



## Value quality not quantity – a shorter working week

I am a senior manager in a government statutory body. My husband is also a senior manager with a government statutory authority. We both need to travel for our jobs, in particular my husband who often travels overseas. We have three children, aged 11, 7 and 1. I had my first child at the age of 36. I am focussing in this submission on the situation for people who want to progress in their careers but who also want to have children. This is where my experience serves me best.

### *Workplace expectations of senior staff*

When a husband and wife are both working at a senior level with children, life becomes very finely tuned. The workloads at these levels are never set to be completed within a 40 hour working week. There exists an expectation of workplaces that Senior Managers are paid more highly and therefore need to work many extra hours. Senior positions were set up for men with stay at home wives. There is only a very small number of mothers in very senior positions.

There is a belief that senior managers do not need to spend time with their families but that junior staff do. Junior staff are happy to promulgate this belief as they always think it unfair that senior staff are paid more than they are. There are many initiatives for junior staff that provide for more family friendly conditions. However, bosses with stay at home wives or no children will tell you that as a senior manager you are expected to work weekends and nights with no time in lieu. An example of this in my organisation was when a previous boss shut the office down over the Christmas break for all staff except for senior staff.

### *Choices for educated and talented couples*

Therefore, there are generally limited choices for couples where both wish to contribute at a senior level and also want children. They need to make considerable sacrifices. They can choose not to have children OR they can choose to have children but not to see them very much OR one of them can sacrifice their career to look after the children. None of these options are very palatable to people who want to contribute to society to their utmost but also want to make sure that their children grow up loved and cared for by their parents.

### *Shorten the working week*

These choices are not an essential part of life, but are purely a result of the culture that we have developed for ourselves in this country. There is actually no real reason why senior managers should not provide quality input to the workplace for 30-35 hours per week rather than for 45-55 hours per week. In my experience of employing scientific staff, I would prefer to employ a part-timer who can make a high quality input rather than a full timer who stays until 10pm every night but does not seem to ever get the work done on time or to a level of quality required. The option of a shorter working week for senior positions is necessary to attract mothers to these positions. If we valued contributions and outcomes, not time spent in the office and ability to own a senior manager (by the employer), we could achieve this goal.

### *Impact on the Australian community*

These choices are not palatable to the people involved. However, they are even less palatable to society. Bronwyn Bishop informs us that around one quarter of Australian women in their reproductive years will never have children, and she is concerned by this. It is likely that many of these women will be the most educated who leave childbearing until their mid thirties when they have finished their studies and achieved a level of seniority that allows them to operate where they can contribute the most. Many leave it too late. Many look at their peers (like myself) whose careers have been hampered through the need to stay at a level where there is sufficient flexibility to manage both career and children. They hear that more than half of my salary goes towards child care and are not prepared to make that sacrifice either.

Therefore, the outcome of the current situation is that we are ending up with three different results.

1. Talented women (and sometimes men) who sacrifice their careers to have children. They either do not work at all or take jobs beneath their abilities in order to maintain flexibility.
2. Talented women who do not have children but do have careers. They often have very little sympathy for women who want both a career and children.
3. Talented women who exhaust themselves and their families by trying to maintain a senior position and also have children.

### **Outcome of Option 1**

Australia needs the most talented people in the jobs for which they are suited. However, Australia is not getting what it needs. In Australia, only 43% of women with two or more children are in the workforce. If talent and abilities and intelligence are divided equally between the sexes, then I observe that we are utilising the talents of the brightest and most talented men, but often instead of placing women who have the most talent in appropriate senior positions, we are placing "second rate men" in these positions because the women cannot meet the hours required of them and because of the lack of flexibility inherent in senior positions.

### **Outcome of Option 2**

The major outcome is that people who can afford to have children, don't. These same people, if work conditions had been more appropriate, would have had children. This is the sector of society that can afford to provide a healthy home environment and education for their children. Educated bright women who do not have children but do have careers often have very little sympathy for women who want both a career and children. This maintains the culture of work that does not provide for senior women to look after both their job and family.

### **Outcome of Option 3**

Stressed women and stressed families. I get up at 5:45 am to feed the baby and play with her. I then leave the children with my husband. To meet my work requirements, I work from about 7am to 5pm every day and manage a swim and shower for my one-hour lunch break. I then zoom to the other side of town to collect my children, give them something to eat, make sure my school age children do their homework and practise their instruments, take them to swimming squad or maths extension or various other clubs and activities, play with the baby and thank goodness that my

husband (when he is not interstate or overseas for work) usually cooks dinner! Then we need to bathe them, read to them, feed the baby, clean up, get them to bed. And then there are the bills, the school forms to fill out, and the submissions to write on the Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family. It would nice to get to bed before 11pm but who am I kidding! And an unbroken night's sleep with a one year old is never very likely.

#### *How do we advise our daughters?*

I was a successful student at school and at University and I thrive on the type of work that I do. I believe that I have contributed considerably to the community through the impact of my work. However, it has come at a cost and I have not progressed in my career for many years now while I have been caring for my children. So - what do I advise my own three daughters? Should I suggest that they not bother achieving at school and university but that they would be better off starting a family young and focussing on their children? Or perhaps they would be better off lowering their expectations of an interesting career where they can progress equally to those of their peers who do not choose to have children? Should I suggest that they seriously consider not having children? Or that they find a house husband and not one who has ambitions like them of using their talents to make the world a better place? Children of today need to understand where they are aiming. Over 50% of university students are female but the statistics on senior female managers are depressing.

Concurrent with this Inquiry, I am aware that the Department of Transport and Regional Services has recently convened a group of very senior corporate women to examine the reasons for poor representation of women on Boards and in leadership positions in rural and regional Australia. A comprehensive study carried out by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation in 1998 demonstrated that two of the three main barriers impeding their rise to leadership positions were:

1. Organisational culture
2. Family unfriendly workplaces – lack of flexibility.

#### *So why not have part time work?*

Part time work is great for those who actually only work the hours for which they are paid. However, the more senior you get the more you are likely to be part time only in name. Yes - you may only be in the office from 9-3 every day but you are also connected to the Internet and check all of your emails while the children are watching Play School. After they have gone to bed, you just need to find a couple of hours to finish that Board paper that is due tomorrow. The Managing Director calls and asks you to follow up an issue with a client. By the end of the week you have managed to work 40 hours but you have only been paid for 27.5. Junior staff have *flex time* and *time in lieu* but senior staff are deemed to be married to the job and not to need to give back the time to their families that work stole from them.

#### *Conclusion*

Talented people who could contribute to society and industry are not contributing because of the time commitments that they must make. Until we change the culture of work in Australia to take account of the increased quality that senior staff can bring rather than the increased number of hours, women and men capable of contributing at a high level but also want to look after their children properly are left with very

unsatisfactory options. This is not only detrimental to them and their families but is also negative for the Australian community who either misses out on their contributions or on their children.