

# 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.

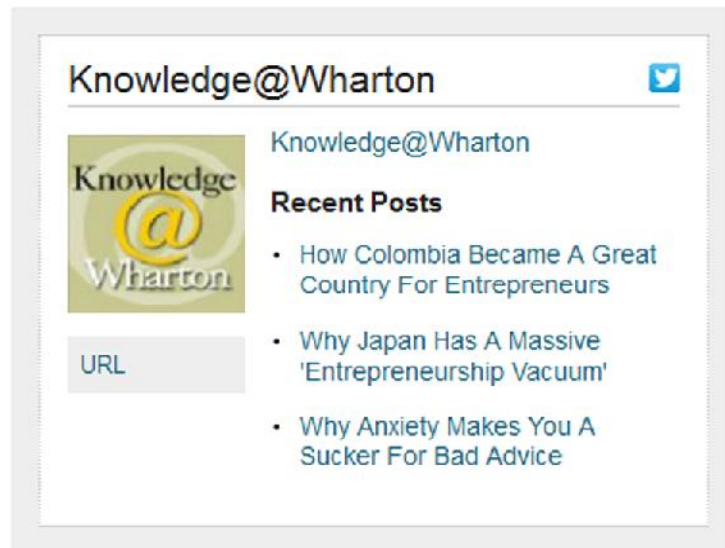
"We had two monster jobs," recalls McGovern, who today is CEO of the American Red Cross. "In the beginning, we fought about who got to take a [particular work] trip. Then we instituted the kitchen calendar rule: Whoever booked it first got to take the trip."

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 dearth 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. The profile picture is a yellow circle with a white '@' symbol and the text 'Knowledge @ Wharton' around it. Below the profile picture is a grey box labeled 'URL'. To the right of the profile picture is the text 'Recent Posts' followed by three bullet points: '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'.



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

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."