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FOR WOMEN OF STYLE & SUBSTANCE

## Attack of the Woman-Dominated Workplace

by Jennifer Braunschweiger

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Photograph: Photo: Phil Toledano

In March, at a White House forum on workplace flexibility, Michelle Obama told the story of how she brought infant Sasha along on a job interview because she couldn't find a babysitter. "It was fortunate for me that [Sasha] slept through the entire interview," the First Lady said, smiling broadly as the audience laughed. Obama got the job—her last before moving to Washington—thanks in part to a sympathetic interviewer who was a new father. But despite the story's happy ending, its point was clear—because really, if Michelle Obama has trouble with the work-life balancing act, how do the rest of us stand a chance?

At the time, Obama was addressing a White House–sponsored conference for 100 experts, authors and labor leaders convened to discuss the challenges of combining career and family; her

husband spoke later in the day. That the forum boasted the administration's two biggest stars underlines the new reality of the workplace: Women finally have clout. And it's not just because of our numbers; it's our earning power. Today women bring in 44 percent of family income, and 26 percent of women earn at least 10 percent more than their husbands. "Work is changing massively, and the biggest piece of that is women's evolving role in the workplace," says Nancy Koehn, a professor at Harvard Business School. "Women have been given a shot of Miracle-Gro, if you will, by the recession. Enormous qualitative shifts will come out of this."

We are all too familiar with the many ways the workplace does not accommodate women's lives. What's new about this moment is the realization that the workplace no longer serves men particularly well either. The demands of child care, elder care and housework—once seen as the reason women couldn't compete professionally—are now shared by men, who increasingly want to participate in family life. "Men are spending more time with their children and experiencing more work-life conflict than women these days," says Ellen Galinsky, president of the Families and Work Institute. In many ways, the inequalities and inefficiencies of the contemporary office don't reflect gender differences as much as they describe a *workplace* that hasn't caught up with a changing *workforce*.

Because of our education, our control of the family purse strings and our resilience through the recession, women are at last in a position to address these problems. But first, we are going to have to stop accepting personal responsibility for bringing work and life together in a sustainable way and start demanding policy change from corporations and the government. "It's almost like we're working off the memory of a time that doesn't exist anymore rather than facing the facts on the ground," says Katie Corrigan, director of Workplace Flexibility 2010, a public-policy initiative at Georgetown Law Center. "We don't have to muddle through this alone. This is something we can work on as a nation."

The key is to reframe the conversation so that everyone understands the true goal and reward of encouraging a better work-life fit. The payoff is not that women will be allowed time to pop in another load of laundry but that companies will become more profitable, to the benefit of the larger economy. Come 2012, as the oldest baby boomers turn 65, more people will be retiring than graduating from college in the U.S., which will cause a labor shortage. That shortage will in turn create competition for workers, and employers who can offer strategies for integrating work and life will be better able to attract and retain talent. Here, a preview of that new workplace and ideas on how to get there.

### **Forget flextime. We want customized career lattices**

The international accounting and consulting firm Deloitte is widely acknowledged to have instituted some of the most progressive employee initiatives in the country. Its primary innovation has been to abandon the outdated, didn't-work-anyway notion of flextime in favor of what it calls mass career customization (MCC). The idea is that a modern career no longer progresses straight up a ladder but rather follows the form of a lattice or sine wave. At any given time, employees—male and female—may want to ramp up, increasing their responsibilities, or scale down, requesting more flexibility in order to focus on other parts of their lives.

Deloitte started MCC to help women. But managers quickly discovered that men needed customization, too, and today all 45,000 U.S. employees participate. At least once a year, every employee talks to a counselor about how she wants to scale in four areas: pace (how quickly she wants to move up), schedule (number of work hours per week), location (whether she is willing to travel) and role (whether she wants to be a leader or an individual contributor). Anyone can adjust her standing on one or all of these dimensions, and at any given time, about 4,500 people are choosing to do so. Of those, only about 30 percent decide to dial down. “Our concept was, if you can customize your ringtone, why can’t you customize your career?” says Barbara Adachi, Deloitte’s national managing principal for the Women’s Initiative. “At the end of the day, we get better returns—more employee loyalty, higher employee engagement and productivity.”

Similar programs exist at Capital One (its version is called Flexible Work Solutions; more men than women participate), KPMG, PricewaterhouseCoopers and others. The evidence is overwhelming that these initiatives help bring in qualified workers—one study of more than 1,500 people found that 30 percent considered flexibility the most important factor in any job offer—and help keep them. “Flexibility can be a cost-effective tool for attracting and retaining workers,” according to “Work-Life Balance and the Economics of Workplace Flexibility,” the White House report released in tandem with the forum that Michelle Obama addressed. “The costs to firms of adopting such management practices can also be outweighed by reduced absenteeism, lower turnover, healthier workers and increased productivity.”

Right now, however, flexibility and its precocious offspring, the customized career, are largely available only to the highly trained professional class. Less-skilled workers report the least workplace flexibility, which makes a certain sense if, like economists, you understand flexibility as a form of compensation. “Just as more educated workers enjoy higher earnings and are more likely to have benefits such as employer-sponsored health care, they are also compensated with more flexibility,” the White House report says.

Still, some companies are thinking creatively about how to increase flexibility for their blue-collar workers. Kraft Foods, for example, has a program called Fast Adapts for hourly workers in manufacturing plants. The program offers shift swapping and job sharing and has a system for bringing in retired workers to substitute for regular employees who need to take time off. But any larger initiative to address class differences will most likely require government intervention. “When it comes to struggling, lower-income single mothers, we need a national response,” says Gail Collins, the *New York Times* columnist whose recent book, *When Everything Changed*, follows the progress of American women from 1960 to the present. “We need to make early-childhood education, day care and after-school programs available at a price these women can afford and at a high quality that will help the kids, who are often the most in need of extra attention.”

### **Untether us. We want a post-geographic office**

To bring the workplace into the future, we have to think beyond the office itself. Today 11 percent of all employees report working from home at least one day a week. Practically speaking, this percentage could be much higher, because technology has increasingly unleashed us from our cubicles and made face time less important. “One of the most amazing things about

technology is that it allows people to do nearly any job at nearly any time, even if they aren't available to sit at a desk in an office during traditional workday hours," says Carly Fiorina, the former CEO of Hewlett-Packard who is now running for the U.S. Senate in California. This shift has reverberated all the way to the top: At the White House, more than half the employees of the Executive Office of the President have secure laptops, and any EOP employee can connect to the network through the Internet from any computer in the continental United States. More than just a perk, the practice allowed the office to run smoothly during the city-stopping snowstorms in D.C. in February, at an estimated saving of \$30 million a day.

Virtual offices are baked into the culture even more thoroughly at firms such as IBM, where 40 percent of the labor force works remotely, and at Capital One, where employees are encouraged to work off-site. For those who do come in to the office, the entire campus is wireless enabled so people can log on anywhere they choose. At Deloitte, senior manager Karen Burgess lives in North Carolina but is attached to the Houston office; she visits the brick-and-mortar site only quarterly. Otherwise she's connected remotely, through a BlackBerry and instant messaging, which all Deloitte employees can use. Burgess also uses an intranet chat room set up for Deloitte's remote employee community; that's where she goes for IT support. In addition, all of Deloitte's tax-preparation employees around the world use the same software, which allows them to look at the same document together in real time.

Some companies have gotten rid of the main office altogether and instead use cloud sourcing, linking together only virtually. In her book *Influence*, which examines the profound demographic shifts now under way, Maddy Dychtwald cites the example of Amy Pritchard, an attorney in Sacramento, California, whose company, Metaverse Mod Squad, monitors websites for corporations and other clients. Pritchard hasn't ever met many of her 35 employees and 100 associates, most of whom are working mothers or disabled people who connect from home. She even hired her chief operating officer without an in-person sit-down; she met him at a virtual sports bar. "Small start-ups and people on the fringe have the freedom to try new concepts," Dychtwald says. "Already these small companies are forcing large ones to change in order to remain competitive and attract talent."

Location-agnostic workplaces also have other, more offbeat consequences that improve a worker's quality of life. Fewer commuters translates to less traffic, which helps the environment and protects the civic landscape. These social benefits provide another opening for the government to step in and facilitate new ways of working. "Employers aren't going to make these decisions based on external costs and benefits" that don't affect their profits, says Cecilia Rouse, a member of the White House Council of Economic Advisers and a professor at Princeton University. "That's where you can see a role for policy, and federal, state and local governments to get involved. Benefits like reducing traffic congestion are cost saving for the community as a whole." For example, incentives could come in the form of tax benefits for companies that encourage these programs.

And then there's the fact that not having to hang out in a cubicle all day reduces the physical strain that comes from prolonged sitting. "We need workplace democracy from an anthropometric point of view as well as a sociological one," says Galen Cranz, a professor of architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, and author of *The Chair*. She argues that

workplace furnishings—chairs, desks—are designed to fit an average male body and are too big for most women. “A seat surface 18 inches from the ground is too high,” she says. “The scale isn’t right for women’s bodies.”

Why stop there? Cranz would go beyond what she calls a Mama Bear–Papa Bear resizing of office furniture to introduce new postures into the workplace. She asks her architecture students to design interior space to support the body in at least five postures: lying down, reclining, perching, sitting and standing. Yes, she believes we should lie down on the job. “Rather than having coffee breaks, it’s better to have stretch breaks and lie-down breaks,” she says. “It should be all right to talk on the phone lying down. We need to start paying attention to our bodies and our physical experience at work.”

The transition to a virtual office doesn’t necessarily require new technology. Employees at the EdLab Group, a nonprofit outside Seattle that trains teachers, are spread out around the country and use basic products to keep the office connected: Microsoft SharePoint, which allows all workers to see the same document in real time; software that turns a voice-mail message into a WAVE file automatically sent to your e-mail; Skype; and Second Life, for meetings. “It’s not that we’re using anything special,” says Karen Peterson, executive director of the EdLab Group, “but we are using it to its full potential.” More difficult is the culture shift that requires workers not to unconsciously punish a colleague for being out of the room. “It’s an attitude,” Peterson says. “If you’re having a meeting, you have to remember to e-mail the agenda to the remote participants. You have to think, Where is the Skype camera pointing? You need a really inclusive attitude so that no one misses out.”

### **Face-to-face is over. Move us to results-based evaluations**

The post-geographic office will become increasingly possible as companies stop evaluating their employees by how much time they spend at their desks and instead more deliberately measure their productivity. The movement is often referred to as results-based work, or ROWE (results-only work environment)—the name the approach was given when it was put into place at Best Buy, the giant electronics retailer. ROWE was the brainchild of Jody Thompson and Cali Ressler, two women in Best Buy human resources who have since gone on to start a company, CultureRx ([gorowe.com](http://gorowe.com)), that’s taking ROWE to corporations across the country. “We had a dream about what the perfect work environment would look like, and that’s what ended up becoming the results-only work environment,” Ressler says. With ROWE, there are no schedules, no mandatory meetings, no compulsory face time. People are free to work wherever and whenever they want, as long as they get the job done.

Productivity tends to rise within weeks as people start finding more efficient ways to work. Employees at Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health in Minnesota, which migrated to ROWE with the help of CultureRx, report that they are now 40 percent more productive. “When people start focusing on the quality of the work and whether it’s done in a timely fashion, they have more control,” says Phyllis Moen, a professor at the University of Minnesota who studied ROWE in a project sponsored by the National Institutes of Health. “That makes people think about low-value work. Why do we have this meeting every Monday

morning? You start by removing some unnecessary tasks and end up rethinking the whole way work is organized.”

Making the transition to this kind of workplace can be frightening for managers, Thompson says. “Companies think, Well, if we give people autonomy, they will take advantage of us. What companies don’t understand is that people are *already* taking advantage of them. People are showing up to work every day and putting in their time, but they are maybe 50 percent as productive as they can be. In a results-only work environment, you can’t scam the system. Either you do your work or you don’t. The fear is that everybody is going to lie on the beach all day and expect to get paid—and the exact opposite happens.”

Managers worry that employees will never work; employees fear they’ll do nothing *but* work. The challenge with the absence of any formal schedule is in defining limits and managing expectations. “We’re helping people figure out, OK, how do I stay connected and also devote time and attention to the things that matter?” says Stewart Friedman, founder of the Work/Life Integration Project at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School. “What that means in 2010 is very different than it was in even 2006, with increased mobility and the no-office workplace. The real challenge that I hear today around the world is in how you create boundaries and focus your attention. Many people are looking for the next great technology, but there are also more people doing yoga than ever before, for focus and balance. The wellness movement is swelling.”

### **Bring the laws up to date. No one should lose a job for taking care of herself or her family**

Lindsey Lee runs Cargo Coffee, a sunny sandwiches-and-soup place in Madison, Wisconsin. He started it eight years ago and now has 25 employees, full and part time. A few years ago, Madison considered an ordinance that would have required all businesses to provide paid sick leave. Lee was against it. “But then I analyzed it, and I realized several things,” he says. “First, in the food industry, you have to create an environment that promotes employees’ being healthy on the job. Second, I have employees with children, and both parents work. Fifty years ago, you had stay-at-home moms. Now you don’t, but kids still get sick. And then I ran the numbers, and the costs are not that much.” So Lee decided to provide paid sick leave to employees who work more than 20 hours a week. He estimates that administering it takes him an extra 15 minutes of bookkeeping every two weeks and that offering it incurred a onetime increase in his payroll costs of about 2 percent, which he says has been more than offset by lower employee turnover and higher productivity. “And it has had other benefits, too,” he says, “including it’s important for your employees to feel like you’re a good boss and you’re doing the right thing.”

Currently San Francisco, Milwaukee and Washington, D.C., are the only three U.S. cities that mandate paid sick days, and only California and New Jersey have state standards in place. Today 40 million Americans—or 40 percent of the private-sector workforce—have no paid sick days at all. Nationwide there is a growing movement to provide these benefits: There are 25 state or local campaigns or bills in progress right now. “That’s 11 more than we had a year ago, so you get a sense of how fast this is growing,” says Portia Wu, vice president of the National Partnership for Women & Families. “Public support is really high. Our polls indicate that 70 to 80 percent of people support some kind of paid-sick-leave policy.”

One comprehensive plan is now in committee in the U.S. Senate. The Healthy Families Act would require employers to provide a minimum of seven days of paid family and medical leave for employees who work more than 30 hours a week. The door is open for this legislation in part because the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 has proved inadequate to the demands of the changing workforce. The FMLA guarantees only unpaid leave (up to 12 weeks in any 12-month period) and applies only to employers with 50 or more employees. Globally, the three other nations without paid leave for new parents are Lesotho, Papua New Guinea and Swaziland.

In the meantime, progressive employers are finding other ways to keep employees and their families healthy and working. Twenty hours a week at the Sierra Nevada Brewing Company in Chico, California, for instance, physician assistants and nurse practitioners run a walk-in medical clinic that's free to all employees and their spouses and kids. Each visit costs SNB an average of \$70, but the company says the clinic has reduced the time workers take off for illness and has increased productivity. "We don't have machines running our offices, right?" says Wu. "We're all people, with real lives and families and things we need to do. These policies make great business sense. There will be better retention of women, which will spill over to better family economic security."

### **Promote more women and pay us what we're worth, damn it**

We can't move the workplace into the future until we repair some of the sins of the past, namely the gross underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. No longer a narrow issue of interest only to feminists, the exclusion of women has become a business liability. When researchers at Catalyst, a nonprofit concerned with advancing women in the workplace, examined the profits of Fortune 500 companies, they found that companies with the most women in senior management positions were over 30 percent more profitable than those with the fewest. And when consultants at McKinsey examined 89 European firms with the highest proportion of women in power, they found that those companies' stock prices climbed 64 percent over two years, compared with an average of 47 percent for other firms in the same sector. Numerous studies support these findings. There seems to be no question: More high-ranking women means more money at the bottom line.

Is this because forward-thinking companies are more likely to promote women, or does it have something to do with the women themselves? Research backs up anecdotal accounts that women have different management styles from men, tending to be more risk averse, more vigilant and more inclined to investigate their options. In addition, women are said to promote teamwork and creativity.

And greater diversity leads to better decision making. Scott Page, a professor at the University of Michigan, has repeatedly demonstrated with mathematical models and case studies that diverse groups solve problems better than very similar groups by drawing on a wider range of experiences. But evidence suggests that one woman on a board of directors is not enough. "The magic number is at least three," Dychtwald says. "One is tokenism. Two creates conflict between the women. When you have three, the women create mentorship relationships, all kinds of alliances, and their presence has an overall good effect on the board."

Which makes our appalling record at promoting women to top positions that much more senseless. Only 15 *Fortune* 500 companies were run by women as of July 2009, and there were only 14 female CEOs in the next 500. Women are kept from the top for the kinds of pernicious reasons we're all too familiar with: They often lack access to the informal networks that spread information and advice; they require more flexibility to take care of family issues and may drop out when they reach middle management; and some may be uncomfortable with putting themselves forward for such positions.

But the evidence is so clear that having women in positions of power makes money that some companies are actively addressing the problem. In 2007, Cisco created what it calls the Executive Talent Insertion program to groom promising women for senior management; by July 2008 female hires were up 18 percent, and that was in a recession. PepsiCo, where women make up 33 percent of the board (just 15.2 percent of the board members of the *Fortune* 500 companies are women) and which has a female CEO, has made a deliberate effort to advance women, with formalized HR processes to identify talent, plus a full menu of mentoring and networking options. "Having a woman CEO as well as these women on the board brings a different perspective to board-level decisions," says Beverly Tarulli, vice president of human resources at PepsiCo.

Then there's the issue of equal pay for equal work. It is infuriating that at a time when so many strongholds of male power have been penetrated by women—witness Sonia Sotomayor, Nancy Pelosi, Meg Whitman—we are still unfairly compensated for our effort. Even today, women bring in 77 cents for every dollar earned by a man. Like other facets of this conversation, the problem of equal pay must be understood not solely as a feminist issue or a point of fairness but more as an economic imperative, essential to promoting the financial health of families. "Wage gap and flexibility are not separate," says Galinsky of the Families and Work Institute. "Women are more responsible for family income these days, but they are still earning less than men. This makes it harder to support the family."

Don't stop at corporate America. These advances must extend to women in academia, too. A university career may evoke pastoral visions of summers off, regular sabbaticals and hours spent in scholarly reflection, but in fact colleges are often cutthroat environments with a not-so-subtle gender bias that puts women at a distinct disadvantage. To wit: Women now earn PhDs at roughly the same rate as men, but only 34 percent of tenured positions nationwide are held by women. The percentage of tenured female professors at elite universities is far lower, especially in the sciences. At Harvard, for example, 20.2 percent of all tenured professors are women; Yale is only marginally better, with 21.7 percent. At Cal Tech, just 11.3 percent of tenured professors are women.

Nationwide, women are hired for entry-level, assistant-professor positions at the same rate as men, giving those spots an approximately 50-50 female-male ratio. "But at the associate level, you already see a 30-70 split; then by the time you reach full professor, it's down to 20-80," says Francesca Dominici, professor of biostatistics at Harvard School of Public Health and author of a study on gender equity at Johns Hopkins. "We call that the leaky pipeline."

The question is why this happens. When Lawrence Summers, then president of Harvard, was pressed on the university's poor record of promoting women in the sciences, he famously suggested that women may lack the innate ability to succeed in that field. A fracas ensued as women protested the suggestion that they are predestined to fail. The outcry contributed to Summers's decision to resign one year later; he now serves in the White House as assistant to the president for economic policy.

But if not an absence of talent, then what? One reason women don't rise may be that the competition for tenure accelerates in the early to middle thirties, just when many are having and raising families. "The tenure clock runs exactly parallel to the childbearing clock," says Martha West, a professor emerita of law at the University of California, Davis, and an expert in sex-discrimination cases. "In the past, the majority of women faculty had no children." Another obstacle to women's promotion is that like their counterparts in corporate America, women in academia are penalized by their lack of access to informal but influential circles. "There is a lot of networking at the high levels of academia," Dominici says. "And if you're not in the picture, no one will nominate you for awards or ask you to collaborate on a \$5 million grant. That jeopardizes your chance of establishing a serious reputation."

Though the problems are clear, change has been glacial, and there has even been backsliding. In 1996, voters in California passed Proposition 209 to abolish affirmative action statewide. By 1998, new female faculty hires at UC Davis had fallen to 13 percent, from 52 percent in 1994. Throughout the UC system, the percentage fell from 37 in 1994 to 25 in 1999. "That's a very significant drop in such a short time span," says West, who responded by organizing a group of women faculty from every UC campus. Together, they joined forces with a senator in the state legislature who held lengthy hearings on the subject, in 2001, 2002 and 2003. Under intense political pressure, the hiring of women faculty rose to 36 percent in 2004. "But we haven't gone above that," West says. "And in 2007 the schools stopped putting hiring statistics on the Internet, which has made this subject very hard to track. We have a serious problem at the University of California."

One practice that is starting to make a difference at universities such as Princeton and Stanford is stopping the tenure clock for both men and women for a year after the birth of a child. Candidates are expected to earn tenure seven to 10 years after their initial appointment, or they lose their jobs; stopping the clock gives them a little more time to complete the necessary work. As with other family-friendly policies, applying it equally and automatically to men and women has helped make the new rules acceptable. If the policy were for women only, says Dominici, "women wouldn't do it. They'd feel they were getting mommy-tracked."

Given how slow many universities have been to address the gender gap, the government has an opportunity to step in with more vigorous enforcement of two laws already on the books: Title VII and Title IX. Passed in 1964, Title VII was the first civil rights legislation to cover gender as well as race; it deals with discrimination by private employers, the government and educational institutions. The law was followed in 1972 by Title IX, which specifically targets gender discrimination in academic settings.

In 1975, Title IX was given its now-famous focus on athletics: Regulations were written specifying in great detail how the law would apply to collegiate sports. Because of interpretations by the U.S. Supreme Court, it is very difficult to use the law to punish employment bias. “You have to prove intentional discrimination, and in a university setting, whose intent can you prove?” West says. “Is it the 30 faculty members in the department where the person is applying? The five members of the secret ad hoc committee? The provost who makes the final recommendation to the chancellor?” Instead, lawyers typically base their arguments on statistics that show there are far more qualified women in the applicant pool than are being hired. Even then, “women won’t sue because they don’t want to get blackballed in their field nationwide,” West says. “This is a small community. If you sue for failure to hire, how are you going to get another job interview at any other university in the country?”

In the meantime, the most positive change has come from the independent actions of individual women. One such person is Catherine DeAngelis, MD, now editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and a professor at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. She has been a full professor at Johns Hopkins since 1985, when she became just the 12th woman in the school’s 92-year history to hold that title. DeAngelis was appalled by Johns Hopkins’s poor record of promoting women and paying them fairly, and when she became vice dean of academic affairs and faculty, she started agitating. “My strategy was to put at least three women on every major committee,” she says. “Then I taught the women that they should each choose a different man to partner up with, so that now they had six votes. And I told them: No major decision is made in the committee room. You work it before you go into the room. That’s the way the guys do it. And I told the guys if they start making deals in the men’s room, I’m coming in.”

### **Let’s barge in after her!**

We need more women to storm the male-dominated spaces, banging their drums about problems and demanding solutions that will benefit women and men alike. So far, we have been too quiet. “I have been disappointed by the lack of leadership by women who have made it,” says Nancy Hopkins, a professor of molecular biology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who walked out on Summers’s fateful talk and has spearheaded several diversity initiatives at MIT. “I would like to see women in the U.S. Senate getting together and really helping. Women are still too fearful for their own positions. Where is the leadership?”

Now is the time to step forward, to speak up, to be brave. We need studies to excavate the extent of the problem, independent thinking by small and large institutions and smart, targeted action by the government. “My plea to tenured women and corporate women is this,” West says. “You have more job security than most women in the world, and you are in a position of power to change things. When women get together and start raising a fuss, we can make a difference.” No single person, company or law can push us into a better future. Together, we have a chance.

—Additional reporting by Virginia Sole-Smith and Patti Greco

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