

[Home \(/HERE/home/\)](#)

[About the HERe Initiative \(/HERE/about_the_here_initiative/\)](#)

[General Conference Information \(/HERE/general_information/\)](#)

[Webinars \(/HERE/webinars\)](#)

[eNewsletter \(/here/enewsletter/\)](#)

DOING IT ALL IS POSSIBLE WHEN YOU FORGET WHAT YOU THINK YOU KNOW ABOUT WORK-LIFE BALANCE

by Stephanie Bouchard

When work-life balance is discussed, inevitably women hear messages that equate to, “You can’t have a high-paying leadership career *and* have a family or personal life.” Many women buy into these messages, and fearing they will have to sacrifice having a family or personal life, they relegate themselves to lower-paying, non-leadership careers. But there’s a secret many women don’t know: Having a leadership role and a family/personal life is doable.

“A lot of people do think it will require working around the clock to be successful, but in reality, that may not be true,” says Laura Vanderkam, author of *I Know How She Does It: How Successful Women Make the Most of Their Time* (<http://lauravanderkam.com/books/i-know-how-she-does-it/>).

For *I Know How She Does It*, Vanderkam surveyed women earning \$100,000 a year or more who have children at home. She asked them to complete hour-by-hour time logs for the 168 hours we all have every week. When she crunched the numbers, she found that these high-earning women worked an average of 44 hours a week, which is more than the average mother working full-time works at 35 hours a week, but not by much. The eye-popping difference is in the earnings. The average mother working a full-time job earns about \$37,000 a year but only works nine hours less than women who earn six figures.



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“Many big jobs turn out to have more reasonable hours than you might suspect, and beyond that, the higher you are up the chain, often the more control you have of your time,” Vanderkam says.

Having more control over her time is exactly the experience founding member of the HFMA HERE Committee Connie Perez had when she began taking on leadership roles.

Perez, now president of revenue cycle services company Adreima, started her career as a pediatric nurse, and she pursued nursing because she hoped it was a path that would allow her to work and have a family. She had four children in quick succession before she turned 30.

Those early years were tough, she recalls, juggling nursing shifts and kids, but right around the time she had her third child, she began transitioning into a leadership role at work. “Even though I ended up working more hours,” she says, “the flexibility made it easier for me to work.” She could go to work at 5 a.m. and leave by 2 or 3 p.m. In addition, instead of working a 12-hour nursing shift on a holiday, she could spend a couple of hours working, then go home to spend the holiday with her family.

“The higher you get into management, in some ways, you do have more flexibility,” she says. “When I thought about what was important to me and to our family, it made sense to work more but have more flexibility.”

Having flexibility is a huge part of being able to manage career advancement and family/personal life, but flexibility alone is not sufficient, says Kenneth Matos, PhD, senior director of research at the Families and Work Institute (<http://www.whenworkworks.org/about-us/our-partners/families-and-work-institute-fwi>), a not-for-profit research center.



Work-life issues must be looked at holistically, Matos says. That means factoring men into the equation. Men, he said, have to have permission to get off the ladder. "In a culture where men are expected to be in place all the time—work first, work first, work first—you've created a scenario where women will always be the fallback for all that household stuff," he says. "In order to really advance women, we need to reconstruct masculinity so that more men are able to be real partners not just in childcare, but also in household management."

In addition, flexibility is key to juggling career and family or personal time. Sometimes getting flexibility is a matter of pushing a little bit, Vanderkam says. "There are often reasons you're allowed to be away from your desk," she says, "so the question is what you allow yourself to be away from your desk for." Maybe you'd like to take your child to school one day a week. Do it, and vary the day. See what happens. "You can often be surprised if you just don't call attention to it. Most people just aren't watching that closely," she adds.

Often, managers are more concerned with getting the work done than who gets it done, so team up with your colleagues to work out a system of backing each other up and covering for each other so that everyone gets some flexibility, but the work gets done, Matos says. Share your personal and professional calendars with the whole team so you can plan how you're going to cover for each other.

In addition, you can request a policy change to allow for more flexibility. To do this, spend some time building support among your colleagues and find some upper-level managers or executives who can lend their weight to your proposal, Matos says. Also, do your research, Perez adds. Know what your senior leadership values. If your boss values return on investment (ROI), see if you can gather data that support how flexible schedules decrease employee turnover.

It might also help to keep a daily time log, Vanderkam says. "Women in [my] book move the hours of work around," she says. "All 168 hours in a week are in play, and because of that you can trade off work time for something that would be very low value to you, like late-night TV watching. You're getting as much family time as you would with a less-hours job, but you're still getting the hours you need, so the only thing you're trading off is something you didn't care about."

Most organizations are now recognizing that they have to have flexibility to recruit and retain quality employees, but if you're working in a place that isn't flexible or supportive of you, move on, Perez says. "In order to be successful and raise a family, you have to be doing it in a place that's going to support you."



Stephanie Bouchard is a freelance writer based in Maine. Visit her website (<http://www.stephaniebouchard.net/>).

here.

The Conversation Starts **HERE**.

The HERe initiative is an effort that aims to inspire not only women but men invested in the professional development of women leaders in the health care field with the tools and resources they need to succeed. We hope to **inspire** one another, **learn** together, and **connect** with colleagues across the industry.

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[general conference information \(/here/general_information/\)](#)

[webinars \(/here/webinars\)](#)

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