

# *The* Working Mother's Manifesto

*This is How We Do It*

BY CAROL EVANS



## We Are Doing It

Today 26 million mothers—more than 72 percent of all moms today—work full or part-time. We raise strong and happy kids. We fuel the economy. We earn money that keeps our families safe and secure. And we get a ton accomplished in a day at work.

Still, most of us draw a blank when friends and family ask us, “How *do* you do it?” Nine times out of ten we laugh (or cry) and say, “I don’t know. I just *do*.”

But in our hearts, we know that response doesn’t do justice to the real answer. How *do* we do it? We do it with old-fashioned elbow grease, with humor, with sleepless nights. We do it with the help of family and friends who pitch in, with great babysitters and caregivers, with husbands who learn how to support us (or not!). We do it by cramming more into a weekday and into a weekend than should be humanly possible. We do it by finding confidence in our own choices. And increasingly, we do it with the support of our workplaces.

Working mothers today are about to face a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to change the way companies work. Employers may not want us to know it...but companies are facing a massive shortage of employees that will last for decades as huge numbers of baby boomers begin to retire. In the next decade, companies will become more and more desperate to find and keep great employees at all levels, so it’s a perfect time to tell them exactly what we need. It’s time for working moms to step back, take a breath and ask ourselves, what works for us? What can be done personally and professionally to make our lives easier, our work more productive and our families happier? What are the most effective ways for our companies and communities to support us?

## It Seems Like Yesterday

For more than 25 years, I've been passionately engaged with these questions, ever since I helped launch a visionary new magazine, *Working Mother*, which recognized very early on that the model of the American family was changing and changing fast. In 1979, a small but passionate band of editors started telling the stories of the 16 million moms who were then holding down jobs and starting careers at the same time that they were having their babies and raising their kids. From our earliest issues, we explored how working moms pull it off. We published their stories and we championed their lifestyle. And we heard about their needs.

In those first years, we got letter after letter from readers bemoaning companies that offered no maternity leave, bosses who would not give an ounce of flexibility and communities without quality child care centers. Moms were desperate for support and *Working Mother* was desperate to speed the rate at which companies were changing their practices and policies. Vivian Cadden, our founding editor, devised a plan to help companies understand what moms need—and to reward companies willing to lead the charge. Using a carrot, rather than a stick, Vivian planned to give an award to those companies that were making their workplaces family-friendly, gaining the attention of the corner office along the way.

“CEOs understand competition,” she told me. “Let’s ask CEO Jim to compete against CEO Joe to see how well their company supports working mothers.”

Thus the first *Working Mother* Best Companies list was launched, 20 years ago. That first year only 30 companies qualified for the award—but the list soon grew to 40, 50, 75, and then to the *Working Mother* 100 Best Companies. We’ve been measuring companies, holding them accountable, asking them to improve, and giving them guidance on what moms want every year since.

In 2005, on the occasion of the platinum anniversary of the list, Ted Childs, IBM's Chief Diversity Officer and architect of the world's most progressive family friendly policies, called the *Working Mother* 100 Best Companies an "American icon," and said, "Our country cannot prosper without women in the workforce, and our society cannot go forward unless women have children." His words reminded us of the ultimate reason it is so critical that we get the support we need.

## The 26-Million-Mom Secret

To say that we're mothers first may sound completely obvious. What could be more fundamental than a mother's primary commitment to her child?

But for moms who work, this has often been a silent truth. It's not something we say at the office: An openly "mother-first" attitude can negatively affect our careers at some companies. If bosses or co-workers (even other mothers!) think a woman is too mommy-oriented, they begin to feel she won't be reliable in a crunch, won't want to take on demanding assignments, won't be able to keep up with those who don't have such heavy obligations. So many of us have to keep our secret to ourselves.

## Wake Up and Smell the Baby Powder

But with 26 million of us in the workforce, does being a mother first need to remain a secret today? It clearly made sense when working mothers were a rare species around the office. But now it's more common for mothers to work than to stay home. A whopping 71 percent of mothers with children under 18 years old have jobs or careers. Nearly half of all mothers

with babies 12 months or younger are in the workforce. It seems we should be able to admit proudly that we're mothers first—and loyal, dedicated workers, too.

Even though working motherhood is the norm, most companies and communities still treat us like we're the anomaly, not the majority. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, just 13 percent of companies across the country offer paid maternity leave (beyond short-term disability insurance). Only 20 percent of companies nationwide offer child care referral services. The vast majority of companies still act like their employees are all men who have stay-at-home-wives. That's not even helpful to most men these days, let alone working moms.

## We Ask for What We Need

Many working moms have mastered the art of asking for what they need—and getting it, and offering concrete steps that other working moms can take to get the changes they want. In our What Moms Want survey, we found that more than two out of three had asked their company to make family-friendly changes. And the vast majority got what they wanted! 74% of the moms who asked for a change in their job or their company policy succeeded in their requests.

The most common changes these working mothers asked for were to work at home at least occasionally, to work flexible hours or compressed workweeks, and to work reduced hours, either for a limited period or permanently.

How do we get what we need? These three tactics are very effective for working moms: The Ironclad Proposal, Straight Talk, and Behavior Modification for Managers.

Not every tactic is effective in every situation: We need to know them all, so we can choose the right option for the right situation. Working hard for change is well worth it—when we *do* succeed, we make life better for *our* family and for many other families at our workplace too.

## THE IRONCLAD PROPOSAL

The Ironclad Proposal is a written document that describes what you want, anticipates and answers all the objections that management might raise, and uses facts and figures to make a business case for whatever it is you're requesting.

One of the most effective Ironclad Proposals I've ever seen was put together by Jaime Duffy, an advertising salesperson for *USA Today*. Jaime was assigned to me as part of a mentoring program run by Advertising Women of New York, an industry group dedicated to advancing women's careers in advertising.

When I first met Jaime, she was a young go-getter doing great things in her career. Jaime was a planner. She'd recently been promoted and our first few mentoring breakfasts focused on her desire to plot a course that would help her become a top notch manager. I noticed that she had lots of energy and enthusiasm, but often wasted both by over-analyzing office politics.

At our breakfast meetings, I reminded her that in sales, the proof is in the numbers. Office politics matter, of course, but I encouraged Jaime to clear her mind of these daily details and focus on growing her numbers day after day, quarter after quarter. She took my advice and ran with it. Her numbers kept climbing as she gained strength and confidence as a salesperson and manager.

Our mentoring relationship changed dramatically when Jaime found out she was pregnant with her first child. She was exhilarated and scared, just like she had felt about her position

in the office. We now focused our breakfast talks on issues of motherhood and working. She wanted to know what it had been like for me, what I regretted and what I embraced about my life as a working mother.

**Working hard for change** is well worth it—  
when we do succeed, we **make life better** for our family  
and for many other families at our workplace too.

After her maternity leave, Jaime went back to work full time, but soon realized she needed a change.

“I gave it three months so I could see how I felt,” she told me. “It just wasn’t going to work. I have an extremely stressful job, and a long commute, and it was weighing on me that I wasn’t spending the time I wanted to with my daughter, Shelby.”

Being a planner, Jaime plunged deeply into the body of knowledge on other arrangements she could make. She concluded that a job-share would be the perfect solution and decided to write a proposal for her supervisor’s consideration.

As an experienced salesperson, Jaime knew exactly how to pull together a persuasive presentation. First, she plunged into the research. She read magazines and books on the topic, used the Internet extensively and picked many brains, including my own, to gather statistics and case studies. She discovered a great online resource, a web site called [WorkOptions.com](http://WorkOptions.com), where work-life expert Pat Katepoo offers proposal templates for a variety of flexible work arrangements. Using Pat’s templates as a guide, Jaime tackled her proposal with the energy and detail she would put into any important sales presentation.

“I was nervous because I felt like this was something I really needed and if I didn’t get it, I might have to explore other opportunities,” she said.

Armed with her research, she wrote a five-page proposal where she marshaled all her arguments and data. Her proposal is a fantastic model for any working mother who wants change. It included five sections.

**INTRODUCTION.** Jaime started out by explaining the purpose of the document—to request a change in her job from full-time to a job share. She talked about other companies that used job shares, pulling data from the *Working Mother* 100 Best Companies list. She also highlighted the fact that many of her company’s clients offered job sharing to their own employees and would therefore easily understand and adapt to her own new situation.

**THE PLAN.** According to Pat Katepoo, developer of the job sharing proposal template Jaime used, the plan section is the core of any proposal. “It should succinctly address how you plan to handle your schedule, job responsibilities, communication with other people in the office and the physical set up you’ll need if you plan to telecommute,” Pat says. In Jaime’s proposal, she described exactly how her job share would work, down to the specific days each partner would be in the office. Jaime proposed working Monday through Wednesday with a partner who worked Wednesday through Friday. She planned to overlap the jobs on Wednesdays so the partners would have a whole day to communicate and work together every week. She outlined how job responsibilities would be jointly handled and made it clear she’d attend occasional meetings on her days off if clients needed her. “I tried to address any objections up front so they wouldn’t have a valid reason for saying no,” she told me.

Pat Katepoo says this section should also outline your compensation if you’ll be working fewer hours—how much will you be paid and whether you’ll get benefits. You may also want to include an evaluation paragraph, setting a time frame for periodic reviews of your work and the flexible arrangement.



**BENEFITS TO THE EMPLOYER.** In this section, Jaime explained that the job-share would help the company. “I pointed out some big benefits, including continuity of workflow,” she told me. “If one person leaves the company or has to take time off, there would be continuity because the other person would understand the job and be able to step right in.” Presenting the company benefits and business case helps managers feel less defensive—and gives them arguments they may need to sell the idea to their bosses.

**BENEFITS TO THE EMPLOYEE.** Jaime also devoted a section to showing how the arrangement would help her. “I felt like they needed to know that I wanted this and how important work-life balance was to me. I wrote that this would enable me to continue a career I want and love, but would also let me spend time with my family.” Because Jaime had proven she was a top performer, she knew the company would want to make her happy if they could—and understanding her needs was an important step toward that goal.

**SUCCESS STORIES AND STATISTICS.** Jaime provided ample evidence of the benefits that other companies had reaped from job-sharing and other work-life programs. “I talked about the different studies I’d found showing how work-life benefits have proven to be invaluable. I talked about how flexible work arrangements in general make for more productive employees,” she said. “And I mentioned that when employees get what they want, they work very hard to protect that arrangement. If the company works hard for us, we’re going to work even harder for the company.”

Jaime’s hard work and research paid off. She’d drawn up an offer her company couldn’t refuse. Today, the job-share she created with her partner is the envy of many other working moms in her office. Her advice to them: “This will only work if you’ve proven yourself to be a low-maintenance, top performer. With that comes trust. Your employer has to trust that the two people sharing the job are going to make this work for their clients and for the company.”

## STRAIGHT TALK

Powerful as it is, the Ironclad Proposal isn't always the right negotiating tool. If your company or manager has a more informal style, or you're bringing up an idea for the first time, you might want to use a simple up-front style.

My long-time assistant Barbara Rosenthal taught me the pure and simple power of straight talk in the office. In 1991, when Barbara and I were at *Stagebill*, Barbara was feeling tremendous pressure because her three children needed homework help every night—and lots of it. She wasn't there to help them because she worked crazy hours keeping up with my own workload. Her work suffered as she became more and more distracted by her worries.

Finally, Barbara came to me to have a straightforward discussion of the issues. She hadn't been complaining, so I had no idea she was having a problem at home. I'd noticed she was having trouble keeping everything organized on the job, but I thought we were just giving her too much to do. Barbara is a very talented woman, so we often pile more and more tasks on her because we know they'll be done well.

Barbara is not a salesperson and never will be. She didn't come to me with a written proposal or even a concrete plan. She had no eloquent words about her talent and our needs. She simply explained the problem and offered a solution.

"Carol," she said, "my kids need me to help them with their homework and when I get home late, I'm too tired and have too many other things to do to help them. Could I come in early and leave early?"

For the next three years, Barbara worked for me from 7:30 AM to 3:30 PM. It worked out just fine. If I really needed her to stay late she would, but as a general course of business, she was out the door at 3:30. We rarely had a problem and her level of work soared. She became

a mainstay of our company, taking on jobs that no one else wanted and using every working minute like it was a precious resource—which, of course, it was.

When I left *Stagebill* to go to Chief Executive, I tried to take Barbara with me, but she wasn't ready to make the risky leap to a new company. Six years later, I acquired *Working Mother* and needed an administrative assistant. I almost lost the chance to hire Barbara because I'd forgotten the lesson of straight talk! I knew Barbara had left *Stagebill* and was looking for a new job, but I just didn't see how her early schedule would work for us this time around. As CEO and owner, my responsibilities were more complex than ever and I couldn't imagine a system that would cover us for those later afternoon hours. Fortunately, our CFO, Bruce Appel, suggested the obvious.

“Why don't you just call her and ask if she can work 9 to 5?”

Ah yes. Straight talk.

I called Barbara, asked if she was interested and said I couldn't accommodate an early-in, early-out schedule. She laughed and said she hadn't been able to work that flexible arrangement since I left *Stagebill*. And anyway, her kids were now six years older and didn't want her homework help anymore.

I almost lost a golden opportunity to hire an excellent right-hand person because I forgot about straight talk!

## BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION FOR DIFFICULT BOSSES

Unfortunately, some managers just aren't going to respond to well-reasoned proposals or a simple ask-for-what-you-need strategy.

"I asked for a more flexible work schedule of compressed work week and work from home options," wrote Sharie Hyder of Seattle, Washington, one of the women who responded to our survey. "While it is stated in our HR literature that these are offered, it's up to the manager to decide if they want to let their employees use them. My manager said no."

I've heard many complaints like this over the years. Nothing makes working mothers more angry, and more susceptible to leaving their current job, than to be denied options that are supposed to be available. The problem is, no matter what your employee handbook says, it's often your individual manager who decides whether or not you can use a flexibility policy.

When you know in advance that your boss just isn't going to give you what you want, it sometimes makes sense not to ask for permission at all, but simply to make changes gradually, over time. I call this "behavior modification for managers."

When I joined Chief Executive Group, my boss, the CEO, had been running the company for years with little regard for the needs of his working parent employees, even though his management team was a youngish crew: His three most senior managers had seven young children between us. One of my boss's core management tools had been a Monday night dinner meeting with his management team that often lasted until 11:30 at night.

When I joined the company, I knew this was not going to work for me. I already had to travel extensively and wasn't about to miss every Monday night of my son, Robert, and daughter, Julia's, lives (they were then 9 and 6). I didn't believe it was necessary or appropriate for the management team to meet regularly into the wee hours...and I found it especially annoying

that my boss was often late to his own dinners! Once the wine was ordered, the business conversation inevitably drifted to more general talk, so the business we'd gathered to discuss often had to be taken up in the office the next day anyway. I had never seen such a colossal waste of time, money and energy!

The other members of the team felt the same way I did. They were dedicated dads who also worked long hours and traveled a lot. But they had become accustomed to the dinner system and didn't believe it was possible to change it, even though we all complained about it endlessly. So I decided to apply my behavior modification for managers method, one step at a time.

Right after the first dinner, which ran on and on, I said to my boss, "Arnie, I'll need to leave these dinners by 9:00 PM so I can catch the 9:19 train home so I can get back in the morning for my sales calls." Note: No mention or complaint about the babies. My reasons—at least the ones I gave him—were strictly business. At the next meeting, I reminded him of my timetable before the dinner started, and left promptly at 9 PM. Because I'd drawn a line in the sand, he began to arrive at our 6 PM dinners on time, since he knew I'd be leaving three hours later.

Next, I launched Phase 2. I suggested we move the dinner meetings to the office once in a while, ordering in food from restaurants we liked instead of eating out. I showed him how much money this would save the company and how much more we could actually get done. He agreed to try it. Once this habit was established, I suggested moving some of our meetings to lunchtime, so we could bring people into the meetings to report or confer—employees who usually left by 5 or 6 PM. This, I argued, would make us more productive. And it did.

Eventually, most of the meetings were held in the conference room at the noontime slot. They became very efficient and everyone was delighted, including my boss, who could see how our productivity skyrocketed. Morale improved and the camaraderie he hoped to foster became real instead of forced. Occasionally, we'd schedule a dinner meeting so we could enjoy bond-

ing over a bottle of wine. These dinner meetings became something special, rather than a dreaded weekly assignment.

The rest of the management team was ecstatic, of course. They had believed it would be absolutely impossible to change our boss's long-standing bad habit. But by using behavior modification to make small changes over time, and by arguing the business case, not the family reasons, for each little change, we gained the advantage. It wasn't easy and it required a long-term strategy and delicate execution. But in the end, everybody—the managers, our families and the business—ended up winning.

\*\*\*

In fact, even though people ask us over and over, “How do you do it all?” the more **interesting question** is, “**Why do you do it all?**” We do it all because we want to live **full lives**.

Sometimes in my busy life, it can seem like all the miscellaneous stuff that happens are just distractions from some bigger life I'm supposed to be living. But as the years roll on, I'm realizing that all the “stuff that happens” *is* my life and that the accumulation of my experiences would be so much less rich without all the ingredients I mix in. Without my workplace and its roster of characters, without my children and their enormous place in my psyche, without every piece that I mold together, my life would be smaller.

Maya Angelou once told me that we are the architects of our own lives and we have to take responsibility for what we build. What have I built? I have built a life that I love living. Not a

“having it all” life, or a life free of conflict and anxiety or fear or pain, but a life full of energy and learning and hope and possibility and accomplishment and humor. A life with spirit. And much of that spirit comes from the small pieces that I allow myself to fit into the grand scheme—the geese, the house, the dogs, the garden—and not from the “grand scheme” itself.

It would be easier to say no to a million things. But for me and many, many other working moms, “easier” is not the point. Taking the trouble to squeeze it all in—work, kids, pets, hobbies, exercise, church, volunteer work or whatever it is that makes our lives feel whole—*that’s* the point. In fact, even though people ask us over and over, “How do you do it all?” the more interesting question is, “*Why* do you do it all?” We do it all because we want to live full lives.

# info

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carol Evans is the CEO and president of *Working Mother* magazine, as well as the country's foremost expert on working motherhood. A trusted adviser to dozens of Fortune 500 companies, she has appeared on national media such as *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, and Marketplace Radio. This manifesto is excerpted from Carol Evans' book, *This is How We Do It: The Working Mother's Manifesto*.

Visit the author's website: <http://www.workingmother.com/>

## DOWNLOAD THIS

This manifesto is available from <http://changethis.com/24.WorkingMothers>

## SEND THIS

Click here to pass along a copy of this manifesto to others.

<http://changethis.com/24.WorkingMothers/email>

## SUBSCRIBE

Learn about our latest manifestos as soon as they are available. Sign up for our free newsletter and be notified by email. <http://changethis.com/subscribe>




# info

---


## WHAT YOU CAN DO

You are given the unlimited right to print this manifesto and to distribute it electronically (via email, your website, or any other means). You can print out pages and put them in your favorite coffee shop's windows or your doctor's waiting room. You can transcribe the author's words onto the sidewalk, or you can hand out copies to everyone you meet. You may not alter this manifesto in any way, though, and you may not charge for it.

## NAVIGATION & USER TIPS

Move around this manifesto by using your keyboard arrow keys or click on the right arrow ( → ) for the next page and the left arrow ( ← ). To send this by email, just click on .

## HAVING PROBLEMS SAVING TO DISK?

First, make sure you have the latest version of Acrobat Reader 6 which you can download from <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>. If problems persist, it may be due to your Acrobat Reader settings. To correct the problem (for Windows), a reader, J. Hansen, suggests going to your Acrobat Reader Preferences > Options > Web browser Options. Check the "Display PDF in Browser" option. Then click on Save to Disk .

## KEYBOARD SHORTCUTS

	PC	MAC
Zoom in (Larger view)	[ CTL ] [ + ]	[ ⌘ ] [ + ]
Zoom out	[ CTL ] [ - ]	[ ⌘ ] [ - ]
Full screen/Normal screen view	[ CTL ] [ L ]	[ ⌘ ] [ L ]

# info

---



## BORN ON DATE

This document was created on 3 July 2006 and is based on the best information available at that time. To check for updates, please click here to visit <http://changethis.com/24.WorkingMothers>

## COPYRIGHT INFO

The copyright in this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content. Please direct content feedback or permissions questions to the author.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial–NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA.

Cover images from <http://istockphoto.com>

## ABOUT CHANGETHIS

ChangeThis is a vehicle, not a publisher. We make it easy for big ideas to spread. While the authors we work with are responsible for their own work, they don't necessarily agree with everything available in ChangeThis format. But you knew that already.

ChangeThis is supported by the love and tender care of 800–CEO–READ. Visit us at main site [www.800ceoread.com](http://www.800ceoread.com) or at our daily blog [blog.800ceoread.com](http://blog.800ceoread.com).