

New Choices for Men and Women  
in Work and Family

BABY  
BUST

**STEWART D. FRIEDMAN**



## Praise for *Baby Bust*

“What a wonderful book. Stew Friedman stands out as one of the few male voices in the field. He understands better than anyone else how leadership, life, and business can fit together. *Baby Bust* offers a fascinating glimpse into how young people think about their work, their families, and their futures. It’s a succinct and invaluable read for managers, politicians, and all men and women seeking to better understand how the world is changing and to support greater freedom of choice.”

—**Anne-Marie Slaughter, President and CEO,  
New America Foundation**

“Provocative and practical, Stew Friedman’s *Baby Bust* draws on his landmark study to document the metamorphosis in men’s and women’s views and expectations for work and family. As more women are leaning in to their careers, more men today want to be actively engaged in fatherhood. But both see conflicts between work and family life that are increasingly keeping them from choosing to be parents. Revelatory and rigorous, this urgent call to action is required reading for anyone who wants both men and women to be able to choose the world they want to live in.”

—**John Gerzema, Author, *The Athena Doctrine:  
How Women (and the Men Who Think Like Them)  
Will Rule the Future***

“Stew Friedman has always been a trailblazer, and he has done it again! The provocative finding that 2012 graduates of Wharton are much less likely to plan to have children than those 20 years ago will receive a great deal of attention. More importantly, Friedman has probed the complex reasons why, and these are even more significant and telling. A must-read for everyone—employees, employers, and families—so that we can be much more intentional in creating the workplaces and family lives of the future.”

—**Ellen Galinsky, President, Families and Work Institute,  
and Author, *Mind in the Making***

“Stew Friedman’s unique cross-generational study finds both a triumphant new freedom for men and women and, at the same time, an indication of the deep conflicts between what we value and the lives to which we aspire. *Baby Bust* is a game-changing addition to the literature on work and family. Stew clearly and compassionately tells the story from the perspective of both men and women, echoing the challenges we all face as we seek to do meaningful work and have a meaningful life in today’s frenetic and tumultuous world.”

—**Brad Harrington, Executive Director,  
Boston College Center for Work and Family**

“Important data and fascinating insights about the revolution we are experiencing in work and family. A must-read for anyone seeking to better understand how the world is changing and what new models will require.”

—**Leslie A. Perlow, Konosuke Matsushita Professor  
of Leadership, Harvard Business School,  
and Author, *Sleeping with Your Smartphone***

“Stew Friedman’s *Baby Bust* is a wake-up call for business. The lack of strong business and public support for the positive enactment of caregiving, breadwinning, and career advancement has redefined what employees see as possible in their lives. The future economic health and well-being of the U.S. may be at risk. This eye-opening study raises the critical questions and provides practical ideas for change.”

—**Dr. Ellen Ernst Kossek, Basil S. Turner Professor of  
Management, Purdue University, Krannert School of  
Management and President, Work and Family  
Researchers Network**

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STEWART D. FRIEDMAN

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We hope you enjoy this excerpt from  
*Baby Bust*.

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Thank you for reading.

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# Introduction

## *The Game Has Changed*

In October 1987, I became a father. My mind flooded with questions. In the very next class I taught, I brought some of those questions to my Wharton MBA students in our organizational behavior course: “What responsibility do you have as future business leaders to nurture the next generation of people in our society? If you choose to become parents, how will you manage to do so in a way that works for you, your family, your business, and your community?”

Hungry for knowledge, they replied with a question of their own: “You’re the professor. Can you just tell us?” Thus began a conversation with students, colleagues, and thousands of people in public- and private-sector organizations around the world that I have been engaged in ever since.

### **The Baby Bust: New Choices and New Constraints**

For me, tracking these issues has been the work of a professional lifetime. In 1991, I founded the Wharton Work/Life Integration Project at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. In one of our initiatives, we surveyed 496 members of the 1992 undergraduate class as they were departing, and established a baseline for our longitudinal study. Twenty years later, we repeated the survey for 307 members of the 2012 graduating class.

With few exceptions, members of the Wharton Classes of 1992 and 2012 aspired to be in long-term relationships. Roughly one-third of both cohorts were already in committed unions, and most of the rest expected to be headed that way. All told, 88 percent of the



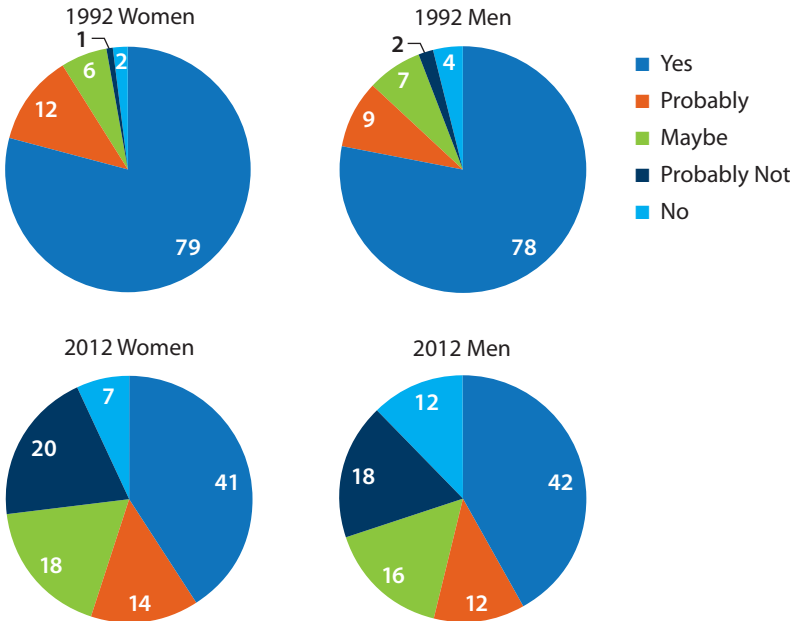
## 2 INTRODUCTION

Class of 1992, the Gen Xers, were in or planned to be in a permanent relationship. For the Class of 2012, the Millennials, the number was only slightly lower: 84 percent. “Permanent relationship,” however, does not necessarily lead to “family,” as we traditionally have understood this term. And here the differences between the two classes were staggering.

In our sample, the rate of college graduates who plan to have children has dropped by about half over the past 20 years. *In 1992, 78 percent said that they planned to have children. In 2012, 42 percent did.* And these percentages were nearly the same for men and women. Millennial men and women are opting out of parenthood in equal proportions.

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### Do you plan to have or adopt children?



We are certainly not the first to observe a decline in birth rates, and this change in plans for children is not unique to young business professionals. It's part of a larger trend: a nationwide baby bust. Across the United States, births have dropped precipitously. In 1992 the average U.S. woman gave birth to 2.05 children over the course of her life. By 2007, this number had crept up slightly, to 2.12. But according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the average number of births per woman declined during each of the four years following 2007, dropping to 1.89 (preliminary estimate)—below the replacement rate of 2.10—in 2011.

The baby bust chronicled here has been even more dramatic. While the average 1992 graduate expected to have 2.5 children in his or her lifetime—well above the U.S. mean at the time—the average 2012 graduate planned to have only 1.7. But numbers can be deceiving, and these are so in one important way. Among those respondents in both 1992 and 2012 who planned to become parents, the number of expected children remained stable at 2.6. What caused the average of the expected number of children to plummet was the sharp decline in the portion of people who planned to have any children, through birth or adoption.

The baby bust, in short, is not about young people forming smaller nuclear families, that is, with fewer children. It is about the many who say they are simply opting out of parenthood altogether.

Many are writing about whether this is a good or bad thing for our society, and there are important arguments on both sides of the debate.<sup>1</sup> This book is instead about why both men and women are opting out of parenthood. And for men and women the reasons are quite different, signifying both new constraints and new possibilities.

I use our invaluable longitudinal data to tell the story of the baby bust and the radical changes that have occurred over these past two decades that have contributed to it. Most research on generational comparisons is cross-sectional, using information gathered in a snapshot from different age groups at one point in time; what's being

compared in such studies are not necessarily differences between generations but differences between people of different ages, for example, 42-year-olds and 22-year-olds. Many such differences have nothing to do with social and cultural currents over time but everything to do with individuals being older. Our study design, which I'll describe, offers a unique vantage point because we asked questions of 22-year-old students as each class was graduating—first, the Class of 1992, and 20 years later, the Class of 2012.

Drawing on our evidence from these promising young business professionals from the Gen X and Millennial cohorts, I offer ideas about what we can all do now to brighten the prospects for our future vitality. I hope this book will inspire fresh insights for how you can play your part in the work/life revolution now under way.

The news is both bad and good. We found evidence of new challenges that are thwarting the family *and* career ambitions of young people today. Millennials foresee more intense conflicts between these two aspects of life. The time requirements of work have shot up astronomically (by 14 hours per week), and student debt has increased.<sup>2</sup> People are drowning in the deluge of data incessantly streaming at them.<sup>3</sup> Competition in the labor market has escalated, and we found that our Millennials feel pressure to conform to a narrow set of career paths. Being a parent is still very important for most young people, but many just don't see how they can manage it, so they are planning lives without children.

At the same time, we also observed greater freedom for men and women to choose paths that are meaningful to them, ones not prescribed by traditional expectations or narrowly defined gender role stereotypes. That is, for Millennials, being a man is no longer inextricably linked to being a breadwinning father, and being a woman is no longer synonymous with motherhood.

We also found that men and women are now more aligned about how to navigate *who* in a dual-career relationship should “lean in” to their careers and *when* they should do so. While some

gender-stereotypical differences about family roles and dual-career relationships linger, today's young men *expect* to see women as peers in the workforce; they are more cognizant of the impending difficulties they, as men, will face in resolving conflicts between work and family life; and those young men thinking about having children see engaged fatherhood as a way of contributing to society. This is a gigantic leap forward for *mankind*, one that has positive repercussions for women and children. Millennial men are increasingly willing to experiment with new family and work models that enable both partners in a relationship to have more of what they want in life. Twenty years ago we saw a wide divergence between men and women on family role expectations; now there's more agreement about what it takes to make long-term relationships work, promising greater collaboration and mutual support.

## A Different Conversation

The earthshaking resonance of Anne-Marie Slaughter's 2012 *Atlantic* article, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All," followed by the 2013 supernova that was Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* book-cum-social movement are compelling testimony to how much has changed. Back in 1987 it was strange for a man to be talking about work and family at a business school known mainly for its strength in finance. "Why," some of my colleagues wondered, "focus on this women's issue?" Thankfully, our new shared cultural understanding is that it's not a women's issue, but a human issue.

In addition to the continuing (albeit slow and insufficient) rise of women into positions of power, and more influential women speaking out and providing models for the new generation, men in positions of authority now recognize that they want something different for their children and are more inclined to try creative approaches. Further, given the increased desire that we and others have observed in young people to do work that matters and heals,<sup>4</sup> companies interested in competing successfully in the labor market

are adjusting their brands as employers by emphasizing social impact, enhancing flexibility, and embracing diverse employee lifestyles.

We are all part of the work/life revolution now. Our collective failure to address adequately the issue of integrating work and the rest of life has *finally* emerged as the critical economic, social, political, and personal issue that it is, and it is deservedly capturing serious attention and accelerating experimentation with new models for work and family for men and women.

Everyone has an opinion because, for the first time, everyone has a stake and a voice. It affects you, whether you're a 60-year-old male CEO whose daughter is confronting the glass ceiling or whose son faces real constraints in his ability to figure out how he's going to fit your grandchildren into his life; a 25-year-old with no children who's managing a 45-year-old struggling to take care of his teenage children and aging parents; or single or married, gay or straight.

In Slaughter's *Atlantic* article we learned the story of a powerful woman with the courage to pull the curtain back and reveal the structural impediments to her being as available for her children as she wanted to be. It was a watershed event that tapped into the electrifying current of intergenerational differences, and it opened this discussion to a worldwide audience. Yet there had already been a body of evidence on what is needed and what works. Fifteen years ago, for example, our study of Wharton and Drexel<sup>5</sup> students resulted in a detailed 10-point action agenda (echoed in Slaughter's recommendations) that called for:

1. Reshaping the division of labor at home
2. Changing society's gender role ideology through education and socialization
3. Helping young people choose careers that fit their values
4. Teaching employees how to generate support from others
5. Investing in what employees do outside work

6. Creating work environments that value employees as whole people
7. Training managers to take a new look at work processes
8. Demonstrating the economic value of investing in family friendliness
9. Authorizing employees to think and act like entrepreneurs
10. Expanding childcare options, including through public-private partnerships

Of course, we were not the only ones advocating for such changes back then.<sup>6</sup>

As women (and some men) have worked for decades to help women enter and advance in the workforce, as women's presence in the workforce has grown so that a new generation of children has been raised by working parents, and as the changing (though not fully changed) division of labor at home strains *both* men and women, we have entered a new world. But our policies and organizational norms have not kept pace with these changing realities. Though there's been some progress, we still need more flexible career paths, better-quality child care, executives who recognize and respect the whole person, and more that I'll spell out in chapter 5.

Society is now ripe for more substantial change; there is at last the chance for long-known solutions to take root in fertile ground. We have reached a new level of collective awareness—which is good news for those who care about creating a more just society where men and women can participate in the spheres of work and home as they choose.

If 20 years after we first asked graduates about “having it all” many are now saying that they are opting out of parenthood, downsizing their family ambitions, why should we be cautiously hopeful? Because we are finally discussing openly the elephant in the room: the world has changed, but our institutions have not. The

level of frustration has increased to the point where there is now the critical mass of interest required for propelling real progress. What is heartening about this moment is how many have joined the conversation. This will undoubtedly increase the options available for our companies, our families, our communities, and our selves. We've reached a tipping point, so there are grounds for optimism, even if the path ahead is fraught with significant obstacles.

### **About Our Sample and Methods**

Our study design allows us to explore differences between two large samples of students from one of the world's leading business schools—privileged, ambitious, and highly talented young entrants to the professional labor market. One of the benefits of studying this group is that if *they* are having difficulty navigating the chaotic and increasingly fluid world of work, family, and society, then we can see our results as conservative estimates of the obstacles facing those who don't have access to the same resources—which is, of course, most people. However, this is a distinctive slice of American culture, so generalizations from our results must be made cautiously. Still, presumably these young people will be part of the leadership in our society to come, so these data provide a useful window into how the next generation envisions its future.

There are some important differences between the two cohorts in our study. The Class of 2012 was more likely to be female, international, and nonwhite, with proportionally more Hispanics and Asians. It was also wealthier and more left-leaning politically.

The curriculum at Wharton changed somewhat during this time, too. But the fact that all were selected for, and completed, this program gives us a powerful and relatively rare means for contrasting these two generations. We have survey data from two points in time 20 years apart, so we are able to see generational differences without having to worry about the effects of individuals' aging, with

retrospective recollections colored by all that has intervened.

Because of changes in society over these two decades, members of the Class of 1992 and those of the Class of 2012 grew up not only in different generations, but also in different families. Graduates in 2012 were more likely to grow up with a working mother. This difference reflects nationwide trends in maternal employment.<sup>7</sup> Compared to 20 years ago, far more of today's young people grew up in either dual-career households or households with female breadwinners. Parents of the Millennials in our sample were better educated, too. In 1992, 45 percent of respondents' fathers and 22 percent of respondents' mothers had earned a graduate or professional degree; this compares to figures of 58 percent and 47 percent, respectively, in 2012. No doubt these dissimilar family experiences (at least in part) helped to shape each cohort's values and aspirations.

After gathering our data, we conducted hundreds of statistical tests to assess differences between our Gen X and Millennial samples. This book does not provide details about these analyses, which are available on request, but all the findings reported here met the standard for statistical significance. When we indicate, for example, that Millennial women are more likely to value helping others through their careers than their Gen X counterparts, this means that the chances of the pattern of responses observed in the two samples being the same is less than 5 percent, so we can conclude with confidence that the difference we observe is not occurring by random chance—that the Millennial women in our sample actually do care more about helping others than did the Gen Xers.

Many of our findings are not included in this book, but you can find simple descriptive statistics for responses to both surveys at [www.worklife.wharton.upenn.edu](http://www.worklife.wharton.upenn.edu). Finally, to fill out the picture, in 2012 we interviewed members of both the Class of 1992 and the Class of 2012. Select quotes from these interviews appear in the following pages.



## **In This Book**

In chapter 1, I describe what we observed about the baby bust's context: the impact of the digital revolution, new pathways for early careers, definitions of success (for career and family) held by men and women, and the aspirations both have for their futures.

In the following two chapters, I explain why men and then women are now less likely to plan for children. For men, the key factors are an increase in anticipated conflict between work and other parts of life, a decrease in their identification with the role of breadwinner, and economic constraints due to debt. Women, on the other hand, are less likely to plan for children because of their increased focus on social impact, greater emphasis on building networks with friends and in their careers, changes in how they view their health, and a decrease in religious affiliation.

Chapter 4 compares, then and now, how men and women think about what “family” means and their relationships with their life partners. A crucial finding here is that men and women now share more common ground in their attitudes and aspirations about work and family than in the past.

In the final chapter, I provide ideas for actions we can all take—as a society, in our businesses, as individuals, and in our families—that I hope will inspire you to think and act differently. And there is a section specifically addressed to men. The conclusion is an invitation for you to join in this voyage of discovery.

I believe there is great opportunity for us to make things better, now and for future generations. Our progress as a society depends on our taking intelligent action now to increase the range of possibilities for men and women, at all stages of their lives, to pursue what matters most to them. It will not be easy, because much of what's needed involves cultural change. And that is accelerated by a clear-eyed awareness of how the world is different now.

## We Are All Part of the Revolution

**T**he context for major life decisions about careers and families has changed for young business professionals. Men and women are much less inclined to plan to have children. Indeed, the very idea of family has shifted. Now let's try to make sense of our study's key findings and draw some practical implications for where we need to go from here—as a society, in our organizations, as individuals, and in our families—in the midst of what surely is a time of revolutionary change in gender roles, family structure, and career paths.

### Is the Baby Bust a Good Thing or a Bad Thing?

I am not a population demographer or an expert in fertility planning; nor am I prepared to make moral judgments on the personal decisions of others. Demographers, economists, and historians are writing intelligently about the potential effects of the baby bust on the environment, the economy, health care, the military, and more.<sup>43</sup> What I can try to address is this: What do the radical shifts in young people's values and aspirations about careers and family life tell us about what we need to do to ensure a brighter future for them and for subsequent generations?

There are a few imperatives on which I don't think many will disagree: We need to continue replacing the human population, and children will still need caretakers to lovingly attend to them, educate them, and support them, both financially and emotionally, as they grow. We must continue to build a society that is ripe with opportunity and choice for both men and women. And for those people who want to become parents, it behooves us as a society to make it easy enough for them to foresee how they can realize this

wish. We need our organizations and social institutions to cultivate an increasingly adaptable and productive workforce that can both compete in the global economy and raise the next generation.

Our current capacity to meet these challenges is cause for serious concern. Yet there are reasons for hope, too. We observed that young people are not including children in their future plans for a complex web of reasons. So there is no one solution; partial answers must come from various quarters. In this chapter, I'll offer recommendations based on what we found and what others have learned. I'll begin with ideas for action in social policy and education, and then describe what organizations can do. I'll next describe a model for empowering individuals to create sustainable change, with a particular emphasis on the challenges and opportunities faced by men who are aiming to lean in at home and win in their careers, as so much is already written by, for, and about women. I'll close with a few thoughts about new conceptions of family life. But first, a quick review of our major findings.

## Highlights of What We Discovered

We found evidence of increased freedom and possibility as both men and women feel less constrained by gender role stereotypes. But we also observed significant challenges for Millennials who value parenthood but don't see a clear path toward it.

The Millennials in our study reported that work is consuming more and more of life. And both their family and career aspirations were lower than those of their Gen X counterparts. They described pressure to conform to a narrow set of career paths, a finding that runs counter to what's being observed in the careers of MBA students,<sup>44</sup> who are moving toward entrepreneurial ventures. I suspect that this shift among MBAs is in part a reaction to the limited options for meaningful and flexible work that many young people encounter in the standard post-undergraduate tracks. By their late twenties, young adults may come to realize that they want something more

from their careers and they are able to assume greater control over their decisions than they had when they were 22.<sup>45</sup>

We observed, as others have,<sup>46</sup> the constraining effects of economic pressures on whether to have children (for men) and when to have them (for women). We also saw that men's plans for having children are shaped by their anticipation of future conflicts between work and family life, and that as their expectations of such conflicts have grown over these past two decades, their family ambitions have plummeted.

At the same time, we found that today's young people, and especially women, more so than in the past, planned to invest their energy in the social sphere, by addressing societal problems and by forming networks of friends and fellow professionals. While young women continue to value parenthood, many are expecting to find fulfillment through other means than motherhood. Young women who highly valued their health were disinclined toward parenthood. And the increasing proportion of women identifying as agnostic is another factor linked to reduction in plans for children. Further, young women now expect to be respected, want more time for their personal lives, and are more knowledgeable about what it takes to advance in their lives beyond the home. All told, there is a greater freedom for women to pursue paths that are uniquely meaningful to them, ones not prescribed by tradition or inherited norms. They're not locked into motherhood and seem better prepared now to forge their own paths.

Yet women we surveyed in 2012 were also more willing to accept either unequal career involvement in their relationships with life partners or no children at all because, as a number of them reported, they are aware (more than their Gen X counterparts seemed to have been) that someone needs to be with children when they are young. While much has been written about Gen X women opting out of their careers, we found that Millennial women are planning instead to opt out of motherhood. As many have decried, however, the so-

called opting-out phenomenon may not actually be a choice, but rather an indication that we are providing neither the sustainable career pathways nor the childrearing supports women, and men, require to pursue rich and full work and family lives.

While gender-stereotypical differences between women and men about family and dual-career relationships persist, today's young men expect to see women as peers in the workforce, see engaged fatherhood as a way of contributing to society, and are increasingly cognizant of the impending difficulties in resolving conflicts between work and family life. They want flexibility as much as or more than women do.<sup>47</sup> Men's new awareness of and interest in the fullness of family life is a boon to women and children both.

Our study showed that men and women are now more aligned about how to decide who in a dual-career relationship should "lean in" to their careers and when they should do so. And because they expect greater parity in career opportunities and commitments, Millennial men are increasingly motivated to experiment with new models for how both partners can have more of what each wants in life. Indeed I could write an entire book, with new material cropping up daily, about the young, highly educated men who are writing about being stay-at-home-dads or about their experiences with paternity leave. Twenty years ago there was wide divergence between men and women; now there's more agreement about what it takes to make long-term relationships work. This convergence of attitudes promises greater collaboration and mutual support.

So, what does all this mean for what we should do now?

## **Strengthening the Infrastructure of Support through Social Policy and Education**

As a commonwealth, we need to focus on what children in our society need: nurturing. How can they get it if the new norm is that both parents work and that we, unlike other developed countries and even many in the developing world, do not provide governmental

and social supports for families? At present our government spends less and less on our children.<sup>48</sup> Our social policies must evolve to catch up to new realities: Women are in the workforce outside the home, men are conflicted about how to have rewarding careers and rich family lives, and children—“the unseen stakeholders”<sup>49</sup> at work—still need love and attention to thrive. Student debt is crushing the dreams of too many young people. They need relief from the astronomical and unsustainable cost of higher education. Our nation’s youth are eager to serve society, but we don’t provide a structure with incentives for national service. Indeed, those who want to pursue socially significant work anticipate that they will not be well remunerated; we as a society are not valuing service. What follows are actions we can and should pursue now.

### ***Provide World-Class Child Care***

Children require care, yet the United States continues to rank among the lowest in the developed world in the quality of the early childhood care we provide. Just as bad, the K–12 education we offer also falls short of our aspirations and of global norms. A massive overhaul could start with labor market compensation practices, which are now based on the principle that the younger the people a worker serves, the lower his or her pay. A more forward-thinking approach would be to reduce this ratio, with all the training and licensing requirements that would be needed to justify much higher rates of pay for those who care for our youngest citizens, arguably our most precious resource. Although this has not been a panacea in European countries, it does support the desires of our young people to become parents and also have careers.

### ***Make Family Leave Available***

Family leave, including paternity, is essential for giving parents the support they need to care for their children. Right now, only 11 percent of U.S. employees receive paid family leave from their

employers.<sup>50</sup> The one public policy that covers time off to care for new children, the Family and Medical Leave Act, laudable though it is, still excludes 40 percent of the workforce. And millions who are eligible and need leave don't take it, mainly because it's unpaid, but also because of the stigma and real-world negative consequences.

We need to expand who's eligible for FMLA and to make it affordable. Family and medical leave insurance funds such as the ones established in California and New Jersey, where employees pay a small amount into an insurance pool and can then draw wages while they're out on leave, would make a huge difference in the lives of parents and children.<sup>51</sup> Such laws alter the frames of reference for decisions about flexible work policies and practices, making them more normative and legitimate, and as researchers Shelley Correll, Joan Williams, and others have observed, this helps to reduce the flexibility stigma<sup>52</sup> I talk about later, under "Changing Organizations." Many Millennials value parenting but can't see how to make it work. Flexibility without penalty will help.

### ***Revise the Education Calendar***

The standard school day is based on an outdated schedule. Other industrial and Western countries have children in schools for longer days and for a greater part of the calendar year. This provides much-needed support for working parents and, of course, greater enrichment for our children. Again, the data from our 2012 sample indicated that though young people see parenting as important in their lives, they are struggling to envision how to realize this aspiration. This is another front on which the public sector can provide help.

### ***Support Portable Health Care***

Given the increasing rates of interfirm mobility in our labor markets and the rising costs of health care, working parents benefit greatly from health care policies and practices that don't punish them for

taking time off or moving. The Affordable Care Act is a step in this direction. It will help families obtain needed care while avoiding crippling debt as both parents might now have to navigate careers in which they move from job to job. Our data revealed that if young people are to plan for children, they will need more support than they currently expect to receive.

### ***Relieve Students of Burdensome Debt***

Skyrocketing interest rates on student loans and the increasing cost of higher education result in debt burdens that are too onerous. Our findings indicated that too many young people simply can't envision a future in which they can afford to support children. This must be changed.

### ***Require Public Service***

The increasing emphasis on careerism doesn't mean that young people don't also want to do work that helps others. They do, despite their expectation that they will not be well compensated for it. But how do we as a society channel that enthusiasm and idealism? We could require a year of public service for post-secondary school youth, as is the case in some European countries. Professors of graduate students regularly observe that those who have served in the military (in the United States or abroad) are, as a rule, better organized, more serious about their studies, more conscious of their responsibilities as leaders, and generally better prepared to make decisions. Requiring some sort of service may improve our workforce and help all of us recalibrate what's really important.

### ***Display a Variety of Role Models and Paths***

This might be an antidote to our finding that career paths have narrowed because students believe they must earn money quickly and that only a few career paths offer that option. The more that boys



and girls hear stories about the wide range of noble, and economically viable, roles they can play in society, the easier it will be for them to choose freely the roles they are best suited for and want to play as adults. Young adults would benefit from opportunities to explore as wide an array of career alternatives as possible.

### *Teach Young People How to Lead Their Lives*

In both primary and secondary schools, boys and girls can be taught how to discover who they really want to be, and they can start to practice the skills they will need to fulfill their aspirations. In college, an increasing number of courses teach young men and women how to think about what's important and what success in life means to them; about their roles and responsibilities to society and in the different parts of their lives; and how to integrate them in creative ways, including how to harness the power of new technologies for communication while maintaining room in one's life for meaningful in-person interaction. Placing greater emphasis on such training would enable young people to make more informed choices and would likely strengthen their resolve and their success in pursuing their aspirations. We have seen that religion has become less important in the lives of these young people, but it has not yet been supplanted by another lens through which to view what really matters in life.

### **Changing Organizations**

Frustration at not being able to pursue a career and a family—a condition many young people reported—may compel unfulfilled employees to leave an organization. This, too, has to change, and it can. Organizations have many possible routes for helping Millennials, as well as others, while adding to the bottom line. Smart organizations have already recognized that they benefit from doing so through increased productivity, engagement, health, and retention of talent.<sup>53</sup> The best interests of companies competing in the

marketplace for talent are served by demonstrating a true embrace of work arrangements customized by and for each individual—Millennial or otherwise.<sup>54</sup>

Naturally it's easier for anyone to try something new if there are role models in the organization who've shown by example that there are various ways to succeed, if there's demonstrated commitment from top executives to trying new ways of contributing to the organization's goals while devoting real attention to the other parts of life, and if there are stories being told of others who are similarly engaged in experimenting with flexible means for achieving results.

Millennials want work with meaning, but they also want and need more flexibility—without which they can't imagine a rich life beyond work—and greater control over how they spend their time.<sup>55</sup> And they are not alone in these desires. Gen X women who have opted out are also calling for greater flexibility.<sup>56</sup> Others are as well.

Following are ideas for actions employers can take that embrace these realities and support employees' development as valued assets to businesses.

### ***Set Clear Goals Pursued by Flexible Means***

Establish clear and measurable goals and expectations and give as much flexibility as possible as to where, when, and how the work is conducted. Recognize that employees' compensation is not just in the paycheck but, especially for Millennials, also in the control of their time.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Declare That It's Not for Women Only***

We don't need more initiatives that serve only to ghettoize work and family considerations as "women's issues." Men may be even more affected by conflicts between work and family.<sup>58</sup> Frame nonwork needs and interests, and all other family arrangements, as affecting not only mothers, but also fathers, couples who don't have children, single people, and those living in other family structures.

### ***Provide Support for Childcare***

Organizations should offer both regularly scheduled and emergency backup care. More important, for all businesses to be able to afford it, private-sector leaders should encourage government sponsorship of excellent child care for all Americans, just as we have state-provided kindergarten and just as other first-world countries provide these types of family-friendly supports.

### ***Make Work Meaningful***

Connect work to valued social benefits, whether this means providing more direct feedback from customers and clients about the value of a firm's services or products, or undertaking other initiatives to serve some charitable aim.<sup>59</sup> Compared to the past, young people today want to have a positive social impact through their work.

As we've seen, young women who want jobs that will allow them to serve others are less likely to plan to have children. If their jobs were more fulfilling—that is, if they resulted in greater social impact and made more use of their talents—these women could pursue their career and social goals in one and the same role. They might not feel the need to split time between work and civic engagement, because working hard in their careers would mean progressing toward the goal of positive social impact. Being better able to pursue their career and social goals might give them room to have children, if they so desired. And of course, young women and young men are not the only ones who want meaningful work; we all do.<sup>60</sup>

### ***Show How Children Can Benefit from Having Working Parents***

As journalist Lisa Belkin pointed out in her *Huffington Post* piece, Millennial women have been inundated with messages about “opting out” and the difficulties of juggling career and family. What these conversations are missing out on is this: careers can enhance family life, and family life can enhance careers; there is a way to weave both

into a rich, strong tapestry.<sup>61</sup> A focus on the positive spillover effects of working parenthood may mean that fewer women will feel they must choose between personal and professional success and fewer men will allow fears of work-family conflict to inhibit their plans for fatherhood.

Young people need more positive examples. They need to hear loud and clear about executives such as John Donahoe, CEO of eBay, who leaned back to share in the care of his children; or Richard Fairbank, CEO of Capital One, who had his young children go to afternoon kindergarten in order that they would be able to stay up late enough for him to see them, and who coached and played every sport in which his eight children participated, all while pursuing a high-powered career. We need to let ambitious young people know that Double Dutch (jumping two ropes at once) is not only possible, it's fun.

### ***Learn to Manage Boundaries and Change the Culture of Overwork***

We're still at the start of the digital age, and we're just beginning to learn how to harness the power of technology and live in a hyper-connected world. Many people, not just Millennials, feel overwhelmed, and they need help, which smart businesses can provide, mainly by experimenting with what forms of communication work best and for what purposes.

Young people in our study expected to work 14 more hours per week more than their 1992 counterparts, and they associated these longer work hours with greater conflict between work and life. How to break this cycle? Reduced hours would help to retain Millennials and allow them to live rich lives outside work.<sup>62</sup> One avenue is through regulation. Another is through the encouragement of norms about boundaries between work and the rest of life. In too many workplaces and industries, long hours are still seen as a badge of honor. Changing these traditions can be accelerated by such programs

as those described by Harvard professor Leslie Perlow, which give teams the tools for organizing their work so that members can have predictable time off.<sup>63</sup> Then tell the stories of successful alternatives to the standard model to make a range of such alternatives legitimate and culturally acceptable. End the glorification of the work warrior. Of course, saner work hours are better for all employees, not just Millennials. They are not the only ones experiencing the strain of overwork.

### ***Fight the Flexibility Stigma***

Many organizations do provide “family-friendly” programs of one sort or another. Yet employees in nonstandard work arrangements aren’t seen in the same way as those who are,<sup>64</sup> to the detriment of much-needed innovations in how, when, and where work is accomplished. Too often those who manage workplace policies designed to be friendly to families inform parents about eligible leaves, then directly or indirectly question their dedication and commitment to the firm when they take advantage of those policies. Sharing the stories, far and wide, of admirably successful alternatives to the standard track must be part of the solution. We must create new norms and fight the flexibility stigma. To this end, slow careers may be a significant part of the solution.

### ***Slow Careers***

The slow movement (applied most famously to food) is about appreciating the value of basic human needs for connection and reflective living. Three decades ago, in 1980, organizational psychologist Lotte Bailyn wrote about the “slow burn way to the top,”<sup>65</sup> the benefits of which include normalization of alternative career paths; specifically slowing down during prime childrearing years without career penalties, and then ramping up again as children mature. Employers should demonstrate that it’s acceptable,

even desirable, to off-ramp and then on-ramp—for young men and women during the childbearing years, for older workers when they need to care for aging parents, and for all workers who need to take time off for any number of reasons. By providing models and encouragement for alternatives paths<sup>66</sup>—and perhaps organizing work according to a series of projects than based on static positions—organizations can signal to employees that their job security is not affected by their having children. This is how we retain talented Millennials and experienced senior employees, and truly support our young families. Creating a variety of possible career paths is also a way of attacking the flexibility stigma.

### **Giving Individuals the Tools and Support to Choose the Lives They Want**

Societal and organizational assistance is essential, but individuals, too, can be empowered and taught how to find solutions that work for them and also how to gain the support they need to achieve the lives they want to live. The central observation of our study is that not all young people today feel compelled to plan for children. For some, this represents an unfortunate constriction of their life goals—they want children but don't see how they can manage it. For others, not having children is what they truly want, at least at this phase of their lives, and thus represents a new liberation from outdated and constraining gender stereotypes.

In either case, it's critical that we focus on what can be done to help young people pursue their true interests with passion and confidence. If they are helped to see how they can realistically bring a sense of purpose to their careers and find the time, space, and support in their lives for all their aspirations, possibly including children, without having to suffer the unbearable conflict between work and the rest of their lives that many of them now foresee, then perhaps more of those who want to be a parent at some point will actually plan to become one.

Providing this kind of help begins with the recognition that one size cannot fit all. Solutions customized by and for individuals to meet their specific needs and interests must be the order of the day. Fortunately, there are proven methods now available that are applicable not only to the problems facing Millennials but for people at all life stages. Let me tell you about one such method.

In the 1990s the Wharton Work/Life Integration Project researched best practices for how people effectively pursue the ideal of aligning their actions with their values, in all parts of their lives. Out of this field research evolved three simple principles:

1. Clarify what's important to you—your values and vision.
2. Recognize and respect all domains of life—work, home, community, and self.
3. Continually experiment with how goals are achieved.

At Ford Motor, where I was head of leadership development between 1999 and 2001, we successfully implemented a systematic process, called Total Leadership, grounded in these principles. We designed a series of exercises that culminated in practical, individualized experiments designed to produce “four-way wins”—improved performance at work, at home, in the community, and for the private self (mind, body, spirit). Our goal was to help individuals overcome the fear and guilt that inhibited them from taking action to make things better for themselves as individuals, *and* for their families, *and* for our business, *and* for their communities. There was no *or* in this equation; it was all *and*.

Here's how it works: You articulate your values and vision for the future and then identify the most important people in the different domains of your life. You clarify mutual expectations in dialogue with these stakeholders, strengthening trust in the process. You think like a scientist and design experiments intended to produce four-way wins. Then you implement a couple of these experiments,

measure their impact in all four domains of life, and, finally, reflect on what was learned from trying something new.

The key is that for each experiment, there are consciously intended benefits at work, at home, in the community, and for the private self—and some way to measure progress toward these benefits in each of the four domains. This is different from standard flex-time approaches where you ask your employer to give you something you want.

The usual result of such experiments is that people shift some of their attention from work to other parts of their lives and—in what seems paradoxical—they see improved performance at work and in the other domains because of greater focus, with less distraction, on the people and projects that really matter. They feel a greater sense of meaning and purpose, greater support for pursuing goals that matter, and more optimism about the future. Whether or not the experiments succeed, after reflecting on what works and what doesn't, they generate insights about how to create change in their lives that is sustainable, because such changes are actively and intentionally planned to produce benefits for all the different stakeholders in all domains of life. The most critical outcome is greater confidence and competence in their ability to initiate positive change. There's a shift in how they think about what's possible. They are less afraid to try new ways to make it all work. This is why this model is not only sustainable, but also contagious! And because it's entirely individualized, it's applicable to any life circumstance; this is not just for Millennials.

With students (undergraduates, MBAs, and executives) and in a wide array of organizations since 2001, we have found that, when given the chance, people are eager to take up the challenging task of experimenting with new ways to braid together the strands of their lives. And they're able to muster the courage and support to do so because they believe that the purpose of their initiatives is to make things better not just for themselves, not just for their families



and communities, but for their organizations, too. This not only helps them overcome fear and guilt, but also buffers them against the flexibility stigma, because experiments are undertaken with the intent of achieving demonstrably improved performance at work. This is neither a perk nor a favor the company is doling out. Just the opposite: it's a boon to firm performance.

This approach directly addresses the needs we observed in Millennials to have work that is meaningful, to lead social lives that are rich, and to have flexibility and control in weaving a coherent tapestry. And of course this isn't the only proven approach to have emerged in the past decade.<sup>67</sup>

So instead of first thinking about workplace flexibility as a program that one might want to somehow take advantage of, what is needed is a fundamentally different mind-set, with the individual asserting control and thinking, "This does not have to be a zero-sum game." The biggest hurdle to adopting this kind of method is the common construction "work/life balance." As I've been arguing for decades, this term is retrogressive because it compels one to think automatically about conflict and trade-offs rather than encouraging creative thinking about practical ways of making life better in all its different parts.

## **Men Leaning In at Home**

Much has been written already about how to help women succeed at home and at work, but men must be as much a part of the story as women. That's why I'm devoting this section to men. However you slice it, it's essential to have men's partnership in creating new alternatives—whether as stay-at-home-dads, dads with extensive paternity leaves, or dads sharing care—and in increasing their ownership of domestic responsibilities.

My subversive mission in creating the Total Leadership model was to provide the language and tools that men could use to address

directly their particular challenges in integrating work and the rest of life without feeling they were doing the “women’s work” of “finding balance.” This is critical still, especially in light of how, as we observed, gender role stereotypes linger in this period of transition.

The key words in this model were not *work/life*, *work/family*, and certainly not *balance*, but rather, *leadership*, *performance*, and driving change to produce *results*—words that convey the idea that this business is not for women only. And it worked. This language makes it easier for organizations to gain acceptance for using this approach to help people—men and women, at all career stages and all levels—learn what they can do personally to create meaningful, sustainable change that increases their productivity at work and their commitment to their work, and improves their lives beyond work.

Men today expect to make bigger contributions to their households than their fathers did,<sup>68</sup> and the anticipation of conflict between home and work has increased. Just as women need support from their organizations and their families to surmount the hurdles of fear and tradition that keep them from achieving, men, too, need help getting past the roadblocks that keep them from engaging more fully as caregivers and homemakers. Breaking the mold of deeply rooted gender stereotypes won’t be easy, because men face substantial barriers at work, in their homes, in their communities, and inside their own heads.<sup>69</sup> But for their fulfillment, and for women to advance in the world of work, men must advance in the world of home. The good news is that when men find smart, creative ways to dive in at home, they also perform better at work.

Traditional gender stereotypes are prisons for men, too, and hold many men back from trying new approaches to work and family life.<sup>70</sup> Like women, men are penalized for requesting or enacting flexible schedules. Men may wonder, “What if I’m just not a good dad? What if I’m perceived by my friends as unmanly because I’m doing ‘women’s work’? What if my children see me as a poor role model because I’m not the breadwinner?” There is whole new industry of stay-at-home-dad (SAHD) bloggers; websites, books, and articles

by and for SAHDs; and gatherings where they explore in nuanced and poignant detail what they are struggling with, and reveling in, as they try to weave a new fabric that combines breadwinning and caregiving.<sup>71</sup>

So how does a man garner the courage to act, despite these worries and real-world impediments, and get his boss and coworkers to encourage him to have breakfast with his family, leave work in time to pick up the kids at school, take a paternity leave, and be truly focused on his family when he's with them instead of constantly checking his digital device about work matters? How can a man ask for the help he needs to sustain his involvement with his family and his work? And how does he enlist his family to support him in taking a more active role at home so that they see it as a benefit, not a nuisance, to them? In short, how can we help empower men so that they can foresee both manageable and, indeed, rich family and work lives even in unsupportive work environments?

Here's some advice, guys. First, think about what really matters to you and figure out what's not working and what you wish you could do to ameliorate the situation. In what ways are you failing to act in accordance with your values? What if your spouse or partner is unhappy with your lack of engagement and availability? If you're a father, do you feel that you're missing out on your kids' childhoods? Are you distracted by work when you're with your friends or at home and distracted by concerns about your family when you're trying to work? Asking these kinds of questions often produces these kneejerk reactions:

- There is no solution that will work because my boss would never go for changes.
- I can't ask for something that's just for me and my family because it's selfish.
- I know I'm not happy, but I don't see how things can improve, short of my leaving the job.

To get to the next step, it helps to find a peer coach (or two)—someone preferably outside of your immediate work circle—to talk to about what you’re thinking. I have never seen anyone voice a problem for which someone else, with a fresh perspective, could not find new ways of seeing possibilities for positive change.

Then talk to those who matter most to you about what they really expect of you, how you’re doing, and what you could do better. More often than not, what we think others expect of us is greater than (or a bit different from) what they actually expect of us. For example, you might think that being at work until very late is seen by your coworkers as a sign of your commitment and great performance when it is actually viewed as an indication of your inefficiency—as in, “Why can’t you get your work done faster so that you don’t need to be here this long into the night?” Find out exactly what the people who matter most to you need from you. Once you know more about what’s actually expected, you’re ready for the next step.

Try an experiment, a small change for a brief period (a week or a month) and keep front of mind the benefits not to you—you will not forget those, I promise—but to key people at work and to people you care about in other parts of your life.<sup>72</sup> An experiment is time limited and has measurable outcomes. The proof will be in the pudding, and your colleagues, family, and friends will be the judges. Make it clear that after the agreed-upon duration, if the experiment is not working for them, then you will return to the status quo, or try something else. No one has anything to lose, and all have something to gain. More often than not, when approached with this goal—to make it a win for all concerned—people around you might surprise you with their reasonableness.

When you invest intelligently in being a better father, or a better friend, or a better marathoner, then you will see how this makes you more confident in your parenting skills, friendships, or your physical condition, for example. The increased confidence spills over into other spheres; you become less distracted at work, more energetic,

and have a clearer focus on business and family results that matter. As you grow more confident, you become less anxious about what others might think of you as you do more at home or spend less time at the office. Although the interventions can be fairly simple, the results can be dramatic—productivity usually increases at work because you are happier and more focused on important results.

For employers, helping men be more active at home, helping all employees be able to engage in the things that matter most to them, makes good business sense. It's wise to encourage people to engage in dialogues with important stakeholders and to experiment with small changes that can enrich their families, enhance their engagement with their community, and improve their health—all while enhancing the bottom line. By making it easier for men, and women, to live more whole, fully integrated lives, employers indirectly contribute to paving the way for the women in their lives to give more of themselves to their work and careers. And, of course, children win, too. We as a society are all the beneficiaries.

## **Reimagining Family Life**

I don't believe that companies should be in the fertility planning business, but they should care about their employees being happy, if only so they can be more productive and so the good ones don't quit. And while it is essential to consider what businesses can do, in the near term it will be difficult to come up with organizational changes that increase young people's willingness to become parents. Governmental policy changes can be glacial, and societal norms often evolve slowly.

For those who do want to have children, there is a growing literature that can inform families about how to thrive when both parents are engaged as breadwinner and caregiver.<sup>73</sup> Jessica DeGroot, for example, has led the ThirdPath Institute's research on models of shared care, providing tools, inspiring examples, and support for families committed to the egalitarian ideal.

Men and women today are more likely than the previous generation to share the same values about what it takes to make dual-career relationships work. One implication of this finding is that there is greater solidarity among men and women and therefore more flexibility about the roles both men and women can legitimately take in society. There is now a greater sense of shared responsibility for domestic life. Young men are realizing they have to do more at home than their fathers did, and today's young men want to do so. The Families and Work Institute's research on the "new male mystique" affirms this trend, as do Brad Harrington's New Dad research at the Boston Center for Working Families and Michael Kimmel's decades-long studies of masculinity.

Of course the sharing of care can happen either in series or in parallel, with costs and benefits linked to both options. A clear pattern we observed is that young people are forestalling the arrival of children. Perhaps this foretells a "slow family" movement to coincide with slow-burn careers—a variety of family life models that enable both partners, at different stages of their lives or simultaneously, to engage more or less, depending on their needs and interests, in their families and in their careers.

With more available and legitimate choices for family life, stronger support from organizations, wiser social policy, and greater confidence in their ability to create meaningful change, young men and women can flourish in all the roles that matter to them—at work, at home, and in their communities—in ways we've not yet seen.

## About the Author

**Stewart D. Friedman** has been at The Wharton School, where he is the Practice Professor of Management, since 1984. In 1991 he founded both the Wharton Leadership Program, initiating the required MBA and undergraduate leadership courses, and the Wharton Work/Life Integration Project.

Stew served for five years in the mental health field before earning his PhD in organizational psychology from the University of Michigan. In 2001 he concluded a two-year stint (while on leave from Wharton) at Ford Motor, serving as the senior executive responsible for leadership development worldwide. In partnership with the CEO, he launched a portfolio of initiatives to transform Ford's culture; 2,500-plus managers per year participated. Following these efforts, a research group (ICEDR) described Ford as a "global benchmark" in leadership development.

Stew is the author of the award-winning best seller, *Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life* (Harvard Business, 2008). Now translated into many languages, this book describes his challenging Wharton course (originally produced at Ford), in which participants do real-world exercises to increase their leadership performance in all parts of their lives by better integrating them. They do so while working in peer-to-peer coaching relationships and using an innovative social learning website that Stew's team designed and built. The Total Leadership program—which marries the work/life and leadership development fields—is used by individuals and organizations worldwide, including in an NIH-funded project on improving the careers and lives of women in medicine. The Total Leadership website was chosen as one of *Forbes's* best for women.

Stew's other publications include the widely cited *Harvard Business Review* articles "Work and Life: The End of the Zero-Sum

Game” (1998) and “Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life” (2008); and the *Academy of Management Executive* journal article “The Happy Workaholic: A Role Model for Employees” (2003). His *Work and Family—Allies or Enemies?* (Oxford University Press, 2000) was recognized by the *Wall Street Journal* as one of the field’s best books. In *Integrating Work and Life: The Wharton Resource Guide* (Jossey-Bass, 1998), Stew edited the first collection of learning tools for building skills for integrating work and life. He also edited *Leadership Succession*, which was recently rereleased by Transaction Books.

He has advised many organizations, including the U.S. Departments of Labor and State, the United Nations, and two White House administrations. He gives high-energy keynotes, conducts interactive workshops, and is an award-winning teacher. The *New York Times* cited the “rock star adoration” he inspires in students. Stew was chosen by *Working Mother* as one of America’s 25 most influential men to have made things better for working parents and by Thinkers50 as one of the “world’s top 50 business thinkers.” The Families and Work Institute honored him with its Work Life Legacy Award.

Stew blogs at [hbr.org](http://hbr.org), and you can follow him on Twitter @StewFriedman.