

Good Housekeeping

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Make Full-Time Money Working Part-Time

These determined moms found flexible schedules without sacrificing their family finances. You can too.



Imagine having an extra 10 hours a week to spend with your kids, get chores done, even squeeze in a few long walks — while you still make good money. It's a fantasy for many women. While only 24 percent of employed women work part-time, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, six out of 10 working women said part-time hours are ideal in a 2007 Pew Research Center study.

For most women, going part-time means accepting the obvious trade-offs. They often make less money, lose benefits, and risk putting their career off track.

But there are women who avoid the pitfalls and manage to have it all: These five women, all moms, work 30 or fewer hours a week on flexible schedules and still earn more than \$32,500 (the median full-time salary for a woman in this country). Some of them make much, much more. Read on for their stories

— and some valuable lessons you can learn from their success.

Sell Your Smarts

Debra Cohen, 40
 Founder, Home Remedies referral service
 Annual income: \$125,000
 Hours per week: About 30
 Children's ages: 8, 12

After sprucing up her family's 70-year-old Tudor in Hewlett, NY, Cohen, a lifelong home-improvement buff, assembled a list of top contractors. "Whenever I discovered a good painter, plumber, or carpenter, I'd share the name," she says. After leaving her full-time job as an assistant at an aviation magazine to care for her first baby, she decided to build a business based on home-improvement referrals.

Cold-calling local real estate offices and hardware stores for names of competent contractors while her daughter was sleeping or watching a video, Cohen (who says, "I'm a networker by nature") built an extensive database. Contractors paid a commission for work secured; customers got referrals for free. She chose contractors who'd been in business 10 years or more, checked with the state and county to make sure they met licensing requirements, reviewed Better Business Bureau and Consumer Affairs records, and checked references.

The referral service caught on quickly after a two-pronged marketing plan: a direct mail campaign and spreading the word among home-improvement and real estate professionals. When inquiries came in from people wanting to set up referral services in other towns, Cohen wrote a manual on how to run a local branch of the referral service based on a franchise manual a consultant from the Wharton Small Business Development Center gave her, part of a package of services that included consultation with her. Her first newspaper advertisement drew 33 responses in one day. The branch businesses are operated mostly by other women, who recruit and screen their own contractors.

Smooth-transition tip: Whether you are starting a business from home or telecommuting, it is crucial to reserve blocks of work time, says Cohen. Turning down playdates or coffee during "office hours" may be uncomfortable — "I feel other moms don't realize I actually work," says Cohen. She avoids hurt feelings by mentioning that she's working and suggesting another time that fits her schedule. She lets personal calls go to voice mail during the day and returns them evenings and weekends. "It can be lonely sometimes, but working from home requires a lot of self-discipline," she says.

Next: Go Back to School

Go Back to School

Janet Wise, 49
Nursing-school professor
Annual income: \$95,000
Hours per week: 15 to 30
Children's ages: 19, 23

Janet Wise already had flexibility as a nurse in Los Angeles, working three 12-hour shifts a week, mostly on weekends. But when colleagues told her she could work three eight-hour shifts as a professor at a nursing school, with full-time benefits, she contacted Santa Monica College and accepted her first teaching job. Because she had a master's degree — a requirement at most universities — she didn't need to go back to school. The shortage of nurses has created a huge demand for professors, and Wise's specialty in psychiatric nursing is particularly prized.

She keeps her hours lean through smart time management, grading work during her office hours at school rather than doing it at home. Five years into her new career, she is considering teaching remotely from Paris — her dream destination — as an online professor.

Smooth-transition tip: Full-time teaching positions at many universities require a Ph.D., says David Drew, Ph.D., a professor at Claremont Graduate University and coauthor of *What They Didn't Teach You in Graduate School: 199 Helpful Hints for Success in Your Academic Career*. However, many community colleges and some colleges make exceptions for those with master's degrees in high-demand fields such as nursing, math, and computer and information science, he says. To find out how much demand there is for professors in your field, check out the job listings in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (chronicle.com) and the Websites of local universities.

Though the pay is low — around \$2,500 to \$3,000 per course — teaching as an adjunct professor is a great way for professionals to break into university work, Drew says.

If your highest degree is a B.A., teaching is still possible if you have a sought-after expertise, such as running a small business, says Andrew J. Sherman, a Washington, D.C., attorney and partner at Dickstein Shapiro who advises business clients and has taught at Georgetown University for 12 years and the University of Maryland for 19 years as an adjunct. He suggests offering your services as a guest speaker for professors in local universities. "A number of my guest lecturers have gone on to become professors," he says. Teaching a few classes will also give you insight into whether you will enjoy planning a semester-long course.

Executive-education programs, offered to professionals wanting to sharpen their business skills, also provide opportunities to teach at the university level. To find out more about them, contact the head of a university department in your specialty.

Next: Start Your Own Business

Ready, Set, Launch!

Renee Wood, 43
Founder, The Comfort Company
Annual income: \$189,000
Hours per week: 20 to 30
Children's ages: 6, 9, 13, 15

If you can't find a product you're looking for, you may have stumbled on a business idea. That's what happened to Wood, of Geneva, IL, who had left her career as a medical social worker after the birth of her third child. Unable to find a meaningful sympathy gift for her bereaved sister-in-law, Wood fashioned a teardrop out of Play-Doh and had a jeweler cast it in silver as a pendant. When friends wanted necklaces to give as condolence gifts, she realized she had the seed of a business.

Wood had to teach herself the rudiments of running a small company, working whenever her children were in school or napping. At a small-business trade show, she found a manufacturer to produce the pendants. Then the busy mom, who says she is "technologically illiterate," learned how to design a marketing Website from library books. "I couldn't go to classes because I was raising my kids, but I could pick up a book," she says.

Today the business is thriving, with more than 200 orders a week for 288 sympathy-related products, including 30 she designed. Sales are up \$60,000 this year, and Wood now employs another mom from the neighborhood part-time.

Smooth-transition tip: If you have a great entrepreneurial idea but lack business skills, don't let it hold you back. You don't need an M.B.A. to run a small business. You can get low-cost help by calling the business school at a local university. Many programs make their students available as consultants for low hourly rates, working under the guidance of professors. Once you have a plan in place, they can advise on marketing products or increasing your profit margin. The Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers keeps a list of centers that may offer professional help to area business owners (765-285-9002).

Next: Update Your Old Job

Old Job, New Twist

Kelly Flores, 32
 Travel agent, Flight Centre
 Annual income: About \$65,000
 Hours per week: 25
 Children's ages: 2, 4

Flores thought her career as a travel agent was finished when she opted to stay home after her first child was born. Then she got a call from her former boss at Flight Centre, a global travel agency based in Australia. Could Flores come into the Newport Beach, CA, office for a month part-time to cover for vacations? When Flores said she hoped to find a telecommuting position, the manager sweetened the deal: After the initial month, Flores could work from home as an independent contractor. Because she would not receive benefits, she shrewdly negotiated a higher commission than an in-office staffer would earn.

Flores flew in her mom to watch the kids while she completed a one-week training course. She already knew how to use the company's computer system remotely and could do her own accounting.

To make sure she could book trips efficiently from home, she invested in high-speed Internet access (about \$30 a month), software that lets her receive multiple calls on her computer (\$20 a month), her own Website (\$115 a year), a BlackBerry (about \$200 plus \$50 per month for service), and a logo, business cards, and flyers (\$260). To boost sales, she fields calls that are forwarded to her home on Sundays, when the office is closed, or whenever other agents take a day off. Flores proposed this arrangement, knowing from industry research she did that other online travel agencies operate this way.

Today, she has 20 regular clients, including families who appreciate her expertise ("They want someone who understands what it is like to get stuck on a plane with a 3-year-old," Flores says), and church mission groups, which include up to 100 people. Her goal is to grow her business by a third. "You can make a very good living with about 30 bookings a month," she says.

Smooth-transition tip: Not every company has a part-time or work-from-home program, but many will allow valued past employees to develop flexible jobs on a case-by-case basis, says Elaine Varelas, managing partner at Keystone Partners, a Boston consulting firm specializing in career transitions. To approach a former boss, put together a written proposal including a job description and stipulating regular evaluations of your work. Then set up a meeting to discuss it and allay any concerns the manager may have. "If you can show more results for less money, the boss sees the benefit," she says. Use stats from your previous experience to prove you can work effectively with minimal supervision, recommends Julie Lenzer Kirk, founder of Path Forward International, a Damascus, MD, firm that trains women for leadership positions, and author of *The ParentPreneur Edge: What Parenting Teaches About Building a Successful Business*. "The biggest question is, Can you deliver the product on time?" says Kirk, who has run her own software firm. "If you can, note that you 'achieved 100 percent of objectives in 80 percent of the time allowed' or 'had 100 percent on-time delivery of projects as directed.' It's a powerful argument in your favor." If you are approaching a new employer, bolster your proposal with quotes from clients and former employers about your work ethic.

Next: Part-Time Careers in the Digital World

The Virtual Career

Meredith Eisenberg, 40
 Virtual assistant
 Annual income: About \$40,000
 Hours per week: 20
 Child's age: 5

Although Eisenberg, who lives in Albuquerque, NM, telecommuted to her job at a government public information office, the long hours made it hard to spend time with her daughter. Cruising an online forum for working moms,

she read a post by a woman who worked as a virtual assistant, communicating with her clients by phone or e-mail. Intrigued, Eisenberg signed up for a 20-week, \$2,695 class at AssistU, a virtual school that teaches students how to build and run a business as a virtual assistant. Drawing on what she learned, she made marketing a top priority, participating in AssistU's online registry for graduates, putting up her own Website, and joining networks for virtual assistants, where she could market herself through online listings. She promised to help potential clients establish and maintain Websites and write press releases, in addition to general office tasks.

It paid off. "I had a couple of clients before I graduated," says Eisenberg. She charges \$50 an hour for new clients — about \$10 more than she made at her last job — to cover her overhead (a computer and other office equipment). With seven regular clients, including several on monthly retainers, Eisenberg subcontracts some projects to entry-level assistants at lower hourly rates. "They appreciate the work — and I appreciate the help," says Eisenberg, who works mainly while her daughter is in preschool.

Smooth-transition tip: "Treat your part-time job as seriously as any other position you've taken," advises Jodi Olin, founder and vice president of sales at 10 til 2, a Denver-based franchise chain that places professional women in part-time positions. Employers' main worry about part-timers — whether they work remotely or not — is being able to communicate easily about ongoing projects, she says. "You need to go above and beyond the communication that is typical in a full-time office job," she says. Give frequent status reports, and while you shouldn't feel obligated to monitor a BlackBerry 24/7, checking e-mail at least once on days off can allay concern about reaching you. If your employer is facing a deadline, tackling a task over the weekend can stress your seriousness. "You should be as available as possible, without being taken advantage of," she says.

Next: Help Getting Started

Firms That Help You Find Part-Time Work

1. **Flexible Executives.** This national company, based in Atlanta, helps job seekers in fields such as accounting, business development, and marketing find contract positions, from onetime projects to long-term relationships. Applicants pay a \$300 fee to join the network, which Flexible Executives makes available to its clients. Employers pay a markup on the company's hourly rates. Many jobs pay more than \$100 an hour.
2. **Mom Corps.** Another Atlanta-based agency, Mom Corps connects women looking for job sharing, telecommuting, part-time permanent, and contract-based positions with 150 client companies nationwide, including KPMG and Wachovia. Most jobs are in finance and accounting. Job seekers can post their résumés for free on the company's site or pay \$9.99 a month for better placement as a "featured candidate." Client companies can retain Mom Corps as a temporary staffing agency or recruiter, or can pay a fee to list positions on the job board.
3. **10 til 2.** This four-year-old Denver-based chain of 17 franchises in nine states helps college-educated professionals find long-term part-time positions. Job seekers don't pay a fee; clients contract to hire candidates.

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