

# Finding a Balance Between Work and Life

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**Q.** I'm a working mom, at my desk by 8:00. The school bus picks up my children at 8:15. My neighbor helps, but I must leave long before the bus. The school doesn't have before-school care. Mornings are stressful, and when my neighbor isn't available, I worry. We can't keep this schedule, but I love my job and don't want to change. Besides, I make a good income with benefits, and we need both. What can I do?

**A.** Many employees struggle with balancing the sometimes conflicting demands of jobs and families. In this case, one option is to ask the school about providing before-school care, which might also help other parents, or see if a day care provider offers care for school age children.

Another option may be to approach your employer about having a flexible work schedule that benefits the organization as well as you. Recognize that as a good performer and experienced employee, you contribute value. Sometimes flexibility is not possible because of the type of work. However, creative thinking and discussions between employer and employee often lead to solutions which benefit both.

Workplace flexibility can include flexible hours, a compressed work week, or flexible leave that allows paid time off for personal and family needs. There are other options. Because employees are different, an

organizational policy that approaches flexibility with a one-size-fits-all perspective will not get the best results. Instead, the employee should draft a proposal; only you fully understand the demands in your life. Consider what changes would help; sometimes even small adjustments make a difference. Be prepared to negotiate and compromise. The plan must make sense for both you and your employer. Offer to try the proposal for a period, such as six months, to see if it works.

From your employer's perspective, research shows that flexibility is a strategy that helps organizations hire and keep valuable employees. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce promotes workplace flexibility. Greg Roth, Senior Manager of Workforce Education Programs for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for a Competitive Workforce says, "It is critical to overall workplace effectiveness. Companies of all sizes use it to improve recruitment and retention, manage their workload, and respond to employee diversity. It helps employers enhance their competitiveness in today's evolving economy." In national studies, companies offering flex-options have seen increases in employee and customer satisfaction, retention of valuable workers, and increased morale.

Starting in January, employers have an opportunity for national recognition as a Sloan Award winner for workplace flexibility. *When Work Works*, a national initiative to promote effective and flexible workplaces, has selected Manchester as a participating community. There are 33 communities in the initiative, designed to share technical assistance, education, research and best practices.

As part of the initiative, employers in the Manchester area can apply for the prestigious 2009 *Alfred P. Sloan Awards for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility*. The awards honor organizations dedicated to making work "work" by using excellent flexibility practices as a strategic business tool. Applications are available online at [When Work Works](#), starting January 7.

*When Work Works* is sponsored by the Families and Work Institute; the Institute for a Competitive Workforce, an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce; and the Twiga Foundation. It is led locally by The Family Education Collaborative and supported by the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce.

For more information about work life fit, *When Work Works*, or the Sloan Awards, contact UNH Cooperative Extension Educator Sharon Cowen by e-mail at [Sharon.Cowen@unh.edu](mailto:Sharon.Cowen@unh.edu) or 641-6060.