

Successful Women

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*** * STAFF POSITION AVAILABLE * ***

Socially responsible, successful company seeks experienced professional to work on team-managed projects. Opportunity to rotate assignments. Full time or job share with flexible hours. On-site day care and fitness center. Educational assistance. Competitive salary and benefits program. Located in a community with an outstanding school system and a wide variety of recreation, fine arts, and cultural activities. Scenic mountains and beaches within 2 hours' drive.

Sounds awesome! At least that is what several women said when I showed them the ad. In fact, if we look at the surveys, this is what many women are looking for in a job. What happened to "challenging, fast-paced, advanced degree a plus, responsible for . . . opportunity for advancement"?

In a world where work is a rat race and technology-driven terms such as fax and cellular phones are added to the dictionary faster than PC's are outmoded, the definition of *success* has changed (Drexler, 1993; O'Toole, 1993). Women have given *success* a new meaning. After manning the factories until the men came home, women in the fifties married their war-time heroes and devoted themselves to Mrs. Cleaver-like perfect motherhood. In the sixties the disillusioned returned to school, sought peace, and attempted to save the world. The early seventies brought part-time community action volunteers who wondered why they were not paid for their money-raising and organizational-management skills—and their credentials. It was not long after finding baby-sitters and their first part-time, but "real," jobs that women

asked for equal pay and full-time positions. They got their degrees, their raises, and their promotions, and they put their children in child care centers. Women in the eighties rushed to their lovely homes to briefly exchange their briefcases for take-out pizza and children's books so they could spend "quality time" with their children before completing some paperwork for the next morning's 8 o'clock meeting.

Sometime in 1990, sometime during the layoffs that have characterized the recession, sometime when they found themselves too exhausted to continue to try to crack glass ceilings (Rosenberg, 1993) and old-boy networks, women became disillusioned once again. In the sixties they sought meaning in the world beyond their kitchens. In the eighties they sought recognition in the workplace. Now, after 15 years of fighting for a corner office and a BMW, women have found their accomplishments hollow. What they gave up in return for their salaries was their life energy—not only the work day but the added hours commuting, decompressing at night, and recovering from illnesses

caused by stress (Weltner, 1993). Their marriages suffered, and now their daughters are rejecting their values. Superwomen have been replaced by women who feel entitled to choose a lifestyle that promises more time and opportunity for self-fulfillment. Fewer women are going to business school (Dembner, 1993). Now, in the nineties, women are seeking meaning and health in what Freud once said was a healthy balance of work and love (Rohrlich, 1980). According to Catalyst (Genasci, 1993)—the leading advisor to American business on women's issues—women, who constitute 46% of college graduates and 45–48% of the work force (Mashberg, 1993), now feel entitled to workplace accommodations such as maternity leave and flexible schedules. In a world where workplace technology has forced them to pursue time, women want to cultivate, to savor that time (Drexler, 1993). Women who are more frequently part of the middle-class “smart workers” (Whitehead, 1992) today want to exchange position, prestige, possessions, and pressures for family, relationships, and meaningful work and leisure activities that make the world a better place. They are likely to apply for the above position.

Several surveys translate the picture into numbers and statistics. The most profound finding of the New York-based Families and Work Institute national survey is that most women and men prefer a decent supervisor and time for a home life over big money and responsibility (Mashberg, 1993). Of the 3,381 workers surveyed, 65% value open communication in their workplace over traditionally valued considerations such as salary/wages and fringe benefits—and even job security. The power of unions, which represent only 15% of the work force, is decreasing; with increased employee control over their own hours and work teams, they no longer need unions. Benevolent companies and good managers are being given more deference. The above position would easily be filled.

The composition of the families these women are asking to spend more time with has changed. With the increasing numbers of women in the work force, they have garnered status and a stable income source (Gaines, 1993). Single women comprise over half of the unmarried population,

which is up from 26% in 1971 to 40% in 1991. Many of these single working women are mothers of very young children. Most recently available data from the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey reveal that in 1990 53% of mothers (18–44 years old) with a child under 1 year were in the work force. In 1991 the number of single mothers with children under 18 exceeded that of the number of traditional families consisting of a working father/stay-at-home mother (Foreman, 1993). These women often have to work and are finding support from maintaining close relationships with their own mothers who are themselves often single and living longer. They are looking for a job like the one we described.

In 1992 *Working Woman* magazine (Kagen, 1993) commissioned a survey by the Roper Organization to ask over 1,000 men and women what “being successful” meant and whether they felt successful. Values have changed. In the last 5 years, most men and women, and especially professional/managerial women and women business owners, have redefined what success means to them. Most important on the list, in order, are a happy family life or relationship (79%), time for family and friends (65%), and being in control of their lives (57%). Money, career, and power came in last (26%, 11%, and 7%, respectively). People have come to value attaining satisfaction and personal growth with a balanced life rather than seeking money and material things. And they feel satisfied they have what they value, whether they are men or women. Hispanics and blacks are more likely than whites to feel more satisfied than they did 5 years ago. Finally, women in every age and racial group tend to strongly agree that they would rather make an adequate salary doing a job that makes the world better than to just earn a lot of money.

Older baby-boom women are poised to assume top leadership positions in corporations, to own their own businesses, and to lead in their own empowerment style. And they are balancing their leadership with personal and family time. They are reestablishing the family, albeit in its new composition, as a basis of society. But they need the help of “family-friendly companies and govern-

ment policies" (Aburdene, 1992). By the end of the century approximately two-thirds of new workers will be women, 75% of whom are likely to become pregnant during their working years. According to Catalyst, companies who fail to respond to women's needs will experience higher turnover rates as they lose some of their best women workers (Genasci, 1993). Women have worked hard for 15-20 years and have experienced sexual harassment and the wage gap. Women have made

their mark in the workplace; business cannot survive without them. Women know what they want and what they need to succeed. Public policy must respond to rapidly unfolding social change (Walsh and Egdahl, 1980). Women are informing companies large and small, corporate offices and assembly lines, health care organizations and legislators, that this country needs successful women—and successful women lead balanced lives.

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