

# Flextime: A Difficult Decision

BY EILEEN L. BERMAN



**Maxine, a 40-year-old,** married woman with two teenage children, has a respectable position in a company she has been with since she left college. To read her bio and to meet with her, you would never believe that Maxine has run out of steam. She came to see me to discuss her work situation and suddenly, she blurted out, "I'm a fraud! I'm absolutely miserable in my job and I can't pretend any longer. I go through the motions as if I love what I'm doing, but I simply don't feel appreciated. Everything I do, somebody else gets credit for."

Does this strike a familiar chord? On more days than not, do you feel as if you cannot continue working under the present circumstances? Do you pretend that you enjoy what you're doing but the reality is quite different?

Her outburst set the tone for our work together. She related to me how she works so hard, has put in many years of service, is well-paid but feels underappreciated as well as invisible and without a voice. When she attends team meetings, she feels her input is minimized although, by her account, she offers a more knowledgeable view than the one being accepted. She feels insignificant relative to the managers and supervisors who attend these meetings and who have, by virtue of their titles, far more clout than she has.

Maxine decided to go back to work after her children were born. She elected to have a flexible work schedule so that she could be available to them and her husband. The company that hired her agreed to let her choose the hours she could spend work-

ing at home and the office. If there were times when the schedule would need to be altered for either her needs or the company's, they both agreed to be flexible. At the time, she was elated at the opportunity to have both a career and a stable home life without anyone being the loser.

Years later, Maxine now has a different view. She has been overlooked for promotion many times and is not climbing the career ladder. Why? Maxine is simply not in the office enough hours during the week to have the continuity and collegiality she needs to become a visible and significant member of the team. She does not put in enough time in the office to have continuity of presence and become part of the office conversation. While she is given projects to work on, she doesn't have a commensurate title that will give her the status or the power of those who are the movers and shakers of the company. Although she is an integral part of every project to which she is assigned, she doesn't get direct credit for anything as she is seen as a consultant with a title to match. Her colleagues are the contacts for senior management and they are given the promotions, titles and the authority that are denied her.

Maxine's situation represents that of many women and men who elect to work from home as well as the office. For their own personal reasons, they want greater flexibility in their lives. For Maxine to come to terms with her situation, she needs to step back and view her role objectively. First, she influences and affects the outcome of the projects on which she works. Second, she is paid quite well for her con-

tribution and has great flexibility in her life. Last, she is viewed as a consultant and not seen as an integral member of the team.

In order for Maxine not to let her pride and need for recognition get in the way of assessing her value to the company, she needs to ask herself the following questions:

If climbing the career ladder is important to me, am I ready to make the leap right now into full-time work at the office? Will I and my family suffer as a result of my working full time at the office? If I delay my decision, will I be able to make the changeover when my family is grown and more independent?

If you elect to work from a home office, as Maxine did, you may face the same situation. In that case, you will need to make a determination whether working at home several days a week is worth the trade-off as to your ability to "climb the corporate ladder." The important factor is to assess the situation dispassionately and determine your present needs and your goals for the future.

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**Eileen Berman** is a practicing psychologist and consultant in Rhode Island. She is the author of two books, *Dealing Effectively with Job Loss* and *Building Productivity*. E-mail her at [e.berman@cox.net](mailto:e.berman@cox.net) with comments or suggestions.