Enhancing Life and Work Balance for Women

"It is 20 years since the term "glass ceiling" was coined by the Wall Street Journal to describe the apparent barriers that prevent women from reaching the top of the corporate hierarchy; and it is ten years since the American government's specially appointed Glass Ceiling Commission published its recommendations.

In 1995 the commission said that the barrier was continuing "to deny untold numbers of qualified people the opportunity to compete for and hold executive level positions in the private sector." It found that women had 45.7% of America's jobs and more than half of master's degrees being awarded. Yet 95% of senior managers were men, and female managers' earnings were on average a mere 68% of their male counterparts.

Ten years on, women account for 46.5% of America's workforce and for less than 8% of its top managers; although at big Fortune 500 companies the figure is a bit higher. Female managers' earnings now average 72% of their male colleagues.

Booz Allen Hamilton, a consulting firm that monitors departing chief executives in America, found that 0.7% of them were women in 1998, and 0.7% of them were women in 2004. In between, the figure fluctuated. But the firm says that one thing is clear: the number is "very low and not getting higher".

Source: The Conundrum of The Glass Ceiling
http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=4197626
July 21, 2005

The world today in 2007 isn't much different and it is rather discouraging for graduate female students to read upon articles like this one. It paints a reality that is reflected even in our own campus: 51% female grad students, 34.4% female post-docs and 30.5% female faculty members (sources from FGSR and AASUA).

However, comforting enough, the administrators are taking on an active role in investigating the plausible reasons for this occurrence as well as making recommendations to perhaps alter this unsustainable trend.

In this section, we focus mainly on coping strategies for women in professional positions. The tips included are advices given by women in the trades themselves. These women hold successful positions within the university and are active in diminishing the so-called "glass ceiling" effects.

Tips

1. Have a support network
   Be it academic or non-academic, it is important to have a group of people who can relate to your experiences. They provide a source for networking and moral support. Check out our links of women's groups on campus that you might be interested in.
2. **Find a good daycare for your children**
   Knowing that your children are being well taken care of will lessen your worries and allows you to be completely present in your career. Again, this re-iterates the importance of having support systems.

3. **Get as much help as possible**
   "Tenure clock and biological clock tick at the same time". To make life less stressful, seek help if it is being offered- e.g. paternal leave policies are in place but not actively utilized.

4. **Eliminate personal biasness**
   To do this, the first step is to acknowledge that everyone has some sort of bias towards something and overcoming that mindset. For example, a group of young students were shown a photo of the Oklahoma bomber, Timothy McVeigh, and another photo of an African American professor. When asked who they thought would more likely commit a crime, majority of the students voted for the latter.

5. **Take solid breaks during your work day**
   Do lunch, coffee, even sports. This will give you a chance to release stress and reflect on the day's happenings. And if you go with your co-workers, it's a chance to build better relationships with them.

6. **Manage your time efficiently and**
   Prioritize strategically, for instance, by having a 'no business email' policy in the evenings and weekends will help alleviate workload stress and give you more time to do other tasks in your life.

7. **De-clutter your office**
   Get organized so as to be completely present in whatever you do.

8. **Designate office space and time if you are working at home**
   Remember, private times become unpleasant if you keep staring at that file you are working on.

9. **Take time off**
   Take vacation time with family, friends or even yourself, something as simple as a dinner outing can make a difference.

10. **Find interests outside work**
    Take up hobbies or non-work related projects as these will help with de-stressing.

11. **Be fit**
    Get enough exercise as it keeps you healthier and helps you cope better with stress and boosts your mood.

12. **Volunteer**
    Take time to volunteer in the community. Find a volunteer program that fits your schedule and interests. It does not have to take much of your time- e.g. online mentoring, Outreach Program.
13. Find motherhood/work balance

Enjoy your leave maternity leave, if you plan to have children. But try to keep yourself in the work field one way or another, i.e., do not lose touch with your career. Do not apologize for being pregnant, it does not mean you are compromising your work ethics.

14. Organize your finances

Plan financially to have housekeeping or childcare supports.


Activities to Do On Your Own

- Take 15 minutes now to de-clutter and organize your desk where you are currently sitting.

- Try to do some desk/office exercise, for example:

  - Wrist Stretch: Extend arm in front, palm up and grab fingers with other hand. Gently pull hand down to stretch the forearm. Repeat other side.
  
  - Wrist & Forearm: Press hands together in front of chest, elbows bent and parallel to the floor. Gently bend wrists to the right and left.
  
  - Back Twist: Sit upright in chair and place left arm behind left hip. Twist to the left and hold, repeating on other side.

- Check out these local women's clubs:

  - University of Alberta Women in Science and Engineering: http://www.ualberta.ca/~uawse/
  
  - Academic Women’s Association, University of Alberta: http://www.ualberta.ca/~awa/index.htm

Other Resources

- http://www.wisest.ualberta.ca/index.cfm