

# Family becoming priority

## Flexible jobs allowing for more personal time

By Stephanie Armour

USA Today

Family is important to Patrick Snow.

It's so important he will stop working in the afternoon to coach his sons' basketball games. It's so important he's brought up family in job interviews, candidly telling managers he needs to limit work hours so he can be with his two boys.

He knows it means his job in high-tech sales could suffer, but it doesn't matter. Family is so important, he says he would leave any employer who did not understand.

"If my company doesn't like it, I'll find another job," says Snow, 33, of Bainbridge Island, Wash. He is also a speaker, coach and author of "Creating Your Own Destiny." "Employees used to be willing to sacrifice because of things like stock options. Now, they're fed up. They realize that family is the only stabilizing force in this turbulent economy."

Employees long have struggled to balance work and family, but the economic slowdown is tilting the scales in favor of home. Making time for family isn't just important for a few employees such as Snow — it's a growing priority for many workers disillusioned by layoffs, corporate scandal and waning company loyalty.

It's also a challenge bedeviling employers. Companies facing profit pressures need to squeeze more work out of fewer employees, but they also risk retention woes if they appear insensitive to their staffs' family needs.

That's because 70 percent of workers don't think there's a healthy balance between work and personal life, according to a poll of 1,626 respondents by Reston, Va.-based online job board TrueCareers, and more than half are considering looking for a new job because of problems coping with both.

"There's a real shift," says Debra Major, an associate professor of psychology at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Va. "In this economy, working 70 hours a week no longer makes a difference in how much you get compensated or how fast you advance. Employees want to prioritize their own values, not the values that the company says are important."

Consider other national studies:

■ Finding time for family is a more pressing concern than layoffs.

More than 30 percent of employees said balancing work and family demands was a top concern, according to a May survey of 567 full-time employees by Menlo Park, Calif.-based staffing services firm OfficeTeam. That eclipses the 22 percent who ranked job security as a top concern.

■ Almost three times as many employees say family is their top priority as those who list work as a top priority, according to a survey of more than 1,000 employees by Atlanta-based

# Economy boosts concerns for family issues

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staffing firm Randstad North America and market research firm RoperASW.

Nearly twice as many employees took sick days for personal needs in 2002 as they did the year before, according to a survey by human-resource and employment-law information provider CCH of 333 human resource professionals in 43 states and the District of Columbia.

## Tugged in every direction

It's not that work is no longer important. Job insecurity wrought by the down economy means some workers are clocking longer hours and sacrificing even more in a bid to avoid layoffs. Many feel less able to refuse bosses' requests to relocate, travel or give up vacation to get work done.

"People are like a puppet being pulled in every direction," says Stephen Covey, author of motivational books such as "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People." "People have re-prioritized in their minds and hearts, but the economic struggles and all the uncertainty have people torn between what they'd like to do and what they have to do."

But several factors are pushing family to the forefront and prompting many workers to prioritize home — even if that decision means paying a professional price.

Psychologists, researchers and other workplace experts credit the shift to the changing priorities of a younger generation, family burdens now facing Baby Boomers, the aftereffects of the Sept. 11 attacks and a backlash against the profit-making fixation of the late 1990s.

Part of the shift is simply generational change. As Generation X and Y employees start families, they're increasingly likely to place importance on the home front, research shows.

More than 85 percent of Gen X women say having a loving family is extremely important, compared with 18 percent who put the priority on earning a great deal of money, according to a study by New York-based research group Catalist.

Also driving the emphasis are baby boomers, who are increasingly likely to be part of the so-called "sandwich generation" caring for both children and older relatives.

More than 25 percent of adults have provided care for a chronically ill, disabled or aged family member or friend during the past



Jason Koski

Patrick Snow cut his work time to spend it with his sons Jacob, 7, and Sam, 11, and the family dog Kobe in Washington state.

year, according to the National Family Caregivers Association. Based on current Census data, that translates into more than 50 million people.

For these employees, there's no choice but to put family first. And it's an issue employers are paying attention to — more than 20 percent of companies offer elder-care referral services, according to the Society for Human Resource Management, up from 15 percent in 1998.

## Nipping hours at work

Mary Murphy-Hoye, 45, curtailed her work hours and changed job duties within Intel. This has allowed her more time to spend with her father, who is temporarily living with her family in Phoenix.

But the new focus she's put on family isn't just a result of elder-care needs. As it was with many Americans, the reprioritization was shaped by the events of Sept. 11. It's a resolution many workers have made to put family first that hasn't faded despite the passage of time.

In a report this year by New York-based "American Demographics" and Greenwich, Conn.-based marketing research firm NFO WorldGroup, nearly 80 percent of Americans say their family is more of a priority since Sept. 11, compared with 70 percent who said the same in October 2001. The poll of 2,500 adults found respondents with children were even more stalwart in their determination to prioritize family.

For Murphy-Hoye, a mother of two boys (Patrick, 8, and Thomas, 11), there have been big changes. Before, the engineer worked on site in Sacramento and traveled. But in June of 2001, she switched jobs to focus on research and work from home. She also trimmed her schedule and puts in fewer hours each day.

"We got a wake-up call," says Murphy-Hoye about Sept. 11. "Everything is about simplifying and getting back to what's really important. I don't feel quite as exhausted as I did before. I'm a lot more in touch with my kids."

## Employers adjust

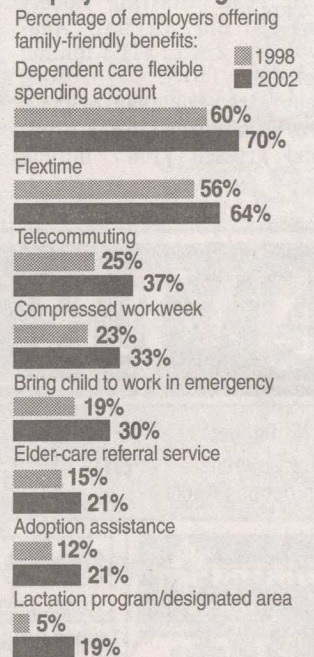
The emphasis on family isn't lost on employers. Despite the recession, nearly all forms of work-life programs saw modest growth in the past year, according to a May survey of 945 major U.S. employers by Hewitt Associates, a Lincolnshire, Ill.-based outsourcing and consulting firm.

These benefits, such as flexible work schedules and job sharing, often cost little but provide a big return.

At New York Life Insurance, work-life benefits include on-site back-up childcare, adoption assistance, flexible schedules and an employee health department.

"We've been committed to work-life for many years now," says Angela Coleman, vice president of human resources at New York Life. "We want programs that meet the needs of our employees. It's about attracting and re-

## Employee benefits grow



Source: 2002 Society for Human Resources Management survey of 531 human resource professionals

Adrienne Lewis, USA TODAY

cruting, but also about retaining employees."

At biotechnology company Genentech, programs include a subsidized child care center near the headquarters in South San Francisco, an on-site hair salon, domestic partner benefits and sabbatical programs that provide six weeks off at full pay after every six consecutive years of service.

Kathy Eckert knows first hand just how flexible some companies will be. After staying home with children Sarah, 10, and Jason, 7, she took a public relations job at software development company Benefitfocus.

She was willing to accept the job in large part because the company catered to her family needs. Her bosses let her work 15-20 hours a week and give her leave as needed to attend her children's school events. Meetings are set around her schedule.

Just before Thanksgiving, her daughter's fourth-grade class staged a parade. On her way to work, Eckert took 45 minutes to drop in at the school and watch.

Shawn Jenkins, president and CEO of Benefitfocus in Mount Pleasant, S.C., says designing a position to be so flexible was a new endeavor for his company. "The result is an employee who is very focused when she is here, because when she wants to put family first, she can."