This article appeared in the HBR Blog Network online, posted October 24, 2012:
http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2012/10/what_about_working_fathers.html.
Reprinted with permission.

HBR Blog Network

What About Working Fathers?

by Lauren Stiller Rikleen | 8:00 AM October 24, 2012

Over the past few decades, we've seen reams of research and articles about the challenges that confront working mothers and been given heaps of advice on what corporate leaders can do about it. But what about working fathers?

A series of studies from the Boston College Center for Work & Family in the Carroll School of Management looks at how men are integrating work and family responsibilities in the 21st century. And there's a clear message for managers: work-life needs are not gender specific.

The New Dad: Exploring Fatherhood Within a Career Context shows a group of new fathers adjusting their career ambitions as they endeavor to become more engaged parents. As one of the men interviewed explained: "When the [baby] was born, I was asked to travel to ten different offices around the country. And I was like, 'My kid is a month old. My wife is getting used to being a mother. I'm getting used to being a father.' Luckily, I was able to get out of it but I realized that there will probably be a lot more moments where you have to pick one or the other." Another study subject echoed that sentiment: "I could keep moving up, but I know that will come with other requirements. I don't want the pendulum to swing back in the other direction where where it's going to encroach on my ability to spend quality time with my family."

A follow-up report, The New Dad: Caring, Committed and Conflicted, based on a survey of nearly 1,000 working fathers, indicates, however, that those adjustments can be more difficult than expected. A full 99% of the men surveyed said their managers' expectations of them had stayed the same or increased following the births of their most

recent children. And, while 65% said they think that both parents should divide caregiving equally, only 30% said it actually worked that way in their households.

Finally, The New Dad: Right at Home focused on a different type of working father: stay-at-home dads who are the primary caregivers of at least one child under the age of 12 and whose spouses work full-time. The men in this survey typically embraced their roles and as a result gave their wives greater flexibility and focus at work, including freedom to accept travel assignments and schedule late meetings. Notably, however, this did not necessarily cause those partners to accelerate their careers. As one recent dad, who had stayed home with the kids while studying for his MBA and was starting to look for a job, put it: "The grand master plan would be to have [my wife] cut back to four days a week and have me work four days a week and that way we only put them in daycare or aftercare for three days and we each get a day to hang out with them."

The implications of the CWF studies for today's workplaces are significant. Contrary to more recent provocative media coverage, the changing roles of women at work and men at home do not signal the rise of the former at the expense of the latter. The trends are far more nuanced. The couples in these studies seemed to be trying to divide bread-winner and caregiver duties between them, moving well beyond the norms of past decades. Indeed, fathers and mothers now face many of the same struggles at work and at home.

Companies can respond by introducing transparent, gender-equal, family-friendly policies that offer flexibility and by fostering a culture that places no stigma on those who benefit from them. The studies showed that fathers tend to use informal workarounds to spend more time with their kids; they should instead be encouraged to use formal ones, including flextime, telecommuting and compressed work weeks. Bosses who ask dads about their family should become the norm, not the exception, in every industry. Let's give equal treatment to all the mothers and fathers who want to leave work early to take a child to a doctor's appointment — and hasten the day when it has no impact on their next promotion.

Lauren Stiller Rikleen
President, Rikleen Institute for Strategic Leadership
www.RikleenInstitute.com

Executive-in-Residence
Boston College Center for Work and Family
22 Stone Avenue
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467
617.552.8931
LaurenR@bc.edu
www.bc.edu/cwf