

Women in the Workplace: Challenges, Trends & Solutions

By Cindy Aronson of GirlfriendGatherings.com, November 26, 2007

Today's Workplace

- Women comprise nearly 50% of the U.S. labor pool *Source: Workforce Crisis: How to Beat the Coming Shortage of Skills & Talent*
- More and better educated women are entering the workforce; in 2006, 58% of all bachelor's degrees and master's degrees were granted to women *Source: Workforce Crisis: How to Beat the Coming Shortage of Skills & Talent*
- 80% of surveyed manufacturers (all industries) experiencing an overall shortage of qualified workers *Source: 2005 Skills Gap Report, National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) Manufacturing Institute*
- Manufacturers are bridging gap by putting more effort behind recruiting, retaining, and training highly skilled women
- Companies must effectively work to engage more of these high-achieving women; those that have done so find that everything, including the bottom line, has benefited *Source: NAM Women in Manufacturing Best Practices*
- **Income Distribution by Gender**

<u>Annual income</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
Under \$15,000	11.0%	6.9%
15,000-35,000	47.2	33.8
Over \$35,000.	41.8	59.2

Occupation:	% Women
Nursing/Home Health Aides, Occupational/Physical Therapy Aides	90%
Paralegals, Legal Assistants, Legal Support Workers	86%
Health Diagnosing/Treating, Clinical Laboratory Technicians	81%
K – 12 Grade Teachers	75%
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	75%
Food Preparation/Server Workers, Bartenders, Counter Attendants	61%
Community and Social Services	58%
Postsecondary Teachers	40%
Chiropractors, Dentists, Dieticians, Optometrists, Pharmacists	30%
Lawyers, Judges, and Other Judicial Workers	29%
Computer Scientists, Systems Analysts, Programmers	26%

Source: Women Employed Institute (based on 2002 government income data)

Workplace Culture

- “The national mood on work-life [balance] issues is among the grimmest I've seen in 15 years writing this column. In poll after poll, most executives and employees report discontent with their work-life balance.”
Source: Sue Shellenbargar, Wall Street Journal Work & Family Columnist; January 12, 2007
- The American Institute of Stress estimates that workplace stress costs U.S. industry \$300 billion per year in absenteeism, turnover, diminished productivity, and direct medical, legal, and insurance fees. According to a 2004 poll by the American Psychological Association, two-thirds of men and women say work has a significant impact on their stress level, and as a result one in four has called in sick or taken a “mental health day. Developing programs ranging from professional and personal growth seminars to home-cooked meals, the APA’s Best Practices Honorees are setting an example by creating strong, vibrant organizational cultures that contribute to both employee health and well-being and the company's bottom line.” *Source: The American Psychological Association (APA), October 13, 2004*
- Workers' calls for help dealing with stress are up more than 40%. This is no small matter. Studies link stress to ailments from heart disease to immune-system disorders.
Source: Ceridian (a provider of employee-assistance and other human-resource services to nine million employees)

Personal observations and feedback from over eight years of Cindy Aronson Training programs involving women:

- Many express “lack-of” symptoms (lack of energy, enthusiasm, joy, passion, etc.)
- Blank stares when asked “what do you do for fun at work?”
- Many find it difficult to balance professional and personal obligations & desires
- Many express their lives are “out of “balance”
- Desire to advance in profession but hesitant to make what they feel are the sacrifices required (even longer hours, ‘power’ management style, etc.)
- Mid-life desire to reinvent, rejuvenate, re-energize themselves– want more out of life than they feel they are currently getting
- Sense that the only path to deeper fulfillment is to quit current position and start anew
- Sense that many women are working in work cultures that don’t fit their needs
- Increased use of anti-depressants by working women

Workplace Solutions:

- A growing body of research is finally proving what advocates of workplace quality have known for decades: that the human beings who execute the goals of business are more than just cogs in a wheel. Truly engaging them can have an almost magical effect on the bottom line. Satisfied employees treat customers better, creating loyal customers. Beyond that, good policies also foster the kind of on-the-job relationships with supervisors and co-workers that inspire employees to soar. *Source: Wall Street Journal; October 18, 2007*
- Dozens of companies have conducted internal cost-benefit studies, which tend to link work-life programs to improved employee satisfaction, productivity and attendance. Companies see these programs as marquee items in their drive to brand themselves as good places to work. *Source: The Wall Street Journal; Paul Rupert of Rupert & Co., Washington, D.C.,*
- Training and development opportunities rank as one of the most important predictors of retention *Source: World at Work study*
- **When it comes to retaining top female employees, at any level, companies are starting to focus on ways to help workers balance life at work with life at home.**

Workplace Best Practices:

- **Cummins Inc. Women Affinity Group** -- Employees, led by senior executive women, assist in recruitment of talented women, the exploration of women's issues in the workplace, celebration of women's events, and support for current female employees
- **Deloitte & Touche** -- Began a Women's Initiative (WIN) aimed at creating a culture where the best women choose to be – a place where women can advance, succeed, benefit one another & successfully integrate their personal & professional commitments. WIN has focused more on connecting with women outside the organization through a combination of workshops, programs, and social gatherings
- **Rockwell Automation** -- Developed the Professional Women's Council (PWC) to develop women leaders, educate/share knowledge, network, mentor & act as role models, serve underprivileged women in their community through sharing & mentoring
- **Working Mother Magazine Best 100 Companies for Mothers:**
 - "Women have been asking for tools that enable them to network with colleagues, develop their skills and grow their career. To help them, we offer a range of programs, including online resources that identify job and learning opportunities." **Ronald Glover, Vice President, Global Workforce Diversity, IBM**
 - "Our female employees repeatedly speak to the need to connect across our organization. The company's leadership panels allow women to get advice from other women. Our affinity networking gives women a chance to connect with others who have similar interests. And our annual balance event enables women company-wide to share how they align work and life." **Shannon McFayden, Director HR, Wachovia**
 - Consistent with the company's belief in taking a holistic approach to staffer well-being, they launched a program called *Total Balanced Life*, which provides free seminars and other resources to help employees create healthy, balanced lives. – **The Timberland Company**