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## Holiday books

Stumped for the right gift? Here are dozens of choices — the year's best books ■ 5-9D

USA TODAY

# More Americans put families ahead of work



By Jason Koski for USA TODAY

**Priorities:** Patrick Snow with sons Jacob, 7, and Sam, 11, sit with dog Kobe before an outing to Point White Beach near their home in Bainbridge Island, Wash. Patrick Snow makes it clear to employers that family is first.

# Priorities shift because of slow economy and 9/11

By Stephanie Armour  
USA TODAY

Family is important to Patrick Snow.

It's so important that he'll stop working in the afternoon to coach his sons' basketball games.

## Cover story

It's so important 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 that doesn't matter to him. 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," he says.

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.

Please see COVER STORY next page ►

# 'Family is only stabilizing force in this turbulent economy,' a dad says

Continued from 1A

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

That's because 70% of workers don't think there is a healthy balance between work and personal life, according to a poll of 1,626 respondents by online job board TrueCareers, based in Reston, Va. And more than half are consider-

## Cover story

ing 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."

Consider other national studies:   
 ▶ Finding time for family is a more pressing concern than layoffs. More than 30% of employees said balancing work and family demands was a top concern in a May survey of 567 full-time employees by staffing services firm OfficeTeam, based in Menlo Park, Calif. That eclipses the 22% who said job security was a top concern.

▶ Almost three times as many employees say family is their top priority as those who list work as a top priority, according to a survey of more than 1,000 employees by Atlanta-based staffing firm Randstad North America and market research firm RoperASW.

▶ Nearly twice as many employees took sick days for personal needs in 2002 as did so last year, according to a survey by human-resource and employment-law information provider CCH of 333 human resource professionals in 43 states and the District of Columbia.

## Tugged in every direction

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 to get work done.

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



By Jason Koski for USA TODAY

**Together:** Patrick and Cheryl Snow, with sons Jacob, 7, and Sam, 11, play with dog Kobe at Point White Beach in Washington. Patrick Snow brings up family issues during job interviews.

books such as *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. "People have prioritized in their minds and hearts, but the economic struggles and all the uncertainty have people torn between what they'd like to do and what they have to do."

Several factors are pushing family to the forefront and prompting many workers to prioritize home, 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 a backlash against the profit-making fixation of the late 1990s.

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

More than 85% of Gen X women say having a loving family is extremely important, compared with 18% who put the priority on earning a great deal of money, according to a study by research group Catalyst, which is based in New York.

Also driving the emphasis on family are baby boomers, who are increasingly likely to be part of the so-called "sandwich generation" caring for both children and older

relatives.

More than 25% 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 those employees, there's no choice but to put family first. And it's an issue employers are paying attention to — more than 20% of companies offer elder-care referral services, according to the Society for Human Resource Management. That's up from 15% in 1998.

## Nipping hours at work

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

But the new focus she's put on family isn't just a result of elder-care needs. As it was for many Americans, the reprioritization was shaped by the events of Sept. 11. Workers' resolve to put family first hasn't faded with the passage of time.

In a report this year by New York-based *American Demographics* and Greenwich, Conn.-based marketing research firm NFO WorldGroup, nearly 80% of Americans say their

family is more of a priority since Sept. 11, compared with 70% who said the same in October 2001. The poll of 2,500 adults found respondents with children were even more stalwart in their determination to prioritize family.

For Murphy-Hoye, a mother of two boys (Patrick, 8, and Thomas, 11), there have been big changes. The engineer used to work on site in Sacramento, and she traveled. But in June of 2001, she switched jobs to focus on research and work from home. She also trimmed her schedule and puts in fewer hours each day.

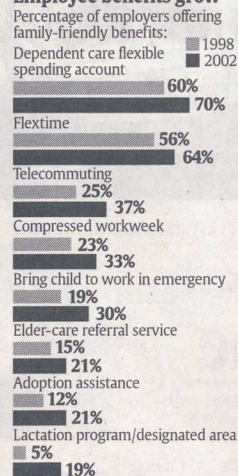
"We got a wake-up call," says Murphy-Hoye about Sept. 11. "Everything is about simplifying and getting back to what's really important. I don't feel quite as exhausted as I did before. I'm a lot more in touch with my kids."

## Employers adjust

The emphasis on family isn't lost on employers. Despite the recession, nearly all forms of work-life programs saw modest growth in the past year, according to a May survey of 945 major U.S. employers by Hewitt Associates, an outsourcing and consulting firm based in a Lincolnshire, Ill.

These benefits, such as flexible work schedules and job sharing, often cost little but provide a big

## Employee benefits grow



Source: 2002 Society for Human Resources Management survey of 531 human resource professionals

By Adrienne Lewis, USA TODAY

return.

At New York Life Insurance, work-life benefits include on-site back-up childcare, adoption assistance, flexible schedules and an employee health department.

"We've been committed to work-life for many years now," says Angela Coleman, vice president of human resources at New York Life. "We want programs that meet the needs of our employees. It's about attracting and recruiting, but also about retaining employees."

At biotechnology company Genentech, programs include a subsidized child care center near the headquarters in South San Francisco, an on-site hair salon, domestic partner benefits and sabbatical programs that provide six weeks off at full pay after every six consecutive years of service.

"They're very important," says Stephanie Ashe, a spokeswoman at Genentech. "We ask a lot of our employees, but in return, we have many, many programs to help employees with work-life balance."

Kathy Eckert knows first-hand just how flexible some companies will be. After staying home with children Sarah, 10, and Jason, 7, she took a public relations job at software development company Benefitfocus. She was willing to accept the job in large part because the company catered to her family needs. Her bosses let her work 15 to 20 hours a week and give her leave as needed to attend her children's school events. Meetings are set around her schedule.

Just before Thanksgiving, her daughter's fourth-grade class

staged a parade. On her way to work, Eckert took 45 minutes to drop in at the school and watch.

"No one was watching a clock," says Eckert, 42. "My family knows I work. My husband is appreciative of the extra income, yet my husband and children know they come first."

Shawn Jenkins, president and CEO of Benefitfocus in Mount Pleasant, S.C., says designing a position to be so flexible was a new endeavor for his company. "The result is an employee who is very focused when she is here, because when she wants to put family first, she can."

## Lowered expectations

Though 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% 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. Sacrifices don't seem as worth it.

Suddenly, family seems top priority.

It's what's most important to Luis Valdes, a vice president and consulting psychologist with management consulting firm Turknert Leadership Group, based in Atlanta.

He had been on the road three to four days a week, but after a spell at home with a mild illness, he realized he wanted more time to be with his three children, Timothy, 14, Jordan, 4, and Liana, 9 months. Now, he's focused on building a local consulting practice instead of being on the road.

"I wanted to be involved with my kids, and I was missing big parts of their lives," says Valdes, 47. "Now, my relationship with them is much better."

It's what's most important to Vivica Woods, 31, of New York, who six months ago left a secure job at a public relations agency to start a consultancy, VMW Public Relations. She can work from home and have a flexible schedule with daughter, Brittany, 4, and 1-year-old son, Logan.

"I love to work, but I want to be a very good mom," she says. "It was a risk, but my family is important."