mothers increasingly say part-time work is their ideal work situation.

"What's ideal for you?"



Source: Pew Research Center

nanny calls in sick, then she brings her daughter, Marin, 2¹/₂, to work with her. "I'm at my own beck and call, not someone else's," she says.

"In some cases," says author Goodman, "[self-employment] is the only way they could fit work life with their personal life." One woman she interviewed for her book was divorced with five school-age children. The cost of day care would have been overwhelming, so she worked from home as a

marketer and copywriter instead.

Tamara Monosoff, inventor of a device that stops kids from unraveling toilet paper, wrote *Secrets of Millionaire Moms* to explain to other moms how to raise capital, develop a business plan, and balance family time with running a business. She started writing about mompreneurs after discovering a high demand from mothers interested in starting their own businesses.

It's a trend that's likely to continue: A 2006 Lifetime Television poll found that the most popular goal among women ages 18 to 29 was to manage their own companies, with 47 percent of respondents choosing it. Yet becoming president of a major corporation was named by only 10 percent of respondents. "Women are trying to have it all but are trying to regain control over their time," says Conway, who helped conduct the poll. "That's why many women are busting out of the traditional workforce and starting their own businesses."

Back at Kelly's house, the pork tenderloin is almost done roasting. Kelly stops into her home office for a quick E-mail check as her husband, George, a real-estate developer, gives their son a bath while speaking to him in his best Sir Topham Hatt impression. For now, at least, Kelly has achieved what she considers an ideal balance. ●

trum benefit from support at home. Leslie Bennetts, author of *The Feminine Mistake: Are We Giving Up Too Much?*, encourages women to find a way to continue working throughout motherhood: "Women must insist that their husbands share everything." Many women appear to be doing just that: A University of Maryland study found that the time men spent on housework almost doubled between the 1960s and 1990s, by which time they were doing one third of it.

For women who feel like they're still doing it all, Peggy Orenstein, author of *Flux: Women on Sex, Work, Love, Kids & Life in a Half-Changed World*, suggests talking to husbands in a nonaccusatory way about how exhausting doing so much housework is and together making a list of everything each person does and dividing it fairly. "Positive reinforcement is a must," she adds. -K.P.

You can share your own experiences at www.usnews.com/mommyforum.

JEFFREY MACMILLAN FOR USNEWS

