

Men Are Starting To View Marriage Differently And It's Upending America's Workforce

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After their daughter Annie was born, Gail McGovern and her husband established what came to be known as the "kitchen calendar rule."

At the time, McGovern worked for AT&T overseeing 10,000 employees; her husband ran a large unit of Hewlett-Packard. They both needed to travel regularly for work, but one of them also needed to be home for Annie.

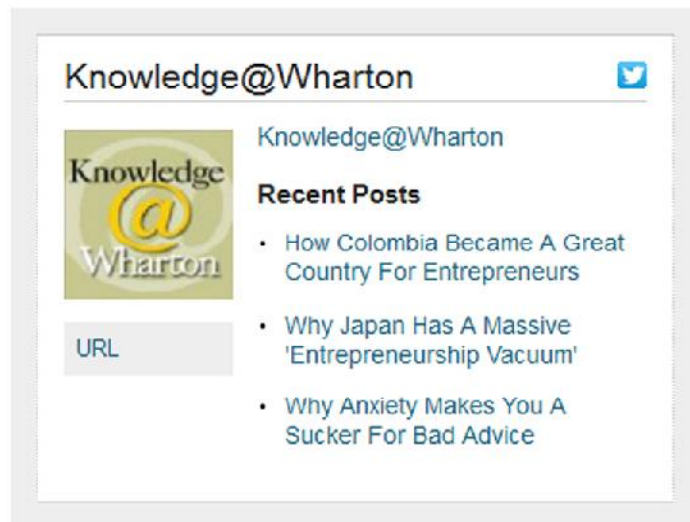
"We had two monster jobs," recalls McGovern, who today is CEO of the American Red Cross. "In the beginning, we fought about who got to take a [particular work] trip. Then we instituted the kitchen calendar rule: Whoever booked it first got to take the trip."

During those years—ones where McGovern recalls her house as "always a mess" and her cooking as "a lot of take-out"—McGovern left the office at 6:30 p.m. to relieve the nanny and spend evenings with Annie. Once Annie was in bed, McGovern was on conference calls until midnight. Despite their demanding jobs, McGovern and her husband never asked the nanny to work overtime, and they never missed one of Annie's school assemblies, recitals, sporting events or parent-teacher conferences.

McGovern, a former Harvard Business School professor who also held top management jobs at Fidelity Investments, acknowledges that it wasn't always easy. "You have to love to work, and you have to love to parent.... If you choose your employers wisely and choose your mate wisely, there is no question in my mind you can have it all."

At a time when issues like gender inequality in the boardroom and the death of women in corporate America continue to make headlines, it is worth asking: How important is the role of a supportive spouse in the lives of high-powered female executives?

"Those kind of jobs are all consuming. For women who have husbands and kids and lives—how do they manage?" asks Betsy Myers, director of the Center for Women and Business at Bentley University in Waltham, Mass. "As a woman is climbing up the ladder, how does she figure out her role at home? How does she navigate her marriage? When the woman's career starts to take off, how does her husband handle it? It's different for everyone."



The screenshot shows the Twitter profile for Knowledge@Wharton. The profile name is Knowledge@Wharton, and the bio is Knowledge@Wharton. Under the heading "Recent Posts", there are three tweets listed: "How Colombia Became A Great Country For Entrepreneurs", "Why Japan Has A Massive 'Entrepreneurship Vacuum'", and "Why Anxiety Makes You A Sucker For Bad Advice". There is also a "URL" field which is currently empty.

Myers, who leads corporate workshops around the world on the changing nature of women's leadership roles, adds: "Of the hundreds of women I have spoken to who have really made it big, most tell me they could not have gotten to where they are without their incredibly supportive husband.... At least the ones who are still married say this."

Yet even with a supportive husband, it has not been easy for today's C-suite women—those who have been in the workforce for 20 or 30 years and who came of age in the era of second-wave feminism. These women navigated thorny professional paths that involved not only moving up in male-dominated organizations, but also taking on traditional cultural values that place a great emphasis on the role of women as mothers and caregivers.

Attitudes are changing, however. New research from [Stewart Friedman](#), Wharton practice professor of management and director of the school's Work/Life Integration Project, finds that young men and women today have a greater understanding of the challenges associated with juggling work obligations with family life. "It's increasingly possible to carefully, consciously and deliberately choose roles that fit our values," says Friedman. "[Young people] are seeing more choice, more freedom and more realistic ways of pursuing lives that fit with the roles they want to fill in society."

Type A Personalities

At a time when women have gained ever more standing in politics and society, they tend to carry additional burdens in terms of family. Some of this is biological. Women are typically pregnant for 40 weeks and then —depending on personal preferences toward breastfeeding —serve as a primary food source for any number of weeks, months or years. Beyond that, though, women are more likely to manage the daily scrum of life with kids. They take on more domestic chores, including such things as meal preparation, school runs, PTA meetings and doctor's appointments.

According to the Department of Labor Statistics, the division of domestic duties in American households is far from equal. On an average day, 83% of women and 65% of men spend some time doing activities such as housework, cooking, lawn care or financial and other household management. Women spend an average of 2.6 hours on such activities a day, while men spend 2.1 hours.

But in a marriage where it is the woman who has the higher-powered, higher-paying job—or at least a job that's as high-profile as her husband's—the dynamic changes. Monica McGrath, adjunct professor of management at Wharton and a consultant who specializes in women's leadership development, says that even women who are in supportive partnerships experience continual strain.

"Many of the women I coach—women who know they want a career and who were groomed to have one—are in very supportive relationships, where there is co-parenting. But there are compromises all around," she says. "It's not simple, and there is often tension. There is a constant negotiation in their marriage about who's going to do what and how much."

"I ask the same question of almost every woman I coach: How much of the home front—the cooking, the cleaning and the household management—can you pay someone else to do? There's a service that can do everything," says McGrath. "It costs a lot of money to outsource, but for most of these women, it is worth it. They need to take a long-term view of their career challenges. Every phase of their career and their family's life is different."

Outsourcing domestic tasks is one solution, but so is dividing them equally between both partners. Interestingly, many professional women struggle with this as well, according to Donald Unger, a lecturer at MIT in writing and humanistic studies, and the author of *Men Can: The Changing Image & Reality of Fatherhood in America*. "Many women are emotionally split about what they want," he says. "Women have long been dissatisfied that men don't do their share in the domestic sphere. [But when men do take charge], there is often a sharp and reflexive: 'You're not doing that right!'"

Women in powerful jobs feel this intensely because they tend to have very high standards for themselves and for their families, according to Unger. "They are Type A personalities. They move in circles where appearance and image are very important. These are people who do not find it easy to let things go."

Putting aside the drudgery of housework, there is the simple fact that many women want, and need, to be a regular presence at home in order to be emotionally attentive to their kids and spouses. But the intensity of top-level jobs—which involve travel, round-the-clock meetings and the expectation from colleagues and employees of near-constant online availability—make balancing work, children and spousal obligations very difficult.

It is one of the issues that Anne-Marie Slaughter documented in her recent essay titled, "Why Women Still Can't Have it All," which ran in *The Atlantic*. The article describes the frustration she felt as her husband served as primary caregiver for their two school-age boys while she worked long hours at the State Department. She left her job in Washington, D.C., after two years and returned to her tenured position at Princeton. "What shifted were my own feelings about what I wanted," Slaughter said during a recent speech at Harvard Business School. "I wanted to be at home."

Late-bloomers and Power Couples

Women who occupy the C-suite today tend to fit into one of three models, according to Bentley's Myers. The categories are fluid, but in general, they include: the late-bloomers, whose careers hit their stride later in life after they have taken care of children; the one half of a power couple, where both partners are in demanding jobs; and the breadwinners, who often have stay-at-home husbands or spouses who work in flexible jobs.

In the first model, "the woman may have stayed home with her kids when they were little, or she worked part-time," says Myers. "But then when her kids are older or out of the house, her career takes off."

Take, for example, Brenda Barnes, who left a top job at Pepsi to spend six years at home with her three kids, and was named COO and eventually CEO of [Sara Lee](#) in her early 50s. These women were always ambitious, but—by choice, necessity or because of their husband's expectations and needs—they spent more time in a traditional mother and wife role when their go-getting peers were putting in long hours at the office or volunteering for special assignments.

Judy Forsley, the mother of two daughters ages 19 and 22, is CFO of Shipyard Brewing Company, one of the largest craft beer companies in the U.S. Her title is relatively new, however. When her children were young, she worked in the accounting department at Shipyard. Her first marriage ended in divorce, and she was a single parent for much of her daughters' childhoods. "I did much more of the kids' stuff—the daycare pickup, the arranging of the play dates, the piano lessons and the soccer games," she says. "I kept work at 40 hours per week. My kids were my priority. My career was second."

It is a choice she doesn't regret, but she recalls struggling with it at the time. "When I graduated from college in the 1980s, there was this feeling of 'Women can do anything.' There was an expectation that we would be working 60 hours a week, raising perfect children, having the perfect house and being great wives. I felt like a failure only working 40 hours per week. It took a lot of discipline and control to leave work at 5 every day. Looking back, I put a lot of pressure on myself."

Forsley, 50, is remarried and now works more than 60 hours a week. "The kids are in college, and I'm growing the business. It feels good," she says.

The second model, according to Myers, is one of "power couples." These include Marissa Mayer, the CEO of [Yahoo](#) who recently had a baby, and her husband Zack Bogue, who just launched a new VC fund; and [Sheryl Sandberg](#), Facebook's COO, who is married to [David Goldberg](#), CEO of SurveyMonkey. These partnerships are built on a mutual understanding of the pressures of work and an appreciation for how much the other values his or her career.

In these marriages, says Myers, "there is an ebb and flow of careers. One partner may take a back seat for a while, and then get an appealing opportunity. So they move for that person's job, and the other partner takes a back seat. In these relationships, we see a lot of outsourcing of childcare to nannies and family members."

Jules Pieri, founder and CEO of the Daily Grommet, a product launch website based outside of Boston with 29 employees, has three sons ages 23, 21 and 17. Her husband specializes in sales and marketing for turnaround companies. When their children were little, she describes their home life as a "ballet."

"Someone was taking the lead, and someone was in the background. We alternated who took the lead. It was tacit; it wasn't overt. When you have little kids [and you each have a demanding job], the questions are: Who gets to travel without even thinking about it? Who's going to be home for the nanny? It was more difficult when I took two years off from work because we lapsed into traditional [gender] roles and the traditional resentments that come with that."

Pieri's husband "takes pride" in her success and appreciates that she is "very ambitious," she says. "He gets my kind of work. He's been a CEO so he knows what it's like. Tomorrow my day starts at 7 a.m., and it ends with a meeting that starts at six. He knows not to hold dinner."

Karen Quintos, who has three school-age kids, is the chief marketing officer at [Dell](#). She says that she and her husband Tony have "both had to make compromises given that we are both career-minded people." She met her husband when she was at [Merck](#) and he had just accepted a big role at Citibank. "He had to commute back and forth between New York and Tampa. After two years of this, we decided someone's career had to 'give.' Our son was 18 months old at the time. I followed Tony to Citibank, where I worked for three years. I then decided to move to [Dell](#), and he followed me here."

Her husband worked for Dell for several years before they decided that one of them needed to be home more with their children during their teens. "As I moved into the chief marketing officer role at Dell two years ago and the demands for my time grew, this flexibility—Tony being home—became more important. It provides us with more work/life harmony. My kids sometimes travel with me; sometimes Tony does. I also realize that not everyone has this flexibility, but having a spouse that supports me, and I him, is huge."

Martha Josephson, mother of two, says that when she first landed a job at Egon Zehnder International, the executive search company, she "staffed up at the office and staffed up at home" because her husband also had a demanding job. "I delegated every annoying personal task I could," she says. "And at work, I focused on the value added things because I was gunning for partner."

Josephson made partner and today is the firm's global Internet practice head based in Palo Alto. She and her husband, whose career had taken off earlier and who was a stay-at-home parent for a couple of years to help their special needs child, eventually divorced. "There's a lot of strain that gets put on a marriage. We are divorced because of the dichotomy between the paces of our work lives.... Many couples will say that only one person can have a CEO job," she says. "A woman CEO has a special strain: She needs to make sure her husband does not feel like the nanny. A stay-at-home spouse in these relationships can't feel like hired hands. It happens to men and women."

Mom: The Anchor Job

Myers nicknames the third model "mom the moneymaker." "Her career is the anchor job in the family. The dad either doesn't work at all or works in a job that has more flexibility, such as real estate or consulting. His job takes a backseat. We're seeing this model more and more."

Gail Galuppo, COO and co-founder of BankersLab, a Chicago-based company that provides training platforms to retail banks, is a mother of three teenagers. When her kids were little and Galuppo was climbing the ranks at companies from [Standard Chartered Bank](#) to [Sears Holdings](#) to [GE](#)—where she was made a vice president at the age of 31—she employed a fulltime nanny to handle the childcare. Her husband worked in sales. While his job was more flexible, they both had significant travel demands. In her role as chief marketing officer at Western Union, for example, Galuppo spent 80% of her time on the road.

"We had a wonderful nanny who was with us for many years. But the nanny can't do everything," she says, noting that a paid childcare provider won't necessarily detect behavioral changes in a child or know how to deal with homework issues.

When one of their children began having difficulty in school, Galuppo and her husband decided to make a change. "That's the challenge for every dual-career relationship: At some point you have to make a bet on whose career is going to take off," she says. "My husband understood my career path, and he saw I was on a roll."

For the past seven years, Galuppo's husband has been a stay-at-home parent. "He's been the one who takes the kids to their activities, to school, to the doctor, and meets with teachers and school counselors. He does the grocery shopping and the dry cleaning. He said to me: 'I want you to focus on your career. I don't want you to focus on the little things.'"

Support from a spouse is paramount to steering a successful career and personal life, according to a recent survey of 270 successful women by Kathy Korman Frey, a faculty member at the George Washington School of Business Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence. In response to the question, "How do you do it?" nearly half of the women surveyed said: "support from my spouse or life-partner." Other responses included: job design, work/life priorities and boundaries, and home services.

Not every husband whose wife has a higher powered and higher paying job has such an enlightened perspective, however. Jealousy and competition are common themes in these relationships. "We still have some residual, traditional gender attitudes in the U.S.," says Unger, the author. "Men are supposed to be visibly stronger and economically stronger. When it's the woman with the anchor job and the man is earning less money and doing more of the domestic work or parenting, he has to be at peace with that. He has to not feel threatened."

Women—even when they are making more money than their husbands and working longer hours—still tend to do more on the domestic front, which can cause some problems, Myers adds. "They are at work making big decisions and being the boss, and then they come home and they are still the boss and they have to organize and schedule. They are directing the office and they are directing the home. This is why a lot of powerful, successful women are single or don't have kids."

1992 versus 2012

There are signs that the next generation of women CEOs and dual-career couples will have a more egalitarian dynamic in the home. Wharton's Friedman heads a longitudinal research project that surveys the school's students and alumni on their beliefs and attitudes about two-career relationships.

In 1992, he surveyed more than 450 Wharton undergraduate students as they graduated. This past May, he posed the same set of questions to Wharton undergraduates in the Class of 2012. The survey asked questions such as: "To what extent do you agree that two-career relationships work best when one partner is more advanced than the other?" and "Two-career relationships work best when one partner is less involved in his/her career" [agree or disagree].

In 1992, men were much more likely to agree with such statements than women, according to Friedman. But in 2012, there has been a convergence of attitudes about two-career relationships: Men are now less likely to agree, but women are more likely to agree. "Young men graduating today are more egalitarian in their views and women are, well, more realistic," he says. "The important point is that men and women today are more likely than the previous generation to share the same values about what it takes to make dual-career relationships work."

Today's young men have a greater sense of shared responsibility for domestic life, he says. "Young men are realizing they have to do more at home than they traditionally did, and they want to do so. Of course it might also be that men today are more inclined to expect and want their wives to work, both for income and for their wives' professional fulfillment."

Indeed, the new breed of women CEOs are taking a new approach to how they run their businesses and their personal lives. Noha Waibsnider, founder and CEO of Peeled Snacks, the eight-year-old company that sells healthy snacks to Starbucks, Whole Foods and other locations, has two small children. She says that she and her husband, who is the head of sales at the Brooklyn, N.Y.-based company, are "big believers in work-life balance."

"Working crazy hours does not make you more productive or effective," she says. "I try to spend the hours of 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. every day with my kids, and I don't check e-mail during those hours. I have evening events, but I try not to miss my kids' bedtime more than two nights a week."

She employs a fulltime nanny, and her mother lives close by and regularly provides childcare. She and her husband split household chores equally. "We're very different, and we have complementary skill sets. I do a lot of the home and kids' organization, and he probably does more of the grocery shopping and cooking. We're both in charge."