

The Value of Women's Work Can Change the Workplace



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Any idea when this statement was made? OK, a clue: I recently ran across it while reading a [speech given by Harriot Stanton Blatch](#) at a suffragist convention—in 1898.

There has been a marked change in the estimate of [women's] position as wealth producers. We have never been “supported” by men; for if all men labored hard every hour of the twenty-four, they could not do all the work of the world. A few worthless women there are, but even they are not so much supported by the men of their family as by the overwork of the “sweated” women at the other end of the social ladder. From creation’s dawn, our sex has done its full share of the world’s work; sometimes we have been paid for it, but oftener not.

Isn't it amazing that Blatch made this argument 113 years ago? Her point still resonates today. A study released by the [Center for American Progress](#) shows that in the down economy, women increasingly became the sole breadwinners, [despite the persistent wage gap](#), since men were being laid off at higher rates to trim companies' bottom line. More and more men defined themselves as "[stay-at-home fathers](#)." Women were fully half the paid workforce as of last year, and because women were concentrated in lower paying jobs were less likely to be laid off.

And yet we aren't seeing enough of a change in workplace culture as a result. Indeed, since the so-called "mancession" has eased up and companies have started to rehire, [men are now being snapped up for job](#) openings at considerably higher rates than women, causing a new term, "womancection" inevitably to enter the lexicon. Diversity initiatives such as those at many major law firms that explicitly sought out women and minorities are [going by the wayside](#).

And, says [Jacki Zehner](#), one of the rare female former partners at Goldman Sachs, who later founded her own financial firm and is co-chair of the philanthropic [Women Moving Millions](#) campaign, "Though we are now over 50% of the workforce, we are still the vast majority in



lower paid jobs without benefits and make on average only 80% of the male wage."

The challenge, then, is for men and women to band together to make the workplace and work life such that people of both genders can both earn a living and have a life. This is the necessary next wave of the feminist movement.

Because these days, men want to participate in their children's lives as women have always done. Family-friendly policies benefit everyone. But many, if not most, men are afraid to take paternity leave or a sick day to take care of an ailing child. And those not in paid employment, as well as the growing number of freelancers and caregiving workers, often have no health care benefits or paid sick days.

As the workplace moves ever closer to gender parity because employers need the skills of both men and women; as the ailing economy moves ever closer to one in which both partners must work outside the home to make ends meet, and as the cultural power balance between partners becomes increasingly equalized because of growing parity in income generation, the work that both do at the office or at home—or in someone else's home—must be valued and supported accordingly.

And women's growing financial power makes it increasingly possible to do so.

Zehner, who blogs at [The Purse Pundit](#) and will be conducting a panel on women's financial investments at a [Women Moving Millions](#) conference in April, says:

We need to... buy products and services from companies that provide equal access and opportunity for women and embrace the values of diversity. Further we need to seek out companies that do embrace our values AND of course provide us with a great service or product. The takeaway – put your money where your values are.

Let's not still be having this debate another 100 years hence. Check out Ann Crittenden's post ["It's Her Choice'--Really?"](#) to find out more about the needed workplace changes that can give women's work the value it deserves right along with men's, and make a healthier worklife possible for both genders.

Now that would really be making history!