

Working Life

W O R K A N D F A M I L Y

Traditionally, work and family tended to be separate, sometimes conflicting, aspects of life. Today, as people try to balance and even blend the two, the results can be interesting. (The first five items were originally reported in the *Wall Street Journal*.)

It's Only a Game

A while back, the Houston Oilers football team docked tackle David Williams's pay for missing a game to be present at the birth of his first child. In reaction, Williams expressed the opinion that seeing his child born might be somewhat more important than playing in one of many football games. Many fans let it be known that they agreed with Williams and sent in money for his fine, which he donated to a charitable cause.

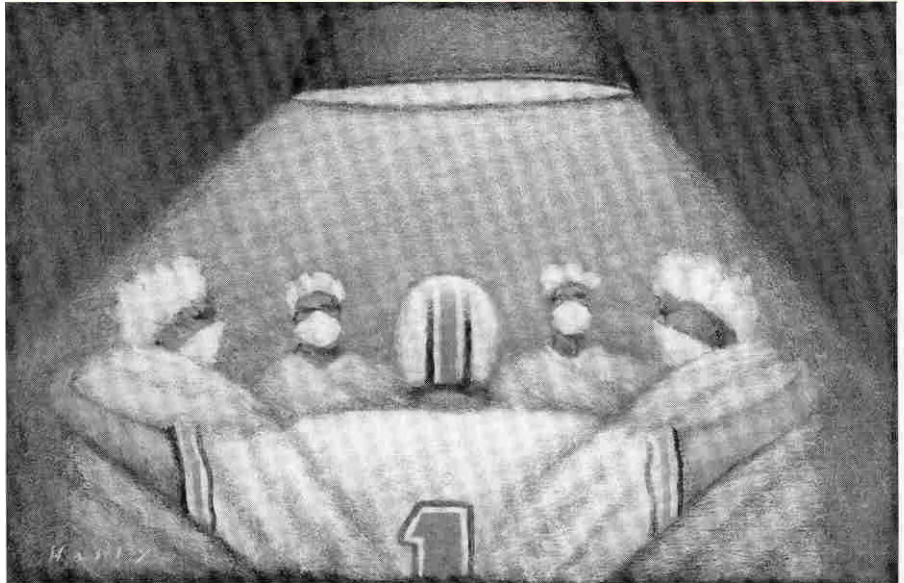
Shortly after that, the Los Angeles Rams paid defensive end Fred Stokes in full for a game in which he missed all but the last two minutes, arriving from the hospital where his wife had given birth.

A Model for the Nineties

A Toronto real-estate developer fills his model homes with live actors to pose as families to help sell the six-figure houses. If that weren't unusual enough, male actors portraying the "husbands" don aprons and bake chocolate-chip cookies while the "wives" play backgammon on the front porch.

Madison Avenue Makeover

The popular image of working mothers in advertising is no longer the business-suited superwoman toting a briefcase under one arm and a toddler under the other. In a recent television spot for yogurt, the scene shifts from a black-and-white scenario showing a woman in an office



to a color scene in which she sits in a park feeding yogurt to her baby.

Advertising executives say that the old image excluded women in non-managerial jobs and women without jobs. The new image aims to show women managing multiple roles in a relaxed way, while recognizing women who feel proud of the traditional accomplishments associated with homemaking and child rearing.

A What Consultant?

A lactation consultant saved the day at Chrysler when the company refused to let a production-line worker extend her breaks to pump breast milk for her baby. Chrysler promptly hired the consultant to assist the new mother in reducing the time needed to accomplish the task in question, and the company settled her discrimination suit out of court.

Play for Performance

Principal Financial Group extends rewards and recognition to the children of employees. As part of the

Footballers score high as family men as they tackle the demands of their careers and parental duties.

company's wellness program, workers' offspring get T-shirts, backpacks, and beach towels for such achievements as exercising, doing chores, and eating fruits and vegetables.

As far as we know, the kids haven't asked for cash bonuses or company cars.

Getting a Life

Employees today are unwilling to sacrifice their personal and family lives for work, reports the *Washington Post*. A five-year study of more than a dozen large corporations conducted by the Families and Work Institute found that people are committed to doing their jobs well—more than they are committed to their employers—but that both men and women are willing to make career trade-offs in order to enhance their personal lives.

Other findings indicate that nearly 90 percent of workers live with family members; nearly half care for dependents.

Employees who have children suffer more stress than those who are childless. And bosses with child-care responsibilities are seen as more supportive than those without such responsibilities.

The institute says that managers who attain business objectives by helping employees meet personal needs are innovative; outdated managers assess performance based largely on the number of hours employees spend at the office.

Truth in Bonding

The Family and Medical Leave Act requires many U.S. employers to provide employees with 12 weeks of unpaid parental leave, though not all parents can afford to go that long without pay.

New mothers in particular who return to work in less than 12 weeks may be jeopardizing their well-being and their relationships with their infants, says *Glamour*. In a study of nearly 600 new mothers, conducted by the University of Wisconsin at Madison, those who returned to work within five or six weeks of giving birth experienced greater levels of depression and anxiety than the women who took 12 weeks of parental leave.

Nepotism Works

Many organizations employ married couples and people who are related in some other way, according to a study by the Society for Human Resource Management.

Of 432 respondents, 83 percent said their companies employ married couples; 88 percent said their companies employ related workers. Most of the respondents said that married couples and related employees pose few problems in the workplace and even stimulate productivity through "family competition." But some respondents did note that charges of favoritism are common. That may be why 73 percent of the companies in the survey have policies that prohibit married people from supervising each other.

In another survey by SHRM, 50 percent of the respondents said that employers should have the right to prohibit employees from dating their supervisors.

Grow Up

CEO John "Jake" Mascotte of the Continental insurance company says that companies fail to balance work and family issues because they structure their businesses as if they were fourth-grade classrooms, reports *Business Week*.

Mascotte learned from employee focus groups that workers saw Continental as rigid and that work-and-family conflicts distracted them from their jobs. In response, Continental introduced such family-friendly programs as job sharing and telecommuting. It also abandoned the practice of tracking employees' absences and using the results in performance reviews.

At first, many of the company's managers resisted the changes, but at least one came around when she saw her division's productivity rise 15 percent in the first 15 months of allowing employees more flexible schedules. And Continental says it has halved its voluntary employee-turnover rate to less than 5 percent a year.

The Dark Side of Dual Careers

Working the night shift is one way working couples try to cope with the demands of dual careers and family,

says *Newsweek*. One couple passes off their infant son to each other in the parking lot of the company they both work for, as they change shifts. But, says the woman, "We have no family life."

About 14.5 million employees in the United States work evenings and overnight, as well as rotating and split shifts. One out of five full-time workers works a nontraditional shift, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That includes such blue-collar workers as 7-Eleven employees, and white-collar workers in such fields as financial services.

At home, the problems come to light. Shift workers trying to make do on less sleep can be inattentive and irritable. Sleep expert Kenneth Groh calls the effect "jet lag without the geographical displacements." Kids don't see parents who come home from work after bedtime; spouses pass each other in the kitchen or bathroom coming from and going to work. In fact, a University of Nebraska study in the early eighties found that people who work odd hours are one-and-a-half times more likely to get divorced as are people who work from nine to five. And they have little opportunity for a normal social life with friends.

Some companies are trying to help readjust shift workers' biological clocks with special light panels that are supposed to trigger hormones that affect alertness. As for the interpersonal problems, some people find that working the night shift allows them more time with their kids during the day. And when parents work different shifts, they can share child-rearing duties. They're also less likely to have to pay for child care, which can be expensive.

Experts say that dual-career conflicts may abate as more companies institute job sharing, telecommuting, and on-site dependent care.

Next month, a medley of "Working Life" classics.

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