# [***Hard times derail the 'mommy track' for some***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:47KH-XTS0-010F-R1SX-00000-00&context=1516831)

Charleston Gazette (West Virginia)

January 1, 2003, Wednesday

Copyright 2003 Charleston Newspapers

**Section:** News; Pg. P9A

**Length:** 1123 words

**Byline:** Bonnie Miller Rubin Chicago Tribune

**Body**

As the economy sputters and employers try to do more with less, the much-vaunted "mommy track" may be veering off course.

In prosperous times, when the labor pool was smaller, employees seeking work/family balance could easily secure part-time work, job sharing and generous leaves.

Now, job applicants are a dime a dozen and corporate America is asking everyone to work faster, longer, harder.

The result? Parents who have negotiated for fewer hours say they feel under increased pressure to put in more work, causing some to call it quits.

"Maybe it can work when things are booming … but not now," said Amy Teschner, 41, of Evanston, Ill. After 20 years in marketing, the mother of two resigned from her part-time position in June. "In good times, you get raises and stock options and you think, 'This is not the time to walk away.' But in a downturn, it's a little tougher to convince yourself that the trade-offs are worth it. It's simply easier to leave."

An increasing number of workers seem to share her sentiments. The percentage of households with one stay-at-home parent has increased from 38.9 percent in 1995 to 41.3 percent last year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That is the highest level in two decades.

The change is occurring for a variety of reasons - including layoffs, stagnant wages and the high cost of day care.

But experts say the latest wrinkle is less about money than about disillusionment. Almost 25 years after a voluntary reduction in hours was dubbed the mommy track, some are concluding that the lofty goal of balancing work and family is simply not attainable in tougher times.

According to a survey by the New York-based research firm Catalyst - whose founder, Felice Schwartz, crafted the model for the mommy track - more than half of women who downshifted from full time to part time reported that while their paychecks and benefits shrunk, their workloads remained the same. About 10 percent said it increased.

"Instead of part-time employment being the best of both worlds, it may be the worst," said Joanne Brundage, founder of Mothers & More, an international nonprofit organization.

Officially, corporate America remains as committed to family-friendly policies as ever, said Frank Scanlan of the Society for Human Resource Management.

According to a 2002 survey, 64 percent of respondents offer some type of flextime; 37 percent allow telecommuting on a part-time basis and 23 percent have job-sharing.

"We haven't seen any scaling back … but there's no question that people need to be at work to take care of customers," Scanlan said. "You have to strike a balance, but if the company isn't making money, it's all sort of a moot point."

George Davis, a senior vice president at Lincoln Financial Group, appearing before a meeting of human resources executives, put it more succinctly: "With fewer people to get the job done, the quality of work life has to drop dramatically."

Kate Lauderbaugh, a former vice president for Northern Trust Bank, sees the dilemma from both sides.

Having had a colleague who put in two 10-hour days a week, "I understand the hardship that flextime can impose on co-workers," she said.

For herself, she reluctantly concluded that management and motherhood were incompatible. Even with an on-site day-care center and a four day week, she still worked 10 hours a day, said Lauderbaugh, who once supervised 65 people and is now home with two children, ages 4 and 14 months.

The only solution: Go back to an entry-level position - a move she wasn't willing to make.

But that doesn't mean she isn't ambivalent. "It's been really good for my kids, but I'm not sure it's been great for me."

Meanwhile, the cost of day care keeps climbing while wages have stalled - even more so for women with children, according to the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. Today's mothers earn about $ 1.50 an hour less than childless women, according to researcher Sarah Avellar, who suggests the reason is that mothers work more part-time hours, which depresses salaries.

And now that computers, e-mail, ***cell phones*** and pagers have created a porous wall between home and office, everyone is on call all the time - except that those with customized hours are doing it for less.

"If you're not getting high-visibility assignments, not getting raises and have no role models, then it's a job - not a career," said Sonia Ossorio, a spokeswoman for Catalyst. "And that makes the decision to go home much easier."

Few people were tethered to technology more then Cheryl Jakub, a biomedical engineer for Medtronic in Coal Creek Canyon, Colo.

When her son was born last year, she negotiated a part-time schedule, but a new project soon interfered. In order to walk out the door at 6 p.m. to relieve the baby-sitter, she would return to her laptop at 10 p.m., when she'd put in another four to six hours.

The only advantage: "I didn't have to get up with the baby," she said dryly. (She's now on a one-year leave of absence.)

With intensifying demands and dwindling job security, work is more likely to spill over at home, said Diane Wilson, a Chicago job consultant. "In tough times, people feel that they can't draw boundaries as clearly. And there's no question that those with special arrangements are the hardest to uphold."

Teschner, who had tried just about every possible employment configuration, agrees. Even though she survived two rounds of layoffs and no one suggested she give up her four-day week, the climate had sufficiently changed from the days when talent-starved employers would do "whatever it takes" to keep valued staffers, and now "face time" has become more important.

"It got to the point where it just wasn't working … and this was the right thing for my family," she said.

Such decisions usually involve older, better-educated professionals who can still rely on one robust income - a luxury that eludes minimum-wage earners.

But quitting comes at a cost for everyone. To pare expenses, Teschner stopped highlighting her hair, swapped bookstores for libraries and limited her clothing purchases to one turtleneck during the last six months. The family is able to get by on the income of Teschner's husband, a self-employed architect, although they both miss the predictability of a steady paycheck.

And once her temporary bridge insurance coverage runs out next year, she may need to adjust again. One option: taking a low-level job strictly for health insurance.

The quandary is one reason why women start about 65 percent of all new businesses.

"There are lots of variables and there's no one right way to do this. … But in bad times, you'd think people would be clinging to their job," Teschner said.

"Instead, it just makes them examine their reasons for working."

**Load-Date:** January 2, 2003

**End of Document**