

One step closer to greatness

By **Jennifer Swanberg**

Work/life columnist

We can all feel the synergistic energy surrounding Lexington's push to become a great place for families to live, for people to work and for businesses to locate their operations. Urban housing is flourishing, economic development funds are being used to develop new companies and lure others to move to our area, and Mayor Newberry is committed to ensuring Lexington becomes the most bike-friendly community in Kentucky.

Lexington now has another reason to brag. Our city has been selected as one of only nine new cities in the United States to participate in the national initiative When Work Works.

When Work Works is a very prestigious ongoing initiative spearheaded by the Families and Work Institute (located in New York City) in partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for a Competitive Workforce and the Twiga Foundation. Funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, When Work Works has been developed to highlight the importance of workplace flexibility as a strategy to enhance businesses' competitive advantage in the global economy and to help both employers and employees succeed. Lexington joins 20 returning communities, including Providence, R.I., Savannah Ga., Seattle, Wash., and Chicago, Ill., who have been changing the way workplaces function within their communities.

Lexington's local When Work Works initiative is being led by a unique university-community collaboration referred to as the Core Leadership Community Coalition (CLCC). The CLCC is comprised of six partners including the Mayor's Office, Commerce Lexington, UK Institute for Workplace Innovation, Kentucky Small Business Development Centers, Bluegrass Chapter of Society of Human Resource Management and Business Lexington. Led by the UK Institute for Workplace Innovation, members of the CLCC will ask employers in Lexington to join the initiative by participating in a range of educational opportunities on workplace flexibility, and to consider applying for the 2008 Alfred P. Sloan Awards for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility. (To review recipients of last year's awards go to: <http://www.familiesandwork.org/>)

When Work Works, as a national initiative, emerged out of a need to strategically address the needs of today's workplaces, working families and the economy. Eighty-five percent of the workers in the United States live with someone whom they consider family. Nearly 50 percent of workers care for children under the age of 18, and well over 25 percent of working people anticipate they will care for an aging loved one in the next few years. It is not surprising that employees today are increasingly feeling pulled between their responsibilities at work and at home. In 1997, 34 percent of employees reported that work and family responsibilities interfered with each other; this number increased to 45 percent in 2002. The reasons for this sharp increase in work-family conflict in just five years are complex, but we know that long work hours, non-traditional schedules, and the mismatch between starting and quitting times and off-the-job responsibilities contribute significantly

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to employees' experiences of work-family conflict. In fact, employees who work more than 50 hours per week experience greater work-family conflict than employees working fewer than 35 hours. While it is difficult to assess the consequences of this rise in work-family conflict, I think we can all recall situations when we have felt frazzled by the ongoing demands of work, personal and family life, and the consequences associated with this stress.

To address this issue, in part, and to respond to a range of other business needs, organizations are creating flexible work initiatives such as flex-time and phased retirement and modifying traditional norms associated with becoming a partner in a law or consulting firm. The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation has had such foresight in recognizing workplace flexibility as business imperative that the foundation has invested millions of dollars in recent years on scholarly research, public policy change initiatives and action-oriented research. Their investment has led to such initiatives as When Work Works, which is designed to expedite the adoption of flexible work solutions and to inform business leaders and public policies of the urgency of this matter. The outcomes of their investments have demonstrated that flexible work solutions, when developed with attention to both employer and employee needs, can improve business performance and bottom-line outcomes, while also improving the quality of life for employees and their families.

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Oct 5, 2007

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