

Do Newsrooms Value Families?

Across the country, flexible schedules are being devised for journalists with children

By Barbara W. Selvin

Slowly but steadily, part-time work schedules for parents of young children are becoming an accepted feature of newsrooms around the country.

Ten years ago such arrangements were a rarity. A few women — Ellen Graham at *The Wall Street Journal*, Nadine Brozan and Deirdre Carmody at *The New York Times* — had persuaded supervisors to let them cut back their hours while they raised their children. These arrangements often lasted for years, but they didn't lead to formal policies.

Things have changed since then. Of the nation's twenty largest newspapers, seventeen now permit full-time professionals to switch to part-time work, although with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Five of the papers have formal job-sharing policies. Many smaller papers have also created part-time programs to keep good people from leaving, according to several studies. Nearly all participants have been women with young children.

"The basic thing is, you want people to not be working against their will,"

Barbara Selvin, who gave birth to her third child on July 1, is a former Newsday reporter. She proposed, and worked in, that paper's first job-sharing arrangement after her first child was born in 1988, and later helped her union negotiate part-time parental work schedules for periods of up to eighteen months. She left Newsday last spring because the paper lacked a longer-term part-time program.

says Laszlo Domjan, metropolitan editor at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, where a series of reporters has rotated through a job-sharing arrangement that began in 1985. Balancing work and family, he adds, "makes better reporters anyway. It seems like such a logical thing."

While attitudes are evolving, policies have a long way to go, in the eyes of those part-time professionals who lose significant benefits — from medical coverage to vacation pay — when work arrangements at their papers change. And many women on reduced schedules say they feel that, despite their dedication and productivity, they are somehow not taken as seriously as other employees. "They act like they're doing this gigantic favor for you, even though you take this big pay cut," one reporter complains.

Meanwhile, some papers have embraced part-time scheduling even as others keep their distance. At *The Miami Herald*, "We're very actively looking for more people to do this," says Christine Morris, associate editor for personnel. The *Herald* has many part-time copy editors and recently split an assistant city editor slot in its large Broward County bureau into a job-share.

On the other hand, at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "We generally discourage part-time work or job-sharing," says assistant publisher Tony Newhall. However, in the late 1980s the *Chronicle* established a policy permitting women returning from maternity leave to work part-time for up to two-and-a-half years — after a female



At *The Boston Globe*, Sarah Snyder, left, and Patricia Wen, right, share a job as weekend and special projects editor, each working three days a week

reporter told the paper she had discussed the matter with state employment regulators.

Often, alternative scheduling begins when a productive reporter or editor comes to a manager and says she just can't handle a full-time schedule and the demands of her young family.

That's what happened to reporter Faye Fiore of the *Los Angeles Times* after her son was born last year and shortly after she had won a promotion out of a suburban bureau to the downtown office. "When he was three weeks old I just went nuts suddenly," Fiore says. "How am I going to turn him over to someone else and go back to work



fifty hours a week?" She went to her soon-to-be-boss, who, to her surprise and joy, consented to a three-day-a-week-schedule. The editors gave Fiore a spot on the team covering Los Angeles's mayoral campaign. Toward the end of the campaign she briefly worked longer weeks, which, she says, gave management the confidence that in crunch times coverage would not suffer. "She was a key part of the team," says metro editor Craig Turner.

Managers and reporters alike say that tailoring beats to the restraints of part-time work helps make the programs succeed. But such accommodations sometimes create new problems. Many part-time reporters find their schedules best suited to features and long, investigative pieces, leaving little time for breaking stories. And, of course, on some days the reporters are just not

there. "Department heads say they're constantly looking around for people to fill in, and we do see overtime creeping up," says Al Larkin, managing editor for administration at *The Boston Globe*.

Job-sharing is another approach to accommodating reporters with growing families. At *The Wall Street Journal's* Washington bureau, Barbara Rosewicz and Rose Gutfeld shared an important beat — environment and energy — for three-and-a-half years. Alternating two weeks on and two weeks off, they covered the 1990 passage of the Clean Air Act "better than any other paper in America," says bureau chief Albert R. Hunt.

Job-sharing, too, is not without its complications. Gutfeld came back to full-time work, as a reporter covering food and natural resources, and Rosewicz went on to cover science and

technology, including the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, part-time. This year, as the space station story heated up, Rosewicz worried about breaking news that happened on her day off.

Many papers have avoided job-sharing because it can be harder to manage than simple part-time schedules, particularly when it comes to ending a job-sharing arrangement. To whom does the slot belong? What happens to the person left behind if only one partner wants out? What about sources — won't they get confused about whom to talk to — and when? What about missed phone calls on one partner's day off?

The *Journal's* Hunt agrees that ending a job-share can cause problems but believes that job-sharing should be considered in the mix of options. Editors at other papers agree. Concerns about coverage in any part-time arrangement should be viewed as "just one more management challenge," says the *Los Angeles Times's* Turner.

At *The Boston Globe*, job-sharing has given two working mothers a foothold on the management track, a major objective of the paper's executives, who were painfully aware that the city desk was staffed primarily by men and by women without children. Most female managers were either single or didn't have children younger than ten. "If you look back at women who were on the management track [and had babies], they opted out, changed their career plans, went to three days or found niche jobs where you can get out at the same time every night," says the *Globe's* Larkin. "That's not healthy."

The paper's new job-share, which began last spring, put former investigative reporter Patricia Wen and former assistant business editor Sarah Snyder together as weekend and special projects editor on the city desk. Wen comes in Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday and spends most of her time assigning stories and talking to reporters. Snyder works Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday and does a bit more editing. Both say the overlap on Wednesday is critical: they try — successfully, for the most part — to avoid handing off stories to one another, but when it becomes necessary, they have a day to sit down

"Make your boss think, 'This is the answer to our problem'"

together with the reporter assigned to the piece and come to a meeting of the minds. "They're interchangeable," Larkin says. "Nobody has to pick up their work."

Of the twenty largest U.S. papers, only the *Globe* and *The Miami Herald* have tried job-sharing specifically to keep working mothers on a management track. At the *Globe*, this heightened awareness comes in part from top male managers' own life experiences. Larkin shies away from the suggestion that "the only reason it gets done is that the men decided it's okay." But "clearly, clearly," he says, "there's a high sensitivity on my part and on [editor] Matt [Storin]'s part."

Larkin is married to Wendy Fox, the staff member who first proposed the *Globe*'s leave-of-absence program. Under the program, which was instituted in 1989, a leave can be taken piecemeal — a day or two a week over the course of a year. Storin says his enthusiasm for alternative scheduling comes in part from his twenty years as an editor — "I've seen the strain in the faces of so many mothers at certain times of the day" — and in part from two months he spent at home in 1985 with his then two-year-old son after quitting the *Globe* in a management dispute. "Those were the most important two months I ever spent, in terms of seeing what I was missing," he says.

While sensitive male management played a significant role in the change at the *Globe*, a lot of pressure for change came from below — from reporters and editors seeking a better balance in their lives. When assistant business editor Snyder learned of an opening for an assistant metropolitan editor on the city desk, she first sought editor Storin's go-ahead for exploring the idea of sharing the job. Once she got Storin's provisional blessing — he would back them if department heads were interested — she and investigative reporter Wen put together a meticulously detailed proposal. They outlined their schedules, identified potential problems, and described how they thought the problems could be solved.

"If you leave a lot to be figured out by very busy managers, you're asking for trouble," Snyder says. "Put yourself in the department head's shoes. What is their need?... Make them walk away thinking, 'This is an answer to our problem,' not 'This is just another problem.'" And, she says, figure out who will end up being inconvenienced — a department, for example, that will be cut by half a person — and make the case that living with that problem is worth it for the paper as a whole.

Snyder notes that success came only after years of effort by the *Globe*'s women's committee, which began pressing for part-time schedules in the mid-1980s.

Often, managers are willing to start out with an experiment before they're ready to endorse a newsroom-wide policy — especially at unionized shops, where precedent-setting is always a touchy issue. Then, over time, the programs are slowly modified and improved.

At *The New York Times*, where a handful of women had worked out ad hoc part-time deals over the years, the paper has slowly begun to develop new policies since Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., took over as publisher last year. (Sulzberger, forty-two, is married to a former reporter, Gail Gregg; they have two children.) After a paper-wide work/family committee presented a list of policy options to management last year, Sulzberger immediately implemented one of its recommendations by appointing Lawrie Mifflin, a veteran editor who had worked on the national and sports desks, as director of work-life services. Last summer, less than two months into her new job, Mifflin, the mother of two boys aged nine and seven, was busy disseminating information to the rest of the paper about family/work opportunities available in individual departments. She will review the earlier committee's recommendations and draw up policies for Sulzberger's approval, in consultation with a new, masthead-level steering committee.

Prior to Mifflin's appointment, making policy changes at the *Times* was

agonizingly slow, says Carol Lawson, a style-section reporter who works four days a week. Lawson, who covers family issues for the paper's Home section, is frustrated by the contrast between the pace of change at the *Times* and the expansive play she gets for stories on other companies' progressive policies.

What frustrated *The Wall Street Journal*'s Barbara Rosewicz was not the paper's policy on scheduling — she was happy with her work arrangements. "Where my nerve endings are raw has to do with benefits," she says. When she went to a part-time schedule, she lost disability insurance, family health coverage, and life insurance. And because the leave time she took after the birth of her second child was factored into the hours-per-week equation that determined benefits for the following year, she is threatened with what she calls a "year of punishment" without vacation, sick pay, holiday pay, and a cost-of-living increase.

She and colleague Rose Gutfeld found that their biggest obstacle to equitable benefits was language in their union contract. They drafted improved wording and presented it to Hunt, who brought it to publisher Peter R. Kann, chairman and chief executive of parent Dow Jones and Company. Management presented this proposal in contract talks, where it was accepted by the company's internal union, the Independent Association of Publishers' Employees. As of this writing, however, negotiations are incomplete.

Rosewicz's experience illustrates the slow, painful evolution of part-time scheduling. Whether the obstacle is contract language that curtails benefits or managers who see only the pitfalls of reduced workweeks, creating a successful program requires years of sustained pressure from committed employees.

"Ideally, ten years from now it will just be part of management's calculus about people. It will become like parental leave is now," says the *Globe*'s Sarah Snyder. "Okay, this person will probably be here fifteen years.... We need to accommodate a beginning family. No big deal." ♦

NEWSPAPER	PART-TIME POLICY	JOB-SHARING	HEALTH COVERAGE	PRORATED VACATION AND SICK AND PERSONAL DAYS
The Wall Street Journal	Yes, can work part-time for up to 5 years after maternity/paternity/adoption leave	Previously; not at present	Yes, though higher cost than full-time	Yes
USA Today	Some ad hoc arrangements	No	Yes, but lose dental, vision, hearing	Yes
The New York Times	No; some ad hoc arrangements; policy in development	No	Yes, but nonunion employees lose coverage if they work fewer than 4 days a week	Yes
Los Angeles Times	No; some ad hoc arrangements	No policy; one ad hoc job-share exists	Option to use company HMOs; no dental, vision, or disability	Yes
The Washington Post	"Maternity Conversion" divides a full-time slot among part-time employees at the department head's discretion	3 married couples share foreign bureau posts; would be receptive to proposals for home office	Pay 25 or 50% of premium depending on hours worked per week	Yes
New York Daily News	No; reviewing policy at new owner's other properties	No		
Newsday/ New York Newsday	Reduced workweek available for up to 18 months	Contract language exists, no takers	Yes for reduced week; no for job-share	Yes for reduced week only
Chicago Tribune	Yes, but few takers	No	No	No
Detroit Free Press	Yes, widely used	No	Yes	Yes
San Francisco Chronicle	Yes, can work part-time for 2 1/2 years after maternity leave; 4-day week also available	No	Yes	Yes
Chicago Sun-Times	Yes, a few people work 30 hours a week	Yes, per sideletter to contract	Full coverage for 30-hour workers, higher cost to job-sharers	Yes, full rate for 30-hour workers
The Boston Globe	Leave of absence may be taken 1-2 days a week for 2 years	Yes, including a supervisory editing position	Higher cost than full-time	Full-time rate for 6 months, then prorated
The Philadelphia Inquirer	Yes	No	Higher cost than full-time	Yes, based on previous year's hours
The Dallas Morning News	Yes	No	Yes	
The Newark Star-Ledger	No	No		
New York Post	Most of staff works 4-day week	No		
Houston Chronicle	No	No		
The Detroit News	Yes	One job-share ended, none now	Yes	Yes
The Cleveland Plain Dealer	No; some have taken existing part-time slots	No	Some covered at higher cost than full-time, others not	
The Miami Herald	Yes; widely used	Yes, including one supervisory editing job	Higher cost than full-time, lose family coverage	Yes on vacation, no on sick days

Sources: Newspaper managers, reporters, editors, human-resources staffs