

Innovating the Working Mom

EXAMINING FLEXIBILITY

IS YOUR WORKPLACE WORKING FOR MOMS?
THREE QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD BE ASKING

By Nyla Beth Gawel, Principal, Strategic Innovation Group

Workplace flexibility is becoming more and more the norm at many traditional employers—even the federal government has gotten wise to the benefits of offering telework. This transition away from sitting at an office desk from 9 to 5 has largely been prompted by the prospering on-demand economy. Traditional workplaces have had to start offering more flexibility to compete with this work-from-anywhere model.

WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY EMPOWERS WORKING MOMS

I HAVE LEARNED A LOT OF LESSONS

as a working mom. For me to have the opportunity to share those key lessons with other working moms speaks to Booz Allen's dedication to fostering this on-going conversation. Booz Allen is committed to figuring out ways to recruit, retain, and empower working moms—and I believe one of those ways is through workplace flexibility.

As a professional woman currently holding two full-time jobs—a mom and a strategy consultant—the increased flexibility that Booz Allen has provided has been a godsend for me.

Traditional, 9-to-5, in-office employment models have made strides in offering more flexibility and acknowledging that working parents require greater elasticity in their work days. Companies like Google, Salesforce, and Johnson & Johnson are recognized for their flexible workplace arrangements, which include everything from telecommuting to flexible scheduling. But for today's working mom, the concept can fall short when it comes to physical office spaces,

the technologies used, and merging it with your personal life.

Here are four questions you should be asking to ensure you are truly able to benefit from workplace flexibility.

1. Does your organization support workplace flexibility?

Let's start by acknowledging that working remotely is very much a privileged opportunity. It gives greater agency to those who likely already have a great deal of it. So, it behooves us to think about workplace flexibility as not just "remote delivery," but in terms of flexibility within the on-site working environment. This lens is especially important for those in jobs that demand your physical presence, like teachers, doctors, nurses, laborers, and more.

2. How does your organization support new mothers?

For on-site moms, the state of lactation rooms should be, at a minimum, clean, private and readily available. Medical-grade pumps would help moms spend

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less time away from their desks, and accessible refrigeration ensures that the time spent pumping wasn't wasted. And if an office building has mother's room amenities, are the cleaning and security staff allowed to use them after hours, too?

In an ideal world, workplaces should be close to day care facilities or coordinate transportation with a day care facility partner. Highly desirable employers may consider providing access to, if not subsidizing, back-up, emergency day care near the office for the days when you just can't be out. And, if a uniform is a required part of the job, flexibility in attire is critical while a mother is expecting.

Every parent has those days where a child has a 100-degree temperature, and you have to drop what you're doing be there for them. But I am lucky in that even on those days, I can still head home with my laptop, take conference calls, respond to emails, and be just as engaged as I would be at the office. Other times, because of my role, working remotely simply isn't possible. Sometimes my role demands my presence in the office—if there's a deadline on a proposal going out under my name, everyone on my team is looking to me for leadership in real time. That's part of why my employer pays me—to be there in those moments—but it's also the part of my work that I find the most fulfilling. However, for many, working away from client site is virtually impossible because they lack the technology to do so. Which brings me to...

3. Does your organization use technology to empower you to work remotely?

Having the option to work remotely doesn't do you much good if your employer-provided technology tethers you to a physical office space. This applies to all forms of workplace technologies. If you're able to work from home, a dedicated work phone line for

conferencing, texting, or calling coworkers can be a real benefit. The same goes for home Internet access. The ability to use different software programs like Skype for Business and instant messaging applications allows me to have those real-time, problem-solving conversations that lead to higher productivity. Being able to participate in a meeting via video conference creates a visual presence in the room and gives you the optics and relevance that calling may not provide. That relevance is especially crucial if your role demands visibility.

4. Does your organization acknowledge your personal journey?

Very often I find that the leaders of organizations have succeeded in part because of the support and opportunities they've received throughout their careers. But what if that was a microcosm for employees at all levels of an organization? Employers who are willing to support you in a new role for which you might not be a 100% fit, but one that acknowledges and aligns with your personal life's demands is a great means to find professional fulfillment and life integration. It can be a real shame if a company does not take into account life's biggest personal moments when deciding what role staff can take. Retention and empowerment can occur when companies are able to help employees rotate into and out of roles in pace with their desired career momentum and parallel to their personal lives.

There's a lot to be said for workplace flexibility as a mom, but therein lies the crux—we are not solely mothers, and we are not solely professionals. A workplace that understands the multi-dimensional nature of the modern working mom will benefit greatly from the richness of her ideas if they meaningfully appreciate, and accommodate, her daily working life.

Continue the conversation by contacting our author using her email below. Or, follow @LifeatBooz on Twitter.



Nyla Beth Gawel

Principal

Gawel_Nyla@bah.com

@nylabeth

Nyla Beth Gawel is a management and solution strategist building IoT, digital, and broadband business, as well as a full-time mom of two. She is a Principal in the firm's Strategic Innovation Group and has been with the firm for 10 years.

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About Booz Allen

Booz Allen Hamilton is committed to exploring new and innovative ways to enhance the work experience for working moms and all of its employees. As one of Working Mother's 100 Best Companies for 18 years running, the firm is dedicated to providing the family support, flexibility, and advancement that the modern workplace demands.

Booz Allen Hamilton has been at the forefront of strategy and technology for more than 100 years. Today, the firm provides management and technology consulting and engineering services to leading Fortune 500 corporations, governments, and not-for-profits across the globe. Booz Allen partners with public and private sector clients to solve their most difficult challenges through a combination of consulting, analytics, mission operations, technology, systems delivery, cybersecurity, engineering, and innovation expertise.

With international headquarters in McLean, Virginia, the firm employs more than 22,600 people globally and had revenue of \$5.41 billion for the 12 months ended March 31, 2016. To learn more, visit BoozAllen.com. (NYSE: BAH)