

31 EXERCISE

Work and Family Issues

I. OBJECTIVES

- A. To understand the conflicts that sometimes arises between the individual's work and family responsibilities.
- B. To analyze the advantages and disadvantages of alternative policies and programs that attempt to reconcile the sometimes conflicting demands of work and family.

II. OUT-OF-CLASS PREPARATION TIME: 1 hour

III. IN-CLASS TIME SUGGESTED: 45 minutes

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. Read the entire exercise before class. Students may want to conduct research on the topic prior to class.
- B. Develop a list of possible policies and programs for this company to better reconcile work and family life before class.
- C. Share your group's recommendations with the rest of the class.

Form groups of three to five students, share your ideas with one another, and write out your group recommendations for policies and procedures to better reconcile employee work and family responsibilities on Form 2.3. Form 2.3 should also be used to provide details of your recommendations as well as a time frame for implementation. This time frame will depend upon how high a priority the group assigns to a particular recommendation and how much time will be required to work out the details of the proposal. In preparing your recommendations, consider the pros and cons of responding to the needs of nurses with small children without alienating other nurses who do not have small children.

- D. Present your group's recommendations to the instructor and to other class members.

BACKGROUND

Sunshine Health Services provides home healthcare services to a metropolitan area of 1.5 million in Florida. Patient visits are primarily based on referrals from physicians and health systems. The company currently offers services in eight different locations in the area and served 11,000 patients in their homes over the past year. Sunshine is a for-profit facility that generated revenues of \$10,400,000 dollars and a net profit of \$430,000 dollars in the most recent fiscal year. The company currently employs a total of 243 staff, of which 186 are nurses.

Most of the home visits are conducted by home health nurses. However, the nursing shortage has negatively impacted the company's ability to recruit and retain the number and quality of nurses needed to service the existing volume of patient visits, much less staff up for the four percent annual growth in patient visits per year expected through 2015.

Home health care has had a difficult time competing for new nursing graduates because pay rates are lower than those in hospitals. The 18 percent turnover rate of nurses at Sunshine exceeds the area nurse turnover rate of 12 percent. In addition to salary, some nurses prefer the hospital environment to home health care and others feel hospitals offer more "family

friendly” benefits as compared to home health care. Currently Sunshine provides either part-time (20 hours per week) or full-time (40 hours per week) employment options. However, they do not offer any type of flex time.

The company has taken the position that the individual’s family and work life are, and should be, separate. Both require time and effort, but should never interfere with each other. The company’s philosophy has been that each individual has a responsibility to hire or otherwise provide child-care service or whatever other services are necessary for the proper functioning of the family. The company’s responsibility has been only to provide part-time and full-time jobs for employees while serving customer needs.

Recently, that philosophy has been challenged by several employees who claim the company is insensitive to employees who have family responsibilities. In particular, they cite the lack of any child-care facilities and family-leave policies. They argue that uniform personnel policies applied rigidly to all employees (irrespective of their family situation) are inherently unfair. If the company really viewed their employees as family members, it would be more flexible in accommodating the employee’s family responsibilities.

The company CEO, Renee Brent, recently read an article in *BusinessWeek* identifying the best companies for women. This article identified a number of family-oriented policies and programs followed by 24 leading companies. Among the most significant of these were modifications in the company culture, executive development to enhance sensitivity, subsidized babysitting, child care, sick-child care, telecommuting, on-site take-home meals, elder care, job sharing, mentorship programs, women on the Board, career development policies, family leave policies, maternity leave with partial pay, modified work and family benefits, flexible benefits, hiring a pluralistic workforce, job sharing, mentoring programs, and part-time professional and/or executive positions. Some of the 24 corporations identified in the *BusinessWeek* article were in health services.

A potential major source of nursing staff for the company is the large number of nurses in the area who are out of the labor force. While some of these have left the field permanently to pursue other opportunities, others have left the field on a temporary basis to raise children or for other reasons. If a substantial number of these nurses could be enticed back into the labor force through the development of attractive job options at Sunshine, the nurse staffing issue might be elevated. Such options would need to meet the needs of a largely female work force to help them balance their work and family responsibilities.

Policy or Program	Specific Details	Time Frame for Implementation*
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2.		
3.		
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12.		

*short-term within the next year; intermediate term one to two years; long-term more than two years.