

# **Today's Schedules for Today's Workforce: Hourly Employees and Work-Life Fit**

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*This paper was prepared with funding from the U.S. Department of Labor. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Federal Government or the Department of Labor.*

## **I. Introduction**

In the workforce of the 1960s, when President John F. Kennedy established the President's Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), only 20% of mothers were employed. (McClanahan 2004) Today, mothers occupy a far larger share of the paid workforce. In over 70% of American families with children, all adults are in the labor force. (Kornbluh 2003) Not only do more workers have childcare responsibilities than was the case in the past; today's workers also increasingly need to take time off in order to care for their elders. Advances in medicine mean that people now live longer, and many of these elderly individuals need assistance or caretaking from a family member. As a result, nearly a third of nonexempt workers paid on an hourly basis have elder care responsibilities, and nearly 60% of adults caring for elders have taken time off work in order to do so. (Berg & Kossek n.d.; Gibson 2003)

Yet today's hourly jobs remain designed for a workforce of male breadwinners married to female homemakers. Even assuming that that workforce existed when the Report of the PCSW was published in 1962, this model no longer describes the workplace today. The disconnect between the design of today's work and the real lives of today's workers creates problems for workers and employers alike. Hourly workers struggle to support and care for their families while working in jobs with unpredictable schedules or, conversely, with schedules that are rigid and inflexible. It goes without saying that such schedules are incompatible with the responsibilities of a working caregiver, who has her own caregiving schedule to manage. Employers, for their part, are faced with sky-high rates of turnover and absenteeism, which results in steep costs today's employers can ill afford in a globalizing world. The good news is that effective

scheduling of hourly workers allows employees to balance work and family obligations while simultaneously helping employers to drive down their labor costs.

This paper provides employers with the tools they need to match today's workplace to today's workforce. First, the paper describes "just-in-time" schedules – schedules which create instability and unpredictability for hourly workers. It then suggests several means by which employers can reduce such instability in the just-in-time sector, providing increased scheduling effectiveness. Next, the paper discusses scheduling rigidity and provides employers with a variety of means for easing this rigidity by creating a more flexible workplace.

The ultimate goal of this paper is to create a win-win outcome for hourly workers and their employers by synchronizing today's workplace with today's workforce. We seek to accomplish this goal by helping employers understand the needs of hourly employees with family responsibilities and demonstrating that accommodating these needs does not result in increased labor costs. To the contrary, introducing flexible scheduling and/or predictable scheduling can in fact *reduce* labor costs.

## **II. Providing Scheduling Stability for Hourly Workers, Particularly in the “Just in Time” Sector.**

Schedules assigned to employees with little or no advance notice is a major challenge for today's workforce. We refer to such schedules throughout this article as “just in time” (JIT) schedules. JIT schedules are the result of “just-in-time manufacturing,” a production philosophy developed by Toyota in the mid-seventies that was intended to eliminate waste. While best applied to a production system, such as

automobile assembly, the JIT model has been extended to the service industry. In essence, the JIT philosophy is that services (or products) should be provided on an as-needed basis to consumers or customers. An example of JIT in the service industry would be a restaurant that schedules the smallest number of employees for an evening shift and then, if faced with a larger than expected number of customers, calls in other workers who are mandated to show up to work “just in time” to meet the employer’s needs. In the manufacturing industry, JIT means that an employer maintains a minimal inventory of product and, should demand unexpectedly increase requiring additional inventory, calls in workers “just in time” to meet the increased and unpredicted production demand.

JIT creates significant schedule instability and unpredictability for hourly workers. JIT workers are faced with changes in work hours by week, time of day, and length of shift, as well as by unexpectedly reduced hours or involuntary part-time work. (Watson & Swanberg 2010) Even for hourly workers who do not work in the JIT sector, schedule instability remains a significant obstacle. About 55% of men and 73% of women work the regular day shift in families earning less than \$25,000. (Corporate Voices 2006, p. 32 Table 2) In JIT jobs, schedule instability typically arises through the design of overtime, which rose 25% in the decade before 2002. (Golden & Jorgensen 2002) Average overtime escalated in manufacturing in the 1990s. (Golden & Jorgensen 2002) A study of unionized employees in six chiefly blue-collar industries found that about one-third had worked compelled overtime in the previous month. (Golden & Jorgensen 2002) Workers in JIT jobs not only have great difficulty planning for regular child and/or elder care needs; they also have trouble getting enough hours to support their families.

### **III. Ensuring the Effectiveness of Just in Time Scheduling**

Employers of hourly workers often assume that they face high absenteeism and turnover because their employees' lives are chaotic and the employees have a lack of work readiness. No doubt this is true of a portion of the hourly workforce. Yet much of the problem lies not in the workers but in the lack of fit between the workplace and the workforce

Researchers have found that “[r]etention analyses reveal that the majority of the workforce stays the same month-in and month-out. A minority of employees turns over rapidly, however, and this results in a high cumulative turnover rate as jobs are re-staffed throughout the year.” (Lambert & Henly 2010, p. 7) The challenge for employers is to increase the loyalty and size of the stable sector of their workforce, while reducing the proportion that turns over rapidly. One obvious way to accomplish this is to raise wages and provide benefits such as health insurance and paid leave. Another, in today's competitive environment, is to increase schedule effectiveness. Notes Lisa Disselkamp, “Scheduling is a form of compensation. It is a very tangible benefit to employees, but the costs are hidden and don't appear as a line item on any budget.” (Disselkamp 2009, p. 156)

In JIT workplaces, managers are expected to “stay within hours.” That is, managers are held responsible for operating their worksite using a particular number of worker hours. Studies show that managers rate the goal of “staying within hours” as even more challenging than meeting sales quotas. (Lambert & Henly 2010) Given the important role that measurement of employee work hours plays for managers, employers

would be well advised to take a step back and assess whether JIT scheduling, as implemented, is saving—or costing—they money.

### **A. Schedule Effectiveness**

To the extent that current JIT practices are driving extremely high levels of absenteeism and turnover, businesses that improve “schedule effectiveness” will have a significant business advantage. A simple three-part process defines scheduling effectiveness:

1. Identify the work to be accomplished.
2. Identify the employees needed to do the work.
3. Identify the constraints within which scheduling needs to occur.

A number of methods are available to help employers improve scheduling effectiveness, depending on their business operations and needs, as described below.

#### ***1. Survey your employees***

A key early step in designing an effective schedule is to survey employees to ascertain their scheduling constraints. The most effective method of conducting such a survey is typically a formal online or paper-and-pencil method which ascertains the number of hours workers would like to work each week, times when workers prefer to work, when they are not available, and when they prefer not to work but could do so if necessary. In the JIT sector, managers will need to rethink their insistence on 24/7 availability if that is unrealistic given their workforce—as it most often will be. To expect total availability, and to ask employees to claim they have it, does an employer no favors when workers can’t adhere to the schedule after it is set.

Scheduling surveys are important because today's hourly workforce is increasingly diverse—which means that workers' responsibilities, constraints, and preferences are too. A workforce composed of parents with children under 18 will require a measure of schedule stability and established ways to handle absences related to child care breakdowns and children's illnesses. A workforce composed chiefly of workers with elder care responsibilities will require an effective mechanism for coverage in the event that a worker needs to leave abruptly to provide elder care, given that elder care often requires work absences at short notice.

A formal survey may well find that some workers (e.g., mothers) prefer daytime hours before 3 p.m., while others (e.g., students) prefer evening hours, or other patterns that provide the basis for crafting a schedule that works well for different groups of workers—and, therefore, for the employer.

## **2. *Find the hidden schedule stability***

The next step is to identify hidden schedule stability that already exists in an employer's operations. A striking and unexpected research finding of JIT schedules in the retail sector is that for nearly two-thirds of participating stores, 80% or more of the schedule stayed the same, week in, week out. (Lambert & Henly 2010) This finding surprised many store managers. (S. Lambert, personal communication at Working Group Meeting, July 27, 2010) An alternative to last-minute scheduling is to post the schedule further in advance and work with employees to develop a procedure about how to distribute the hours that later have to be cut (or added).

**3. *Lengthen the time period within which supervisors can “stay within hours”***

Another task for many employers will be to lengthen the time period within which supervisors are required to meet their supply-to-demand ratios. In some workplaces, managers call supervisors several times a day to inform them of the ratio required for the next few hours. (Lambert 2008) In other workplaces, managers had to adjust the desired ratio between customers and staff on an hourly basis, based on the number of customers in the store at a given time in the previous week. When managers were allowed to attain the target ratios by the end of a given week, they could offer their employees far greater schedule predictability. If there were fewer customers than expected, managers could decrease the number of staffing hours they used by not replacing a worker who called in sick or had a childcare emergency. Of course, this requires giving managers more leeway—and some may not be up to the challenge. But if a manager consistently fails to “stay within hours,” that is nothing more than a performance problem. The risk of extra labor costs may well be more than compensated for by reduced attrition and absenteeism. This is an empirical question employers need to investigate.

**4. *Determine the optimum number of employees***

Another important issue is workforce size. One study found that over two-thirds (67%) of managers reported that they liked to keep headcount high in order to have several associates capable of being tapped to work when needed rather than having a smaller staff in order to give workers more hours. (Lambert 2009; Lambert & Henly 2010) Managers tend to keep headcount high so that they can schedule workers for shifts during peak business hours and can help compensate for the high level of turnover and

absenteeism that typically accompanies JIT scheduling. Knowing who will show up for work, said a manager in an airline catering business, is “like flipping a coin.” (Lambert 2008) Moreover, sky-high turnover means that some employers are always hiring for certain jobs. (Lambert 2009) Surely employers would be well-served if they paused to assess whether this is the best business model. Lambert and her colleagues found that supervisors who hired fewer workers and gave each more hours were rewarded with 5% higher retention on average than supervisors who hired a large pool of workers and gave them few hours. (Lambert & Henly 2010) It makes sense that, when employees do not receive enough hours to support themselves and their families, attrition tends to be high.

#### ***5. Determine the optimum mix of full- and part-time employees***

The next challenge for employers is to assess the optimum mix of full- and part-time employees. Managers who prefer to keep their staff large and give them fewer hours have a higher proportion of part-timers, to whom they typically give an average of 10 to 15 hours a week. However, the cumulative annual turnover rate is much higher among part- than full-timers. (Lambert & Henly 2010) According to one survey, roughly 40% of stores surveyed had cumulative turnover rates of 120% among part-timers; a quarter had turnover rates of over 150%. (Lambert & Henly 2010) Across companies in four industries, the turnover rate among workers with little seniority (who are most likely to be given part-time work and unstable schedules) was as much as 200% higher than the rate among workers with more seniority. (Lambert 2009)

Contrary to the accepted wisdom that employers use part-timers to save on wage and benefit costs, a study by Houseman (2001) indicated that among the 72% of firms that used part-time workers, only 21% reported that they used part-time arrangements to

save on wages and benefits. Instead, 62% did so to provide assistance during peak business hours and 49%, during hours not usually worked by employees in full-time jobs (e.g., evenings in retail stores). Employers that can optimize the mix of full- and part-time employees may be able to materially enhance their competitive position.

**6. *Determine the optimum advance notice of employees' schedules.***

The next step for employers seeking schedule effectiveness is to experiment with giving workers greater advance notice of their schedules. Posting work schedules a few days in advance of the workweek has become the norm in many industries, a way of business that is rarely questioned. (Lambert 2008) It may be possible, however, for many businesses to post schedules further in advance. For example, in one retail firm, schedules were typically posted a few days before the workweek (a common practice throughout the retail sector). (Lambert 2009) Yet store managers received their staffing hour allotments for a month at a time, making it feasible for them to post schedules for the full month—something few (6%) managers did. (Lambert 2009) Obviously, there are limits to how far in advance schedules can and should be posted; business conditions change, as do employees' circumstances. Yet it may be feasible—and beneficial—for many businesses to post schedules a few weeks or even a month in advance, which could dramatically reduce unplanned absenteeism. (Lambert 2009)

**7. *Adopt a formal system for handling scheduling changes.***

A majority (53%) of managers in one study reported that schedule changes were common. (Lambert & Henly 2010) Those requested by management typically reflected managers' need to stay within hours. Those requested by employees typically reflected a wish to switch shifts or to cover for a colleague. An informal system for handling

scheduling changes is both costly in terms of managers' time and limited in the amount of information that can be processed.

After schedules are posted “[m]any workers call in to find out their hours or stop by to obtain a new schedule so that they can arrange or rearrange child care and other family activities for the coming week.” (Lambert & Henly 2010) Virtually all managers report that they try hard to accommodate associates' scheduling requests, regardless of the reason for the request, yet informal systems make it hard for supervisors to “keep on top of requests and preferences.” (Lambert & Henly 2010; Lambert 2009) The obvious answer is to shift to a more formal system for keeping track of, and responding to, change requests, either online or on paper. If systems are computerized, which increasingly is quite affordable, employees can enter not only their underlying scheduling needs and preferences but also their unavailability because of a specific engagement on a given week (doctor's appointment, parent-teacher conference, etc.).

### **B. The Goal: Scheduling Equilibrium**

The ultimate goal is to identify the scheduling equilibrium: the point at which the savings that can be attained by increasing schedule stability equals the additional costs incurred due to initiatives to decrease schedule instability. This equilibrium point will vary from industry to industry and from workplace to workplace, but should be easy to calculate. Employers already track absenteeism, turnover and attrition. Employers also can readily measure the costs associated with programs to decrease schedule instability, for example by giving a smaller group of employees more hours, rather than a larger group of employees fewer hours each, or by implementing a system that allows managers to balance supply and demand at the end of the week rather than on a daily or hourly

basis, or by hiring floaters to fill in for workers who cannot come to work because of family responsibilities. Employers need to develop a methodology by which they can weigh these costs and compare them with the savings produced by reducing turnover and other costs caused by scheduling instability.

Once scheduling equilibrium has been identified, the next step is to build managers' success in effective schedule management into the metrics used to evaluate the managers' performance, given that "we treasure what we measure." In one study, most managers reported that their companies encouraged them to be responsive to employees' scheduling needs, yet nearly two-thirds (66.2%) felt that their company did not reward managers for being responsive. (Lambert & Henly 2010) No doubt, given that employers currently using JIT scheduling encounter turnover rates of up to 500%, businesses that increase scheduling effectiveness can gain a competitive edge.

### **III. Introducing Flexibility into Rigid Scheduling Practices**

JIT scheduling causes instability, which creates problems for workers and costs for employers; rigid and inflexible scheduling may be the other end of the spectrum, but it creates similar problems for employees and similar costs for employers. Rigid schedules are very common for hourly workers. Only 17.5% of workers without a high school degree can vary their schedules, less than half the rate (39.1%) among college graduates. (McMenamin 2007) According to one study, only one in three (33%) low wage workers has access to traditional flextime, while only 12% can change their work hours on a daily basis, and only one in three can decide when to take breaks. (Bond & Galinsky 2006) Another study found that one-third of lower-wage workers cannot decide when to take breaks, nearly 60% cannot choose starting or quitting times, and 53%

cannot take time off for sick children. (Workplace Flexibility 2010 and Urban Institute n.d.) Low-wage workers also are more likely than more affluent workers to report that using workplace flexibility programs will negatively affect job advancement. (Workplace Flexibility 2010 and Urban Institute n.d.)

Low-wage workers also often have little (or no) sick, vacation, or leave time. Only about half of non-college jobs (53%) offer sick leave that can be used to care for family members who are ill, according to employers; among entry-level jobs, this drops to less than one-third (31%). (Acs & Loprest 2008) Nearly 70% of lower-wage workers have two weeks or less of vacation and sick leave combined. (Heymann 2000, note 2, at 15 fig. 6.1) They also are less likely to be covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which provides twelve weeks of unpaid leave in connection with the birth or adoption of a child, or the serious medical condition of an employee or the employee's child, parent, or spouse. (Workplace Flexibility 2010 and Urban Institute n.d.)

Expected mandatory overtime also exists in some low-wage jobs. A study of hourly jobs in Chicago found mandatory overtime commonplace among hotel housekeepers. (Lambert 2008) In another study, work hours expanded as managers called workers to come in from home or asked them to stay on after their shifts ended, if demand proved stronger than expected. (Henly, Shaefer & Waxman 2006) "At nights...we'd have to stay late and clean up the store and they schedule you to 11:00...I don't have no problem with [staying late] but after 2, 3 hours go past...that, I think, is too much because I have a child to go home to, and so does everybody else," said one woman. (Henly, Shaefer & Waxman 2006, p. 622) An overtime system that assumes that

workers have someone else on tap to care for their children can lead to particularly harsh consequences for single mothers.

Many workers are one sick child away from being fired due to overly rigid schedules that ignore workers' family care responsibilities. (Williams 2006) Often these workers simply require, unexpectedly, permission to leave work for a short period of time, perhaps to pick up a sick child from school and take her to the doctor. Sometimes short absences can be scheduled in advance—for example, to take an elder to a social worker. Additionally, employees may need a permanent or semi-permanent schedule change—for example, to accommodate their childcare providers or the work schedules of their spouses or partners.

The conventional wisdom is that workplace flexibility is not suitable for hourly jobs. This assertion is far less true than is ordinarily assumed. Workplace flexibility is one element of schedule effectiveness. In the hourly context, one benefit of scheduling effectiveness is to ease the excessive rigidity of typical of hourly jobs, which is counterproductive for employees and employers alike. The following best practices have been developed to address each of these issues.

#### **A. Compressed workweeks**

Compressed workweeks are full-time schedules compressed into fewer days per week. Among low-wage workers, 42% are allowed to compress their work hours; among other hourly workers, this percentage climbs to 46%. (Swanberg 2008) A survey of five companies that offer workplace flexibility found that 23% of hourly workers used compressed workweeks. (Corporate Voices n.d.) A study of eight unionized companies found that 31% of employees with elder care, 37% of those with child care

responsibilities, and 32% of employees overall worked compressed workweeks. The highest usage was among police (88%), followed by blue-collar workers (45%). (Berg & Kossek n.d.) An Oregon cocktail waitress earning \$7 per hour plus tips explained why she worked compressed workweeks:

Well, because (exhale), I can work, I can do three tens, get my days over and done with, and then I have four days off with my kids....Because otherwise, if I worked days, I would hardly, I mean, the only time I would see them is at night....I'd only have two days off with them.

(Weigt 2006, p. 333)

### **B. Flex-time**

Flex-time schedules allow workers flexibility in when they start and stop work. One study found that only 37% of low-wage workers and 39% of other hourly workers can choose their own starting and stopping times. (Swanberg 2008) A survey of five companies that offer workplace flexibility found that 13% of hourly workers surveyed used flex-time that could be changed on a daily basis and 30% used flex-time on a set schedule. (Corporate Voices n.d.) A study of eight unionized companies found that 65% of employees with eldercare responsibilities, 58% of employees with children under 18, and 54% of employees overall used flex-time. (Berg & Kossek n.d.) Flex-time is something professionals often take for granted; it is a highly prized benefit for hourly workers who can use it, for example to match their work hours with their partner's work hours when tag teaming or to enable them to care for an elder before coming to work.

### **C. Reduced hours and job sharing**

Job sharing is when two employees split one job. Typically they work different days, with some overlap to aid coordination. Retention part-time jobs are jobs with

benefits where the occupants have chosen to reduce their hours. A survey of five companies that offer workplace flexibility found that 11% of hourly workers surveyed worked part-time, while 1% used job sharing. (Corporate Voices n.d.)

#### **D. Gradual return to work**

This policy allows someone returning from childbirth or other health-related leave to start part-time and gradually increase to a full-time schedule. A study of eight unionized organizations found that 32% of employees with children under age 18, 27% of employees with elder care responsibilities, and 23% of employees overall used gradual-return-to-work policies. Service workers had the highest usage rate. Thirty-one percent (31%), or nearly a third, used the policy. The next highest usage was among administrative support staff. Twenty-six percent (26%), more than a quarter of employees in these jobs, took a gradual return to work (Berg & Kossek n.d.).

#### **E. Compensatory Time Off (Comp Time)**

Comp time programs allow employees to take time off instead of receiving pay when they work extra hours. Employers need to be mindful of relevant state and federal labor laws when setting up these programs; in a handful of states (including Alaska, California, Nevada, and Puerto Rico), state law requires an overtime premium for work in excess of 8 or 10 hours a day, in addition to the federal law requirement for an overtime premium for work in excess of 40 hours per week. (U.S. Department of Labor 2010) A study of eight unionized companies found that 42% of employees with elder care responsibilities, 46% of employees with children under 18, and 40% of employees overall used comp time. The highest usage level was among police (51%), followed by administrative support workers (40%). (Berg & Kossek n.d.)

## **F. Part-year work**

Among low-wage workers, 32% are allowed to work part year; among other hourly workers, this percentage falls to 21%. (Swanberg 2008) A study of eight unionized companies found that 42% of employees with eldercare responsibilities, 13% of employees with children under 18, and 12% of employees overall used policies that allow part-year work. Usage was highest among police (29%); 11% of blue-collar workers used the policy. (Berg & Kossek n.d.)

## **G. Redesigning overtime systems**

In 1963, the report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women noted that in private employment, 13.5 percent of workers worked 49 hours or more and called for a normal workday and workweek of no more than eight hours a day and 40 hours a week. (*American Women*, pp. 36-37) The Commission was of the view that until there was broad and effective federal and state legislation providing for at least time and a half the regular rate for hours in excess of eight a day and 40 a week, state laws limiting women workers' maximum hours should remain in effect and be strengthened and expanded, while at the same time providing flexibility for additional hours with proper safeguards. After passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which enforces the Act, found that such laws and regulations did not take into account the capacities, preferences, and abilities of individual females and, therefore, discriminated on the basis of sex and conflicted with and were superseded by the Act (Guidelines on Discrimination Because of Sex, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 29 C.F.R. 1604.2(b)). Some of the terms in modern usage,

such as flex-time, compressed workweeks, job sharing and telework, were not in the labor lexicon at that time.

In many workplaces, one group of workers passionately wants overtime (typically men whose wives have primary responsibility for child care), while for another group (mothers and tag-teamers), an order to work overtime on short notice can mean losing their job. Employers can improve morale and decrease costs by taking the trouble to design overtime systems to achieve work-life fit for both groups. A poorly designed overtime system will result in attrition for single mothers and tag-team parents.

In tag-team families, when one parent is ordered to work overtime at short notice, the family may well have to choose between the mom's job and the dad's job in a context where the family needs both jobs to pay the mortgage. The previously mentioned study of five companies that support workplace flexibility found that only about half (54%) of those surveyed rarely or never were required to work overtime with little or no advance notice while 20% were required to do so at least several times a month. Men (40%) were more likely to be required to do so than women (24%). (Corporate Voices n.d.)

The first step is to rely on volunteers to work mandatory overtime to the extent possible. Two alternative ways exist of handling mandatory overtime when it is unavoidable. One is to provide workers with coupons that they can use to buy out of overtime or to claim additional work hours. The second is to divide employees into four groups and have one group on call for possible overtime during the first week of every month, the second on call during the second week, and so on. This enables workers to arrange for back-up childcare during the week they are on call.

**H. Allowing employees to contact children, elders, or caregivers during work hours**

Only 33% of low-wage workers can choose their break times. (Bond & Galinsky 2006) Parents need to be able to contact latchkey children and to call caregivers when a problem arises.

**I. Allowing attendance at children’s activities**

A national study found that nearly three-fourths of working parents could not consistently attend school conferences with teachers and learning specialists. (McGuire, Brashler, & Kenny 2006) California, by state law, requires employers of 25 or more employees to allow employees up to 40 hours of unpaid time off each year for parents, guardians, or custodial grandparents to participate in school or licensed day care center activities, with reasonable notice to their employer. (Cal. Labor Code § 230.8) Employers may offer similar programs to address related issues.

**J. Allowing sick leave that can be used for care of dependents**

The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) requires covered employers to give eligible employees up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave to care for a child, parent, or spouse with a serious medical condition. (29 U.S.C. § 2601, *et seq.*) However, employees often face the need to care for children and other dependents who are ill, but not sick enough to meet the definition of a “serious health condition” under the FMLA. Only 24% of low-wage and low-income workers can take a few days off to care for a sick child without losing pay or using vacation days. (Bond & Galinsky 2006) Much of the cost of allowing employees to use their sick leave to care for sick children or dependents

already is incurred as employees call in sick when, in fact, it is their children who are sick. The Federal Government, under the Federal Employees Family Friendly Leave Act (FEFFLA), authorizes federal employees to use their own sick leave to give care to or otherwise attend to a family member having an illness, injury, or other condition which, if an employee had such a condition, would justify the use of sick leave by the employee. (U.S. Office of Personnel Management Frequently Asked Questions, Pay & Leave)

Another key issue is notice. A study of welfare-to-work moms found that, although half received paid vacation and one-third received paid sick leave, typically paid time off required several weeks' notice, which made it hard to use for family emergencies. (Weigt 2006) Among low-wage workers, only 34% of full-timers and 25% of part-timers are allowed days off to care for a sick child without using their paid vacation days. (Swanberg 2008) A survey of five companies that offer workplace flexibility found that 14% of hourly workers surveyed used paid sick time to care for a sick child and 11% used paid sick time to care for a sick family member other than a child. (Corporate Voices n.d.)

**K. Allowing employees to purchase additional vacation**

A survey of five companies that offer workplace flexibility found that 35% of hourly workers surveyed take additional time off without pay beyond vacation and personal days. (Corporate Voices n.d.)

**L. Allowing personal time to be used in small increments**

In one study, among low-wage workers, only 56% could decide when to take breaks, a percentage that climbed to 69% among other hourly employees. (Swanberg 2008) A survey of five companies that offer workplace flexibility found that over half

(52%) of hourly workers surveyed used vacation time and about a quarter (23%) used sick time in hourly or partial-day increments. (Corporate Voices n.d.)

#### **M. Leave banks**

Leave banks allow employees to donate unused leave to a colleague and are often used in situations where a worker or a worker's relative is seriously ill. Leave banks also enable colleagues to help a woman who has recently borne a child. One study of blue-collar parents found that only 10% of the mothers had paid parental leave when their baby was born. (Perry-Jenkins, Bourne & Meteyer 2007) This meant that they tended to use up all their sick and vacation time to care for their newborn and thus to return to work with no safety net for needed time off.

#### **N. Extended unpaid leave**

Some employers allow employees to take extended time off without pay. This is particularly important for workers with family in other countries so that they can return home for an extended visit without quitting their jobs and is also helpful when a worker has to nurse an ill family member through an extended recovery period or for a variety of other uses.

#### **O. Updating no fault attendance policies**

A survey by World at Work found that 40% of respondents had an absence control policy. (CLASP 2010) These policies are an excellent source of information for determining whether flexible work arrangements need to be introduced. For example, when 80% of the associates are on probation, as occurred in one flagship department store (Henly and Waxman 2005), the time is ripe to examine and consider changing

scheduling policies to improve work-life fit for employees. Another study found that one worker out of three had received points or other sanctions due to attendance problems. (Henly, Shaefer & Waxman 2006) Said one manager at PNC Financial Services Group after adoption of various flexible policies, “Instead of having six people call off...we’d rather have you work a schedule that wouldn’t have us taking corrective action [because of absenteeism]. Most people want to do the right thing.” (Corporate Voices n.d.)

Another issue that arises with leave policies that are supposedly “no-fault” policies is when employers give employees sick leave, but then penalize them for using it. According to one researcher, “In one nursing home we studied, nursing assistants received six sick days a year, but they were penalized anytime they used a sick day.” (N. Gerstel, personal communication to J. Williams, July 27, 2010) This seems particularly troubling in a healthcare context, because it means that nurse’s assistants who are sick are forced to report to work and to expose patients to their illnesses. Turck, an industrial automation manufacturer, provides a useful model. It excludes the following types of absences from its no-fault policy: 1) absences accompanied by a medical provider statement, 2) absences taken for family medical reasons, and 3) absences that have been approved by the employee’s supervisor. (Geiger & Potratz 2010) Note that giving points or other discipline to an employee covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act who has taken time off in connection with a serious medical condition is a violation of federal law. (29 U.S.C. § 2601, *et seq.*)

## **P. Telework**

A common assumption is that hourly jobs are place-bound jobs. Some are, but many are not. In fact, much routine white-collar work can be remote. Estimates of

telework among hourly workers vary widely. One study found that only 3% of low-wage and 6% of other hourly workers ever work regular hours at home. (Swanberg 2008) A study of eight unionized companies found much higher levels; 55% of employees with children under 18, 30% of employees with eldercare, and 38% of employees overall used telecommuting programs. (Berg & Kossek n.d.) Usage was higher among professionals than among nonprofessionals, but 36% of administrative support personnel and 17% of blue-collar workers telecommuted.

**Q. Eliminating the flexibility stigma**

According to one study, only 28% of low-wage workers strongly believed they could use flexible work arrangements without jeopardizing advancement. (Bond & Galinsky 2006) A study of call center employees found that hourly workers were more likely than salaried ones to use formal work-family policies but that workers with the best performance ratings had not used them. (Wharton, Chivers & Blair-Loy 2008) This may mean that high-performing employees were better able to negotiate informal accommodations or that employees who formally request flexibility face the “flexibility stigma,” which can negatively affect them. (Williams, Blair-Loy & Berdahl 2010)

The first step in eliminating the flexibility stigma is to ensure that relevant scheduling information is widely available. In one survey, a woman in an hourly job said, “Information isn’t openly available, and it’s hard to get a flexible schedule,” , even in a company that strongly supports flexibility. (Corporate Voices n.d.,p. 80) Yet the five companies surveyed, all leaders in the field of workplace flexibility, clearly had made substantial inroads towards eliminating the flexibility stigma. Fully 70% of those surveyed reported that their manager was supportive of flexibility and 68% said their

peers were supportive. One key to eliminating the flexibility stigma is to ensure that offering flexibility to some workers is not achieved by dumping unwanted extra work on others. Again, these best-practice companies have avoided this common problem; 66% of those surveyed said that their peers do not have a heavier workload because they used flexibility. (Corporate Voices n.d.)

A key issue for hourly workers is the tradition of close supervision, which may lead to stigma if managers resist flexibility for hourly workers because they are apprehensive about the lack of control. In one heated session in a workplace that was adopting the Results Only Work Environment (ROWE), in which employees' comings and goings are not monitored as long as they get their work done, a woman in an hourly administrative position asked, "Can you, as a salaried person, trust us?" Her senior manager said that "hourly workers need to be here to support us," to which she shot back, "but you're not going to be here anyway [under ROWE]!" No one said anything for several seconds. (Kelly, Ammons, Chermack & Moen 2010, p. 294) Two departments withdrew from ROWE because high-status professionals opposed it. One exempt worker stated her view that these managers would not "let their nonexempt [employees] utilize ROWE. They want or need them here 8 to 5" (Kelly, Ammons, Chermack & Moen 2010, p. 297). Training is needed to help managers of hourly workers rethink these assumptions.

#### **R. "Right to request flexibility" laws**

A new approach, at least in the United States, is the passage of so-called "right to request flexibility" laws. Similar to policies in the United Kingdom, Australia, and elsewhere, Vermont and San Francisco have recently enacted such laws, giving

employees the right to request flexible working arrangements without fear of retaliation. (Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 21, § 309 (2014); S.F. Admin. Code Ch. 12Z (2014)) Such arrangements include changes in the number of days or hours worked, changes in start or stop times, changes in work location, and/or job sharing. San Francisco's law also includes the ability to request greater scheduling predictability. Under these laws, employers must put a process in place by which workers can negotiate schedule adjustments, though employers are not mandated to provide these schedule changes and may deny requests if they create an undue hardship.

### **S. Training supervisors and managers**

Many studies document the importance of supervisor support in helping employees balance work and family. (Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner & Hanson 2009) The sociological literature shows that employers can engender tremendous loyalty when employees feel their supervisor is supportive of their need to balance family responsibilities with work responsibilities. Kim, a cocktail waitress and mother of two young children, described why she stayed at a job with no benefits that paid just \$7/hour plus tips, because of her supervisor (Weigt & Solomon 2008, p. 636):

I couldn't ask for anybody better as far as, I mean, that's why I'm still there. I have no medical benefits, I have no paid vacations, I have no sick days or anything like that. But there's not too many jobs out there that are so lenient, either...I could call him up and say, "John, I'm just exhausted, I'm tired. I didn't sleep very well last night. I'm going to be an hour late." "OK, well just don't crash on your way here"...he's great. And he's done the kid thing you know, and he's older. I mean, he understands.

Another woman, Maria, described how grateful she was to a supervisor who let her switch her hours to daytime from evenings so she could pick up her son from day care at 5:30 p.m. (Henly, Shaefer & Waxman 2006, p. 626) She said, "My manager, she's real

cool about everything. You know, you just have to tell her what you need and whatever...she respects a lot of us, you know?... But she's always like, 'You know your family comes first. You have to take care of them first.'" A 33-year-old shop supervisor explained that her employees were flexible with her because she was flexible with them. (Perry-Jenkins, Bourne & Meteyer 2007) She said, "They are the best. They would do anything I ask within reason. They've proven it, people need time off for family matters and they can get it, no questions."

Given examples such as those above, it is surprising that only 36% of employers offer work-life training to managers of hourly workers, according to one study. (Litchfield, Swanberg & Sigworth 2004) More recent work has identified the specific types of supervisory behaviors that help the most. Creative work-family management is pro-active and involves redesigning jobs to improve work-life fit. Instrumental support is reactive. It concerns a supervisor's routine reactions in handling employees' day-to-day work-family conflicts. Emotional support involves having supervisors make sure their subordinates feel comfortable talking to them about work-family conflicts, taking the time to find out their subordinates' family and personal commitments, talking with their subordinates, and responding with sympathy and understanding when work-family conflicts arise. (Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner & Hanson 2009)

Leslie Hammer and Ellen Kossek developed supervisory training based on this model and ran small sessions in grocery stores on how to plan coverage and cope with employees' scheduling conflicts. One study found that employees of the trained supervisors were less likely to state their intention to seek a job elsewhere and were more willing to comply with safety programs. (Kossek & Hammer 2008) After the training,

employees with high levels of work-family conflict felt less stress and had better physical health. The training program that produced these results consisted of a one-time self-paced 30- to 40-minute computer training followed by a 75-minute face-to-face training; the researchers met with the store director, assistant director, and department heads all together and trained them on the four dimensions of supervisory support, informed them of existing company work-life policies, and had them role play situations where they could provide more behavioral support to employees to enable them to better manage work and family. (L. Hammer, personal communication to J. Williams, December 27, 2010)

### **III. Conclusion**

Employers often assume that uncontrolled turnover, combined with high rates of absenteeism, are simply facts of life. They are not. Often they are symptoms of a mismatch between the way today's jobs are structured and the makeup and needs of the workforce of the 21st century. Gone are the days when most mothers stayed home, freeing workers up to work their shifts and overtime at short notice with the confidence that their children, parents, and ill family members were receiving the kind of care and attention all Americans believe they owe their families. Schedules that worked well in a workforce of breadwinners married to housewives do not work well today. And employers need to know that there are alternatives to existing practices that can benefit both them and their employees. Indeed, as discussed above, offering employees greater flexibility is likely to engender loyalty, enhance employee satisfaction, and decrease turnover.

To improve work-life fit in low-wage jobs requires effective practices to address problems presented by just-in-time scheduling and a quite different set of practices to address the workplace rigidity faced by hourly workers more generally. Only by combining effective practices designed to increase schedule stability in the just-in-time sector with effective practices designed to increase flexibility in hourly jobs more generally can the mismatch in the fit between today's workplace and today's workforce be remedied.

Businesses are organizations of people. Employers need to understand their employees' lives well enough to design schedules that do not place workers in the position of having to choose between their employers' needs and a family member's immediate and pressing need for care. Employers who place workers in that position are bound to be disappointed time and again as employees put family first. (Williams 2010)

The logical solution for both employee and employer is to increase schedule effectiveness by designing today's schedules for today's workforce. It can be done.

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