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Patrick Snow has told potential employers that his sons, Jacob, 7, and Sam, 11, come first and that he needs to limit work hours to be with them. With many employees increasingly disenchanted with corporate America, the balance may be shifting toward the importance of family.

Why work so hard?

Fed up, disillusioned employees rethinking where they spend their time

BY STEPHANIE ARMOUR

Family is important to Patrick Snow.

It's so important that he'll stop working in the afternoon to coach his sons' basketball games. It's so important that he's brought up family in job interviews, candidly telling managers he needs to limit work hours so he can be with his two boys.

He knows it means his job in high-tech sales could suffer, but it doesn't matter. Family is so important, he says he'd leave any employer who didn't understand.

"If my company doesn't like it, I'll find another job," says Snow, 33, of Bainbridge Island, Wash. He is also a speaker, coach and author of *Creating Your Own Destiny*. "Employees used to be willing to sacrifice because of things like stock options. Now, they're fed up. They realize that family is the only stabilizing force in this turbulent economy."

Employees have long struggled to balance work and family, but the economic slowdown is now tilting the scales in favor of home. Making time for family isn't just important for a few employees like Snow—it's a growing priority for many workers disillusioned by layoffs, corporate scandal and waning company loyalty.

It's also a challenge bedeviling employers. Companies facing profit pressures need to squeeze more work out of fewer employees, but they also risk retention woes if they appear indifferent to their staffs' family needs.

That's because 70 percent of workers don't think there's a healthy balance between work and personal life, according to a poll of 1,626 respondents by Reston, Va.-based on-

line job board TrueCareers, and more than half are considering looking for a new job because of problems coping with both.

"There's a real shift," says Debra Major, an associate professor of psychology at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Va. "In this economy, working 70 hours a week no longer makes a difference in how much you get compensated or how fast you advance. Employees want to prioritize their own values, not the values that the company says are important."

It's not that work is no longer important. Job insecurity wrought by the down economy means some workers are clocking longer

hours and sacrificing even more in a bid to avoid layoffs. Many feel less able to refuse bosses' requests that they relocate, travel or give up vacation in order to get work done.

"People are like a puppet being pulled in every direction," says Stephen Covey, author of motiva-

tional books such as *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

But several factors are prompting many workers to prioritize family—even if that decision means paying a professional price.

Psychologists, researchers and other workplace experts credit the shift to the changing priorities of a younger generation, family burdens facing baby boomers, the aftereffects of the Sept. 11 attacks and backlash against the profit-making fixation of the late 1990s.

Part of the shift is simply generational. As Generation X and Y employees start families, they're increasingly likely to place importance on the home front, research shows.

More than 85 percent of Gen X women say having a loving family is extremely im-

portant, compared with 18 percent who put the priority on earning a great deal of money, according to a study by New York-based research group Catalyst.

Also driving the emphasis are baby boomers, who are increasingly likely to be part of the "sandwich generation" caring for both children and older relatives.

More than 25 percent of adults have provided care for a chronically ill, disabled or aged family member or friend during the past year, according to the National Family Caregivers Association. Based on current Census data, that translates into more than 50 million people.

For these employees, there's no choice but to put family first. And it's an issue employers are paying attention to—more than 20 percent of companies offer elder-care referral services, according to the Society for Human Resource Management, up from 15 percent in 1998.

Mary Murphy-Hoye, 45, curtailed her work hours and changed job duties within Intel. This has allowed her more time to spend with her father, who is temporarily living with her family in Phoenix.

While the emphasis on family is shaped by demographics and events such as Sept. 11, the economy is also a major driver, experts say. Expectations have changed. During the boom years of the dot-com era, pay raises were on the way up. More than 70 percent of college students polled said they expected to someday be millionaires, according to a 2000 Ernst & Young survey. There was money to be made in long hours on the job.

Now, advancement is blocked because fewer employees are changing jobs. Raises are paltry. And workers realize there's no guarantee their extra effort on the job will guarantee job security. The sacrifices don't seem as worth it. Suddenly, family seems top priority.

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