



Book Work and Family - Allies or Enemies?

What Happens When Business Professionals Confront Life Choices

Stewart D. Friedman and Jeffrey H. Greenhaus
Oxford UP, 2000

Recommendation

Stewart D. Friedman and Jeffrey H. Greenhaus conducted extensive research with 861 alumni of the business schools at Drexel University and the University of Pennsylvania, both in Philadelphia. Their research yielded revealing results about the struggle of professionals to manage work and family commitments. However, Friedman and Greenhaus present these results in such overwhelming statistical detail that the average reader is in danger of being swamped. This is especially the case when the data proves principals that most people already grasp through common sense and experience. That said, *BooksInShort* recognizes that the authors have done working Joes and Janes a great service by aggregating numbers to back up the notion that it's getting tougher to balance family and career. As such, this is an important book for anyone in a position to set workplace policy.

Take-Aways

- People's two dominant roles - work and family life - can be allies or enemies.
- The two roles are allies when you achieve a good balance between them.
- The two roles become enemies when you lack balance.
- Women experience more problems choosing between career and family.
- Motherhood tends to limit women's career advancement, because they spend more time parenting than men.
- Fatherhood tends to advance men's career achievements because it is associated with more authority in the workplace.
- For men, a big tradeoff in career success is less time at home.
- Children suffer when parents are not psychologically available due to work.
- Dual-career families are becoming the norm, and employers need to adapt to this by permitting greater flexibility.
- Society needs to encourage "gender equity" in the home and office.

Summary

Work and Family: Changing Dynamics

The two dominant roles most employed women and men fill - work and family life - can help or hurt each other as allies or enemies. They can be allies if you learn to balance them, while they may be enemies if you invest too much time in one to the detriment of the other.

“Motherhood turns out to be a career liability as things exist today. For men, however, fatherhood is a career asset.”

Today, people from dual-career families are working more hours, which makes it particularly hard to care for children. The psychological effects of work commitments on the home and of home commitments on work can be even harder to handle than the time commitment a job requires. This conflict affects men and women differently. Women find it more difficult to choose between having a satisfying career or marriage and children. Trying to keep a balance often limits their career advancement opportunities. By contrast, men may find it more difficult to participate in family life when they place a priority on career advancement.

Balance: Six Major Themes

Research with 861 alumni of business schools at Philadelphia's University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University, produced the following six themes:

1. Having it all is possible but tough for working mothers - You can have both a fulfilling career and satisfying family life, but you need balanced involvement in both spheres. This can be especially difficult for working mothers, since traditional values still influence the division of labor in most homes. As a result, working mothers are most at risk of suffering career penalties and stress over balancing their dual roles. They generally feel less satisfied than men with both their careers and personal growth, while men are better able to invest time and energy in both areas. Working mothers earn less than women without children, in part because they work fewer hours. They also feel less career satisfaction. Women feel more forced than men to make tradeoffs to maintain a good family life, so they spend more time on home and child activities and adjust their work schedules to do so. So, today, motherhood is a career liability. By contrast, fatherhood is a career asset, in that fathers have more authority at work, which helps them achieve more and feel more satisfied.
2. Work and family can be allies - Work and family life can be mutually enriching. Careers can provide emotional gratification and satisfaction, such as increased self-esteem. Men feel better about their families when they have more job success, while women can gain useful family management information and support from their social networks at work. Spouses who support each other at home contribute to this work-family alliance, as do family-friendly employers. Employer support, such as childcare, can be especially helpful for women. Employees in supportive companies spend less time at work, but their job performance does not differ and they are more loyal and committed to their organizations.
3. Time is not the major problem - Although balancing work and family participation is a logistical time bind, the real problem is "psychological interference." This interference reduces your family satisfaction and sense of personal growth. It interferes with parenting when kids sense that you are distracted, even though you are physically present.
4. Authority on the job is essential for work-family integration - Experiencing authority on the job affects your career and your off-the-job satisfaction. Employers can help by giving employees more autonomy beyond just flex-time and telecommuting, such as by allowing employees to determine ways to do their jobs that best fit their lives off the job.
5. Women may be better adapted for the jobs of the future - In the future, people will increasingly need to be skilled at juggling their career, family and other commitments - a skill where women seem to do better than men. Thus, employers should do more to invest in women as future leaders and to help men develop juggling skills.
6. Kids are the unseen stakeholders at work - Although they are often forgotten in the work equation, kids are very much affected by their parents' work experience. When parents are overly focused on their careers, kids have more problems in school and more behavior problems, because their parents are not psychologically present for them.

Relationships: Work and Family

Your resources, involvement and emotional gratification both affect the way you carry out your work and family roles, and result from the choices you make in these areas.

1. Resources - The supports or aids that help you deal with your situation include both tangible resources such as time or money

and less tangible resources such as information, acceptance and self-esteem. Resources you gain in one role enable you to be more competent, better available to people and more satisfied in your other role. So, resources you gain at work can increase your ability to balance and integrate work and family.

2. Involvement - How deeply you are involved in one or both roles affects the way you apply the resources in one domain to the other domain, but only as long as your involvement in both areas is balanced. If you are too intensely involved in one role, then you will be more likely to experience conflict. Balance can make the two areas into allies.
3. Emotional gratification - You experience positive emotions when you perform effectively. Generally, when you have positive feelings about one role, you can transfer them to your other role. On the other hand, negative emotions from one sphere will undermine your ability to experience satisfaction and success in both spheres.

Changing Roles: Work and Family

Even though a growing number of women have entered the workforce, the work-family split has more impact on women than men. In the United States, many traditional views of male/female differences remain. Changes in the workplace include:

- About 50% of the American workforce is female.
- 63% of married women with children younger than six are working.
- 40% of workers are in dual-earner couples.
- 23% of employees are single parents.

“While a parent might be physically present, kids rarely miss picking up on the psychological absence of a mom or dad who’s with them but whose mind is elsewhere.”

Increasingly, many employees, especially women, face the pressure to have a satisfying life off the job while satisfying their career demands. Although egalitarian arrangements where men and women share home responsibility are trendy, mothers in general are more responsible for worrying about what gets done at home and by whom.

“For men, greater success on the job generally leads to a better feeling about family.”

Women are more concerned with having stimulating tasks and with the career goal of professional development while men are more concerned with securing a solid financial base. Men pay a price for their greater career commitment, in that they have less opportunity to participate in their children’s development or to gain satisfaction from family life. Men who are more involved with their families feel their lives are more meaningful and they experience less stress, which contributes to their better health.

The Need for Flexibility

Research suggests that the following workplace changes are necessary to promote more flexibility so people can better balance their work and family roles:

- Employers should value what employees contribute to work as a result of satisfactorily fulfilling their other roles. They should support the "whole person," though it remains necessary to keep appropriate boundaries between family and work.
- Companies should restructure work to promote greater flexibility on a day-to-day and long-term basis, including helping parents be more available for their kids.
- Everyone should recognize that dual-earner families are becoming the norm and should adapt to the needs of different parents at different times.
- Society needs a new definition of gender roles to permit mothers and fathers to take on the roles each have held traditionally. This enables gender equity at home and work.
- Society should recognize that career interests might change over time, as influenced by different life stages.

Conclusions

Beyond these recommendations, this research led to the following specific conclusions:

- It is difficult to be highly involved in both career and family simultaneously, but it is possible to be highly involved in both.

- Women experience more constraints than men and have to make more trade-offs.
- People have diverse priorities in different areas of their lives. Career-focused people value status, challenge and money, while family-focused people value relationships, and some are more interested in personal growth and development.
- Work-related experiences are especially powerful in determining career success and are much more important to career success than family factors are. For example, the most successful individuals work long hours, are psychologically involved in work and have a great deal of authority on the job.
- Men experience a "family bonus," while women face a "family penalty," in that married men and fathers have career advantages because they have more job authority. By contrast, children have a detrimental affect on women's income and career satisfaction.
- More important than the actual time spent in balancing different roles is the psychological experience people have in balancing different life roles. Mastering the mental challenge contributes to achieving this balance.
- Individuals who receive a great deal of personal support from their families generally experience relatively little work-family conflict, although if such conflict develops, the support doesn't make much difference. Such support includes providing empathy, praise, information and advice, and it contributes to increased satisfaction with personal development, family life and career achievement.
- Family-friendly companies can have a significant impact on improving the lives and careers of their professional employees. Even though people in such firms work fewer hours, their job performance is equal to those in unsupportive organizations, since they are working more efficiently.

"Forty percent of all workers are part of a dual-earner couple. There is less pressure on men to be the sole breadwinners."

Work and family can be close allies, when the resources derived from one role are effectively applied in the other, and positive emotions in one area enrich the other. Conversely, they can be enemies, when work and family fail to provide resources or deplete them, or when individuals are too involved in one realm to the detriment of the other.

"All sorts of career factors and experiences - authority at work, commitment to our employer and bright future prospects, to name a few - are assets that can help create allies of work and the family."

The research results promote a sense that people can live happier and more balanced lives in which each part of life benefits from the other. But to achieve this, employees need flexibility, information, acceptance and self-esteem, along with the support of employers, families and society.

About the Authors

Stewart D. Friedman is a professor of management at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, where he directs the Wharton Work/Life Integration Project. He has advised Al Gore on work and family issues. **Jeffrey H. Greenhaus** is a professor of management, commerce and engineering at Drexel University. He has authored or co-authored three books.
