

Chapter Seven

"FAMILY-FRIENDLY" MEANS FATHERS TOO!

by

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Traditional views that family life should not intrude on the workplace are slowly being eroded. One of the single biggest catalysts is the changing demographic structure of our society. The 1997 and 1998 EEO Trust Indexes note that 57% of all working age women are now in the labour market. There are more families with two parents in paid employment. And the number of sole parent families has increased to almost 18% of all families.¹ Paradoxically, another pressure is the competitive requirement for businesses to increase productivity, extend service hours, and become more responsive to customer need, which means that attracting and retaining skilled staff has become paramount. In this context, some organisations are starting to realise that staff turnover will be lower and employees will be more productive if they are able to manage a satisfactory balance between paid work and family needs.

However, the danger is that family-friendly workplace initiatives designed to help achieve that balance are often directed primarily at women or seen to benefit only mothers in paid work. This approach reinforces the stereotypical notion that women continue to do the "double shift", juggling work and family demands single-handedly, and discriminates against male employees who are actively involved in meeting their domestic responsibilities. A 1990 New Zealand Time Use Pilot Survey showed that men spent 34% of their time in paid and unpaid (including domestic) work combined, and for women the average was 28%.² Typically women tend to work longer hours in unpaid work, while men spend longer hours in paid work. We can conclude that in many families both father and mother suffer from the "double shift", although the proportions of paid and unpaid work may differ. In this context, achieving and sustaining a balance between the demands of a paid job and responsibilities outside the workplace is a desirable outcome for all employees.

It is an outcome that brings with it more than just broad social justice benefits to individuals and families. As Howard Davies, Director General of the Confederation of British Industry, reports, "What is most important is for employers to accept that helping people achieve a balanced home life is the surest way of increasing their

¹ *EEO Trust Index*. Auckland: EEO Trust, November 1997, pp.4-5
EEO Trust Index. Auckland: EEO Trust, November 1998, p.11.

² *Testing Time: Report of the 1990 Time Use Pilot Survey*. Wellington: Department of Statistics, 1991, p.21

contribution to the company."³ This approach means a substantial change from traditional work patterns and organisational cultures which have been based on the "invisibility" of men's families. In the past, employers have traditionally assumed that most male employees, particularly those in executive positions, are supported by wives at home who take care of them and their children, leaving the men free to work as many hours as the organisation requires, and go wherever they are sent. The higher up the executive ladder men go, the greater may be the demands to perform for the company and the greater the difficulty in handling family responsibilities, in turn placing a heavier load on their partners. Compounding the problem is the high pressure nature of many jobs in the 1990s - companies that operate as 24-hour-a-day global entities, the requirement for international travel, tight margins, downsizing, and all-pervasive communications technology. It is a working environment where many employees are expected to be available at any hour of the day or night.

Today, with an increasing proportion of women in paid employment facing these pressures too, men are assuming a greater share of family responsibilities. The 1990 Time Use Pilot Survey showed that on average women still do much more of the housework and childcare than men. Gender differences in the proportion of time spent in unpaid domestic work were greatest amongst part-time workers and least amongst those not in paid work (which include the retired). The Time Use Pilot Survey found that New Zealand men were spending an average of 2.4 hours out of a 24 hour day handling household chores and caring responsibilities, compared with an average of 4.3 hours a day for women.⁴ Comparative data for earlier trends in unpaid household work in New Zealand is not readily available. Some overseas studies show that men are doing more housework than their fathers or grandfathers did, as well as taking far more responsibility for children. US studies suggest that in the 1980s women handled twice as much housework as men, compared with the 1960s when women were doing three times as much unpaid work as men.⁵ Recent Australian research found that while the mean time spent on domestic chores by women over the period 1987-1992 had fallen, the figure for men remained unchanged. However, over the same period both men and women had increased the amount of time spent on caring for children.⁶ What is clear is that household and caring responsibilities remain an issue for both men and women to varying degrees, and employers need to develop family-friendly work practices aimed at allowing both men and women to balance their work and non-work commitments better.

People's domestic realities vary enormously. Recent Statistics New Zealand figures show that 34% of men and 36% of women in paid employment have at least one dependant child. Clearly, however, family responsibilities extend beyond caring for

³ *Balanced lives: Changing work patterns for men.* London: New Ways To Work, 1995, p.7

⁴ *Testing Time: Report of the 1990 Time Use Pilot Survey.* Wellington: Department of Statistics, 1991, p.22

⁵ Pleck, J.H., cited in Levine, J.A. and Pitt, E.W., *New Expectations: Community Strategies for Responsible Fatherhood.* New York: Families At Work Institute, 1995, p.22.

⁶ Bittman, M. and Pixley, J., *The Double Life of the Family.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997, pp.145-146

children. With the ageing of New Zealand's post-war baby boomers, caring for or assisting elderly parents is adding extra pressure on many of today's middle-aged workers, and will continue to do so in the future. Maori, Pacific Island and other ethnic groups may also have responsibilities to their extended families. In a number of families these days, both in New Zealand and overseas, it is the mother who goes out to paid work while the father stays at home to look after family needs. This reflects in part the fact that increasingly women have been taking advantage of educational and career opportunities, and can now earn higher salaries than spouses who may be less qualified. In the United States, there is a small but growing trend among executive career men to regain a balance by leaving successful jobs to spend time with their families. Men in business, having witnessed the loss of company loyalty inherent in downsizing, are totting up how much they are worth on paper to determine whether they can afford to quit. However, for most men the economic reality means that this is simply not an option.

Sole-parenting puts an added pressure on parents in paid employment. Data from the 1996 Census showed that 17% of parents in sole-parent families were fathers. The highest incidence of children living with a male sole parent occurs amongst boys over 10 years - according to 1991 Census figures, one in five boys aged 10 to 14 living in a one-parent family lived with their father. Non-custodial parents, too, can face difficulties in balancing their work commitments with their part-time responsibilities for their children. The father is generally the non-custodial parent, but the workplace may not see him as having parental obligations. The increasing number of sole-parent families reflects in part the level of divorces in New Zealand. Indeed, the emotional and economic pressure and stresses of couples trying to balance work and family needs may well be contributing factors behind many such marriage break-ups. However, Ian Pool, Professor of Demography at the University of Waikato, notes that the rate of increase in both divorce and sole parenting is now slowing. Reasons include the fact that fewer people are formally marrying, and those that are marrying are doing so later in life and such marriages have lower probabilities of breaking up.⁷

An Institute for Public Policy Research report in the UK states that many fathers are suffering "role strain" in trying to balance work and family needs, and that few attempts are being made to help them. The Institute suggests employers adopt "father-friendly" policies with initiatives like paternity leave, parental or other special leave (such as caring for a sick child) and greater flexibility in varying working hours to suit family needs. It identifies employer benefits as "reduced tardiness and absenteeism, and increased productivity and company loyalty." The report adds, "Thirty percent of employee absence is due to stress. Enabling fathers to have more satisfying relationships with children helps reduce their stress levels, improves their effectiveness at work, and supports their relationships with their partners - leading, ultimately, to less employment disturbance from family disruption."⁸ The winners of the 1998 EEO Trust

⁷ Pool, I., *Fathers, families futures: a population perspective* (a paper presented at the Fathering the Future Forum, Christchurch, March 28, 1998), p.6

⁸ Burgess, A. and Ruxton, S., *Men and their children - Proposals for public policy*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 1996, p.ix

Work & Family Awards demonstrated the commitment of some New Zealand employers to creating workable family friendly policies and practices, and the business benefits to be gained. The Awards underlined the need to see work and personal responsibilities as interconnected if we want men and women to participate in both income earning and family life. In particular, the experiences of the three men who shared the "Walk the Talk" award for senior managers achieving a genuine balance between work and family, showed that a win-win situation is not only possible, but beneficial. Reported gains included good staff retention rates, and increased efficiency and discretionary effort by employees.

The commonly cited benefits of a family-friendly workplace are, generally speaking, part of more widely desired organisational goals. Family-friendly initiatives frequently incorporate the same strategic aims that any competitive "quality management" organisation works to achieve - attracting and retaining skilled staff, commitment, productivity, flexibility, and a high level of customer service. In New Zealand, however, very little quantitative analysis has been done to measure the costs and benefits of implementing family-friendly practices in workplaces. The main focus to date has been on the costs of high turnover. Recent Australian research looking at the cost/benefit of providing childcare for employees, suggests that the cost of staff turnover is 20%-50% of annual salary.⁹ This is more conservative than the figure used by the Families and Work Institute in the USA which sets turnover costs at 70%-150% of salary. WestpacTrust in New Zealand experienced an increase from a 30% return rate from parental leave to 70% after implementation of their parental leave programme - an estimated saving of \$1 million per year. Aside from the costs of recruiting and training a replacement employee, there may be other business costs associated with turnover. A 1998 Massey University survey, for instance, found that when a senior staff member leaves a law or accounting firm, 40% of his or her clients usually follow.

Employee stress and absenteeism is another common justification for introducing family-friendly practices. Again, very little analysis has been done in this area. Macpac Wilderness Equipment in New Zealand contracted an Employee Assistance Programme to offer a confidential counselling service to staff after this was identified as a need. An evaluation after a year showed that staff who had used the service claimed they were more productive at work.¹⁰ Similarly, LWR Industries introduced a compressed work week with an early Friday finish to allow employees to meet some family commitments which usually occurred during work hours, such as doctor's appointments. The company cited reduced absenteeism and improved goodwill as a benefit.¹¹

⁹ *Considering Childcare? A Cost Benefit Guide for Employers*, 2nd edition. Sydney: Families at Work, 1998, p.20

¹⁰ *Work & Family Directions - What New Zealand Champions Are Doing*. Wellington: Families At Work/Top Drawer Consultants, 1995, p.42

¹¹ *Work & Family Directions - What New Zealand Champions Are Doing*. Wellington: Families At Work/Top Drawer Consultants, 1995, p.21

Calculating direct links between some family-friendly policies and business benefits is problematic because of the difficulty in identifying the effects of other external variables and the complexity of personal lives. For instance, in a given case there may have been other factors, besides introducing parental leave provisions and support, which also influenced improved staff retention rates. However, some cost/benefit links can be documented, such as surveying employees about whether the introduction of part-time work influenced their decision to return from parental leave, or whether flexible hours reduced childcare problems. Ilene Wolcott, senior research fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies and one of the judges for the 1998 EEO Trust Work & Family Awards, noted in her address at the Awards presentation that there are two aspects in calculating the costs and benefits of work and family policies. One takes the broad social justice approach that society and families will benefit and this, in turn, will generate the best attributes in future employees. The other shows that the benefits of a family-friendly approach are profitable in dollar terms to the employer.

US researcher, Dr James Levine, confirms the value in creating a workplace culture and practices which accommodate the needs of working parents. He says, "Work/family issues ten years from now...will fully be issues for men and women, and the most productive companies will be the ones that focus equally, that see these as gender neutral, that really start to invite men into the discussion."¹² However, the introduction of family friendly policies which enable men to have satisfying family relationships as well as to succeed in their jobs, can be fraught with problems. Even when such policies exist in the workplace and are gender neutral, poor internal communication can mean that male employees are unaware of their options. A New Zealand survey of expectant parents prepared by the Business Research Centre for the Industrial Relations Service in 1996 found that only 17% of fathers knew about paternity leave entitlements. Furthermore, men can be reluctant to take advantage of family friendly options. With parental leave usually unpaid in New Zealand, many men may need to continue working without a break for financial reasons. Another concern is that using flexible work options might damage their career prospects, or that they might be perceived as "unable to hack the pace." The 1980s phenomenon of the "mummy track", where women took flexible work options in order to combine career with raising a family, was often seen as a promotion-killer. A number of organisations developed successful initiatives aimed at helping women to resume their careers. In other cases, however, many competent, dedicated women found themselves sidelined from any real career progression. The 1990s equivalent, the "parent track", runs the risk of being regarded in the same way. Indeed, a 1997 study in the USA indicated that well-educated men with working wives are paid and promoted less than men with stay-at-home wives, possibly because they don't clock as much face time.¹³ A possible alternative interpretation may be that men do not need to seek promotion if they have a partner who is earning a good income.

¹² Levine, J., *What's your daddy strategy?* (a paper presented at the Work & Family: Beyond 2000 Conference, Perth, May 12, 1998)

¹³ Morris, B., Is your family wrecking your career? (and vice versa). *Fortune*, March 17, 1997, p.48

The flip-side of the perception that having a family can be damaging for career prospects, is the notion that pursuing a career can be damaging to the family. Children are growing up in an increasingly fast-moving society, facing the pressures of violence, drugs, AIDS, and an uncertain job market. More than ever, they need time, interest and caring guidance from their families. Arlene Johnston, vice-president of the Families and Work Institute, USA, says employers need to ensure their work and family policies are credible, are seen to be supported by management, and are seen not to harm people's careers. She calls for "no fault flexibility" with a change in organisational culture which recognises that those working part-time or who take other flexible options are no less committed and productive than full-timers. "People want more options," Johnston says. "Men saw their fathers make sacrifices at home for work, and they don't want to experience that."¹⁴

So, on a practical level, what can organisations do to help men balance their work and family needs? Initiatives include:

- Recognising that helping male employees to balance their fathering and work roles is a positive investment, which will improve employee satisfaction and productivity, and reduce absenteeism and turnover.
- Recognising that two-income and sole parent families are a reality, and that this needs to be accommodated in the workplace.
- Surveying and consulting with employees to find out which initiatives would be most valuable to fathers in the workplace to make it easier to balance their work and family responsibilities.
- Publicising family-friendly policies and practices to all employees so that they are aware of their options and that the policies are not "for women only". This should include providing advisory material and information packs on parental leave provisions and flexible options for fathers-to-be and their partners.
- Creating and supporting an open work culture where employees feel free to acknowledge their families, and are confident to make use of family-friendly practices. In particular, senior managers should act as role models by using family-friendly options themselves.
- Encouraging fathers to consider working reduced and/or flexible hours and encouraging fathers to work from home when appropriate. Flexible scheduling allows employees to have more control over when and where they get work done.
- Allowing fathers to take career breaks without affecting service entitlements.
- Rewarding performance, not face-time.

¹⁴ Rose, R., Make your workplace family friendly, *Management*, August 1993, p.46

- Offering male employees a cash bonus if they take parental leave.
- Monitoring new initiatives and evaluating their effectiveness.
- Joining the EEO Trust's Work & Family Network.
- Seeking recognition and publicity for successful initiatives taken, for example by entering the EEO Trust's annual Work & Family Awards.

The key to achieving a satisfactory balance between work and family responsibilities lies in focussing on flexibility and work outputs, rather than on face-time. Innovative organisations are beginning to create a culture where work and family policies are integrated into strategic management plans and where initiatives are taken to encourage all employees, including men, to exercise greater choice in balancing work and family responsibilities. The result benefits both families and the business bottom-line.

EEO Trust Work & Family Award Winners: Walk the Talk

The 1998 EEO Trust Work & Family Awards included a "Walk the Talk" category which recognised the efforts of senior managers to achieve a successful work and family balance themselves and to help their staff to do so in a practical way.

Ross Gillett, Department of Social Welfare

One of the joint winners of the award was Ross Gillett who works as a manager at the Income Support Service of the Department of Social Welfare based in Wellington. With a staff of around 100 people reporting to him, Ross's management style is open and inclusive. He recognises the need to provide a supportive environment where employees can maintain a healthy balance between work and their family and cultural life.

Flexible work arrangements are part of the office culture, where "Working Windows" can be negotiated to meet individual and business needs. Ross uses these policies to ensure the best advantage to both the business and staff members. This is reflected in enhanced customer service, and in good staff retention and return rates. Staff are welcome to have their children come into the office providing the safety of the children can be ensured. Staff outings including family members are held regularly and are well attended. Ross encourages staff on parental leave, or those who have left to have children, to take part in these events and to keep in regular contact.

Ross also recognises and values the ethnic and cultural diversity of his staff. His initiatives in this area have helped to achieve more open communication with staff, particularly when family issues need to be addressed. The effect has been to improve respect for and understanding of different family norms and values.

Despite his dedication and enthusiasm for his work and staff, Ross above all values his own family and shows a strong commitment to them. When there are deadlines to be met, Ross prefers to take work home rather than work in the office, believing it is important to spend time with his family whenever possible. Although travelling is a part of his work, he tries to keep it to a minimum because it compromises his ability to provide support to his wife and children. Ross and his family are regular participants in the social and cultural activities of the NCSCC, underlining Ross's view that work and non-work life are inextricably linked.

Rob Borgers and Bruce Henry, Wheeler Campbell Consulting Ltd

Fellow winners of the "Walk the Talk" Award, Rob Borgers and Bruce Henry are Directors and Principals of Wheeler Campbell Consulting Ltd, a Wellington-based recruitment and human resources company. They founded the business five years ago, and since then it has grown to 18 staff.

One of the motives in setting up the company was the desire to allow themselves and staff to achieve a balance between their personal and professional lives. Both Rob and Bruce found that organisations they had worked in previously had not recognised the important obligations they had to their children and partners. They also believe that society as a whole benefits from its members having a more balanced lifestyle and that families need to be together regularly to function effectively.

Rob and Bruce model these values in the workplace. Bruce works from home one day a week. Both men take time off to care for sick children or partners at home. Neither works excessive hours, nor do they expect their staff to do so. Staff are explicitly encouraged to share rather than shirk family responsibilities. Those who have worked long hours are expected to take time off to re-balance. Rob and Bruce encourage their staff to use flexible arrangements to meet non-work commitments. Leave is also treated in a flexible manner. Staff members may take leave to attend children's school camps or other school-based activities. Study leave is also available to allow staff to study in work time rather than in family time. Staff report increased efficiency and discretionary effort resulting from the company's commitment to work and family balance.

Rob and Bruce see value in enhancing the contacts between work and family. Children are welcome in the office at any time. Social events for staff members, their partners and families, are held regularly.

The Directors of Wheeler Campbell Consulting Ltd have tried to create a workplace that encourages all staff to achieve a balance between work and non-work life. The reality is reflected both in the management practices that Rob and Bruce have developed and in their own everyday behaviour at work.

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