

# SMALL Business Times

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## Become an employer of choice

*Family-friendly workplace will provide return on investment*

BY DANIEL SCHROEDER, for SBT

### Question:

**Like many companies, we are having a harder and harder time attracting and retaining employees. "Good to Great" has been a popular book around here, and the idea of "getting the right people on the bus, the wrong ones off, etc." is something we talk about all of the time.**

**One of the things we hear from prospects are more and more questions about our work policies. They want to know about the flexibility in the work schedule, working part-time, etc. As a management team, we want the company to be employee-friendly. We want our employees to say good things about us in the community. We strive to be an employer of choice, but how far do we have to go?**

### Answer:

It is an evolving workplace as the 21st century unfolds. The Hudson Institute has identified the following five fundamental demographics that are shaping and will shape the 21st century workforce:

1. The population and the workforce will grow more slowly.
2. The population and the workforce will grow older, and a shrinking pool of young people will enter the workforce.
3. More women will enter the workforce.
4. Many of the new entrants to the workforce will be Americans of African, Asian, Latino or Native American descent.
5. Immigrants will constitute the largest share of the increase in the population and workforce since the early part of the

20th century.

In light of your question, let me observe that traditional roles within the workplace also are evolving. Consider the following data:

- In the mid-1960's, about 40 percent of women worked outside the home. Today, more than 60 percent of all women and 76 percent of women between age 25 and 44 work outside the home.
- The number of dual-income families has doubled since 1950.
- Women receive more than 55 percent of all bachelor's and master's degrees.

This is not to say that women have it easy in today's workplace. For starters, there is the problem of the wage gap. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics tells us women earn about 76 cents for every dollar men earn.

Then, there is the problem of the "glass ceiling." Only 4.1 percent of the Fortune 500 top earners are women. Only 1.2 percent of the Fortune 500 companies have a female chief executive officer.

The issue of work-life balance is also becoming a more prominent factor. While there is some empirical evidence to support the idea that men are playing a more involved role on the home front, the reality for most women is that they are the primary caretakers of children and household tasks. Inevitably, this leads to role-juggling, which is a major source of frustration and stress for working women.

It is worth noting, though, that men also are faced with some challenges as they carry out their work. As previously mentioned, there appears to be an increase in the number of men who are seeking to balance their career and family choices. For example, some fathers choose to spend time away from work with their newborn children under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

Ironically, however, some studies have shown that when men do opt to spend time with their families, they are discriminated against.

So, what can be done to craft a workplace that is more family friendly?

Give work-life balance a high priority in your organization's objectives.

Establish policies and practices that are favorable to employees with children (e.g., childcare).

Emphasize career development programming with your employees so that they can develop multiple opportunities to grow and advance, providing for enhanced personal flexibility.

Explore being more open with the work schedule you offer, perhaps by making use of flex time, compressed workweeks, job sharing or telecommuting.

In the final analysis, you have to take a long and hard look at what you mean when you use the term "employer of choice." What are the practices that support that term? In which do you currently engage? In which do you not?

From my way of looking at it, to be an employer of choice means to be employee-centered. This does not mean that you give away the store or let the employees have everything they want. Rather, it means that you recognize that your employees are, indeed, your most valuable assets and you want to do well by them.



**Daniel Schroeder, Ph.D.**, of Organization Development Consultants, Inc. (ODC) in Brookfield provides "HR Connection." Small Business Times readers who would like to see an issue

addressed in an article may reach him at (262) 827-1901, via fax at (262) 827-8383, via e-mail at [schroeder@odcons.com](mailto:schroeder@odcons.com) or via the internet at [www.odcons.com](http://www.odcons.com)