

A QUESTION OF BALANCE

• Workers are finding it harder to juggle their time for careers and families.

By DAVID MADRID
Citizen Business Writer

Kim Turner was never taught to juggle, but the mother of four is juggling as she attempts to balance family, work and school.

It is a balancing act, minus the school, that more employees must attempt as the workplace is increasingly being filled by dual-career couples and single parents.

And the failure of employees to achieve a work-family balance can affect an employer's bottom line in the form of absenteeism, tardiness and turnover of employees.

Employers have not failed to notice.

According to a 1992 Work and Family Survey Report compiled by

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President and CEO of Human
Resource Management

the Alexandria, Va.-based Society of Human Resource Management, of 1,004 companies responding to the survey, workplace problems were reported in more organizations as resulting from child care issues than from any other family-related issue studied.

Child care problems were reported as leading to absenteeism and tardiness in about 9 out of 10 companies answering the survey. Workdays were said to be cut short because of child care problems in about 8 out of 10 companies.

Turner knows the routine. With four children — ages 3, 4, 5 and 7 — someone is bound to get sick.

A sick child forces her to stay home from her job at Pima Community College. Her mother lives in Northern Ireland, so she has no family to rely on. Her husband, from whom she recently separated, cannot always leave his work to care for the children.

"I try to find an emergency sitter, but if I can't, I miss work," Turner, 25, said. "It can be frustrating. I can't send sick children to day care or school."

Tucson Electric Power Co. is attacking the problem with its own program.

Tucson Electric Power keeps a list of people who will watch a sick child at the parent's home for \$12 a day. Faced with a sick child, parents can call someone from the list and TEP will pay \$10 of the \$12-per-day charge, said Jay Gonzales, TEP's manager of public affairs.

"Clearly, this is important to our employees," Gonzales said. "An employee who doesn't have to worry about a sick child can come to work and be productive. This allows our employees to keep working and save their sick time for when they are sick themselves."

The \$10 TEP pays for a sick child's care is well worth the cost to the company, Gonzales said.

TEP also provides its employees with educational seminars, classes and literature regarding family topics ranging from adoption to parenting to money management and estate planning.

Michael R. Losey, president and chief executive of the Society for Human Resource Management in Virginia, predicts that the day will soon come when employees will choose jobs with working-family programs and lower pay over jobs without the programs but with higher pay.

"People will accept less money if it makes life easier for them," Losey said. "Fathers and mothers want to be parents. And in order to



Photo illustration by N. NAVIER GALLEON/Tucson Citizen

get enough people to work for them, companies are going to have to be more user-friendly on these issues."

But ultimately, it is up to each working parent to find balance on the work and family issue.

David and Ruth Mathews have found their balance by working different shifts, which allows them to largely bypass any child care problems.

"We wanted to raise our own children, instead of having someone in a day care raise them," David said.

David, a dialysis technician, and Ruth, an intensive-care registered nurse, made their decision when their oldest daughter was born more than 18 years ago. The couple have four children — ages 18, 14, 12 and 10 — and do not regret their decision.

It is their way of balancing work and family with a minimum of disruption to their work.

David works a day shift five days a week, while Ruth works three 12-hour night shifts each week.

But for some there seems to be no way to achieve that work and family balance.

Cherie Sohnen-Moe, a Tucson business trainer and consultant, said striking a balance between work and family has become especially difficult with more companies demanding more working hours from their employees.

"Part of what I am seeing is people just working a lot more than they really want to be," Sohnen-Moe said. "As they need to put in more hours, they have to give up things, particularly if those things are not related to their career."

The result of constantly working additional hours is increased stress and decreased morale at work, and this leads to more illness and time off by employees, Sohnen-Moe said.

And that time away from home and children can have other, more-subtle effects on workers.

Turner, who juggles her time among her children, work and school, said there is one problem that bothers her more than any other.

"My major problem is guilt," she said. "I feel guilty about spending so much time away from my children."

Help available for family care

By DAVID MADRID
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The days of Ozzie and Harriet don't exist in reality anymore, says Barry Wanger.

Wanger is a spokesman for Work/Family Directions, the largest provider of work and life consultation and referral programs in the country.

Today's worker, he said, differs from Ozzie Nelson considerably.

For one thing, yesterday's Ozzie - the bread winner - may easily be today's version of Harriet, who joins the millions of women who make up 45 percent of this nation's work force. That compares with a 1960 work force that was 33 percent women.

Wanger said it is estimated that less than 10 percent of families have a parent at home full time today.

And Ozzie and Harriet aren't the only ones who don't exist anymore: Their family has changed as well, said Cherie Sohnen-Moe, a Tucson business trainer, consultant and author who writes about business issues.

"The family today is not just children; it is also the spouse and increasingly the parents," Sohnen-Moe said.

That new family is something that Work/Family Directions has worked to accommodate as well.

Although the consulting and referral company focused primarily on child care issues when it began in 1983, it has since expanded to include elder care and school care.

"Elder care is an increasingly important issue," Wanger said. "A lot of times the kids leave when they turn 18, but the elder parents stay a lot longer in most cases."

"We provide information on social services programs, Medicare and Medicaid, nursing homes or whatever the person may need to know how to deal with an elder family member," Wanger said.

After expanding its focus to include elder care, Work/Family Directions expanded further to include a school care program that

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deals with school-age children of employees.

"A lot of employees are more likely today to be working without social support that their parents had without a spouse at home or family nearby to care for a sick child or help them with their homework," Wanger said. "The situation has also been aggravated by school budget cuts that have increasingly left children without guidance counselors to help the families out."

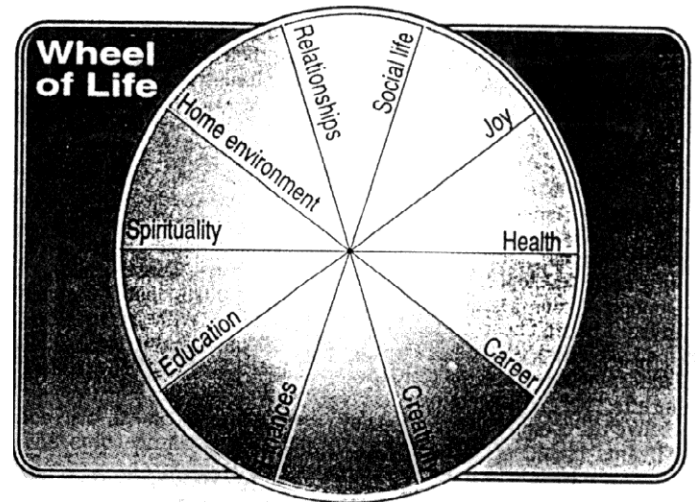
So as family and work problems become more complex, Sohnen-Moe said, some workers end up trying to take on a super-person identity by attempting to be all things for all people at both work and home.

Unfortunately, most workers fall way short of their super-person goal, she said.

Adding to the frustration of workers' failures to balance all their family problems and work is the fact that today's workers face more change and less security at work than Ozzie and Harriet's generation, Wanger said.

Stress at work and upheaval at home can send a worker into a tailspin, he said, giving rise to feelings of loss of control and being overworked.

"At one time companies said your home problems are your own problems," Wanger said. "Today, that view can be very costly. Work has changed and so has the work force."



Wheel of Life helps find balance

The Wheel of Life is a technique used to help people find which areas of their lives need to be brought into balance.

It is a technique taught by Cherie Sohnen-Moe, a business trainer and consultant, in her seminars on balancing work and life.

This is how the wheel works:

The middle of the wheel represents the least desirable point of a person's life, while the outside edge represents the most desirable point.

Mark the spot on each spoke of the wheel that reflects where you are. Least satisfied is near the middle; most satisfied is near the edge.

For example, if you are not satisfied with your home environment, mark a point on the home environment spoke closer to the center than the outside.

Once all spokes are marked, it's time to connect the dots.

"This is a visual representation of how smooth life is," Sohnen-Moe said.

"The jagged areas show a need for more balance and the areas that need work."

The person should then work to move the inner jagged edges out by working to attain satisfaction in the problem areas.

The object is to get as round a wheel as possible within the wheel of life.

Once a circle has been achieved, then the person can work to move the entire circle outward by improving each part of life on the wheel.

Sohnen-Moe said the wheel should be done regularly to maintain balance.

And if there are other facets of a person's life that are important to balance, then more spokes can be added to the wheel.