

# balance sheets

A series of information sheets for employers interested in helping employees balance their work, family, and personal responsibilities

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# Xsheets™

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The Center for  
**Work & Family**  
BOSTON COLLEGE  
CARROLL SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

**One Small Step**  


MIDWESTERN  
WORK-FAMILY  
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***"Our ability to acknowledge and respond to the special needs of employees has been critical for the company to attract and retain the best people and enable them to reach their full potential."***

Marilyn Fuller  
Texas Instruments Inc.

***"Part-time professionals are thought to be one of the fastest growing segments in the labor market."***

Medea, 1997

***"As of 1997, 7.7 million professionals were working part-time. That number has doubled since 1989."***

Chambers & Tolliver, 1997

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## Part-Time Professionals & Managers

... voluntarily work a specified number of hours below the standard work week on a regular or permanent basis. The Department of Labor defines part-time as anything less than a 35-hour week. Professionals are exempt employees; managers oversee the work of others. Most part-time arrangements are also intended to be "reduced-load," with work responsibilities scaled back with the reduction in work hours. ment work/life initiatives; or 3) the results of work/life initiatives.

Many professionals, mostly women, now voluntarily seek reduced work loads to help balance their work and personal responsibilities. Contrary to popular belief, successful part-time or reduced-load professional positions can be found in most industries and positions. Unlike most of the part-time jobs in the U.S., many part-time professional and managerial positions carry full benefits and compensation comparable to full-time workers. Although part-time professionals often face challenges in implementing their new work arrangements, several studies show that most are satisfied and happy about their decision.

Employers also can benefit from part-time work arrangements. Research has found that employers offering flexible work arrangements can attract and retain valuable employees. Keeping experienced employees costs much less than recruiting, hiring, and training new employees. Employers also can benefit from higher morale, increased productivity, and greater loyalty reported among part-time professionals.

### RELEVANT STATISTICS

- In 1980, there were about 17 million part-time workers in the U.S. By 1998, this had risen to 23 million – about 18% of all workers (Alverson, 1998).
- According to a 1998 Catalyst study:
  - 98% of part-timers agreed that offering flexible work arrangements was good for employee retention
  - 37% said their work arrangement was an essential part of their decision to remain with their employer (McShulskis, 1998)
- Although pay for part-time jobs overall is only half that of full-time jobs, a 1995 Hewitt Associates study showed that more than half of the responding companies awarded medical, dental, and life insurance to employees working 20 hours or more per week (Carre & Tilly, 1998; Tolliver & Chambers, 1997).

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## THE BOTTOM LINE

From 1996 to 1998, Mary Dean Lee, from McGill University, and Shelley MacDermid, from Purdue University, interviewed over 80 part-time professionals and managers, as well as spouses, bosses, coworkers, and HR professionals -- over 350 interviews in all. Persons reporting to the part-time managers also were surveyed. Results showed that:

- managers and professionals **gained** an average of 18 hours per week by working part-time
- success of part-time work arrangements depended a great deal on individual workers, but the single most important factor appeared to be a **supportive boss**
- in over half the cases, the part-time work arrangements were seen as having **neutral or positive effects** on employee performance, not just by workers but also by their bosses
- climbing the corporate ladder slowed but did not stop -- 35% of the managers and professionals working part-time had been **promoted**
- 91% of the part-time workers were happier and more **satisfied** with the balance between home and work
- 90% of the part-time workers reported **better relationships** and more time with their children

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## MODEL PROGRAMS

### **Texas Instruments Inc., Attleboro, MA**

Marilyn Fuller -- manager of Diversity, Development, and Employment -- says that approximately 3% of TI's 850 managers and professionals work part-time or on alternative work schedules. As a result, the company has retained high quality workers. Key to success are clear agreements about expectations, regular assessments of how well arrangements are working, and shared responsibility for success.

### **SGI, Mountainview, CA**

Also known as Silicon Graphics, about 1% of SGI's 5,000 U.S. employees work part-time. Teri Alugas, Benefits Analyst, says that the organization gets "more bang for the buck" from part-time workers because they are dedicated and committed employees. Teri says work-life professionals should know that dealing with the need to manage head counts can be challenging, and that support from immediate management is key to success.

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## CONSIDERATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

Here are some common concerns among managers about supervising part-time work arrangements:

- **"The floodgates will open"** - In practice, this rarely occurs. Since part-time arrangements are usually contingent on business goals being met, excessive requests that interfere with the business can justifiably be turned down or deferred.
- **"Coworkers will be resentful"** - Coworkers may feel resentful when extra work falls to them without acknowledgment, and when they do not have opportunities to raise questions and concerns. Addressing these issues up front avoids most resentment later.
- **"The work won't get done"** - When employees have more time off, it is easier to schedule personal responsibilities outside of work hours. Part-time employees are often described as very focused, organized, and productive. Supervisors must be realistic, however, about what can be accomplished -- part-time jobs that carry full-time responsibilities can lead to employee frustration.
- **"It will be too hard to manage"** - Careful discussion of how work responsibilities will change due to the new work schedule can avoid supervisory challenges later on. Written agreements help to make sure employees and supervisors are always "on the same page." Many successful arrangements are the result, however, of tinkering. Realistic supervisors will not expect every arrangement to work perfectly as it is first set up. Flexibility on both sides is very helpful.
- **"It will cost too much"** - Workers feel unable to use part-time work arrangements if the financial penalties -- especially in benefits -- are too high. Rather than continuing to work full-time, some workers look for new jobs, a costly decision for employers. Offering access to benefits, even on a prorated basis, can make part-time work feasible for workers at minimal expense to employers.
- **"What if it doesn't work out?"** - Short trial periods are excellent ways for employers and workers to test out new arrangements. Regular checking in every few months helps to make sure that arrangements are continuing to work well for all concerned.

(Lee & MacDermid, 1999; Tolliver & Chambers, 1997)

Below are job characteristics commonly associated with reduced-load work. The tremendous diversity of successful part-time work arrangements suggests, however, that they can work in many more jobs than is commonly thought.

**Characteristics of jobs that work well with reduced-load arrangements among professionals and managers:**

- Clearly defined and bounded tasks with predictable peaks
- Access to technology at home, in the office, and often the car
- Short-term project oriented work requiring exceptional entrepreneurial effort
- Being at a high level in the organization, with a lot of authority
- Located in "staff" or support functions, or corporate headquarters
- Managing people more than tasks, leading and delegating
- Having clear financial indicators of success, a focus on results
- Client/customer interface usually handled via telephone or e-mail
- Having discrete tasks which can be re-allocated, re-configured
- Work unit operates with a strong teamwork mentality and minimal reliance on manager

**Characteristics of jobs that make it more difficult to work reduced load:**

- Excessive, expanding, or hard to control work demands
- Having to deal regularly with ad hoc emergency requests/crises

**Aspects of managerial jobs that make it more difficult to work on a reduced load:**

- Having to supervise new or marginally qualified direct reports
- Expanding staff
- Responsibilities for getting products and services out the door

(Lee and MacDermid, 1999)

NOTE: A COMPLETE LIST OF THE REFERENCES USED IN THIS BALANCE SHEET IS AVAILABLE. SEND REQUESTS TO [SHELLEY@PURDUE.EDU](mailto:SHELLEY@PURDUE.EDU).