

April 10, 2008

Work & Family Mailbox

By SUE SHELLNBARGER

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Q: *I'm interested in attending a working mothers' group that meets regularly. How can I look into this?*

--K.L., New York

A: Start with a Web search on "parenting groups" or "mothers' groups" and your city name; this will likely turn up several groups on- or off-line. Many mothers' groups start as book groups; try asking at a bookstore or library about book groups for working mothers, suggests Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, co-founder of MomsRising.org¹, an advocacy group whose Web site links to many mothers' groups. Children's hospitals also may have information through their family-resource offices, she says. Also, Rachel Levy, a Summit, N.J., mother who helps run a working mothers' group, suggests checking www.newcomersclub.com², a directory of groups, for mothers' groups in your area.


Another route is to start your own group. Ms. Levy says her group started when two friends asked friends to coffee one evening after work; "two years later, 15 to 20 moms have the third Thursday of every month" set aside to meet. If you lack prospective members, sign your child up for Saturday morning music, dance or other classes and get to know other moms who come to watch, she suggests. Members can decide on activities, including discussing books or specific topics, or just socializing. Above all, Ms. Rowe-Finkbeiner says, "have fun, enjoy the discussions, throw some food into the meeting mix" and keep in touch.

Q: *I supervise a hospital radiology department. A technician who became pregnant was working in the operating room, exposing her to radiation levels unsafe during pregnancy. I tried to arrange a shift swap with a man, but she refused to change her hours. I had to disrupt five other people's schedules in order to get her out of the operating room. Could I have made her change her hours?*

A: I can't give legal advice specific to your situation, which raises some complex issues. However, in general, a manager should be guided by how the company has handled comparable situations in the past involving male employees who need accommodations because of medical or other conditions, says Larry Stuart, a Houston employment lawyer. Under federal law, pregnant women must be treated no worse or better than other workers with similar limitations, he says. If the company in the past changed other employees' schedules for a male employee who needed a change in duty, that would suggest a manager should do the same for a woman whose pregnancy requires a change, says Mr. Stuart, who is also a member of the Society for Human Resource Management's advisory panel on labor relations. Similarly, if other employees in comparable situations have been required to change their hours, then the supervisor could likely do the same with a pregnant woman.

Q: *After years of working in the medical industry, I want to move to a nonprofit organization -- to follow*

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my heart, rather than the money. How can I find recruiters who want to fill this type of job?

--M.D., Menlo Park, Calif.

A: A growing number of recruiters cater to nonprofits; for example, the 360 Group, San Francisco, founded in 2004, fills positions for nonprofits in the Western U.S., among other places. However, most non-executive jobs of the kind you want aren't filled through recruiters, says Marilyn Machlowitz, who heads a New York executive search firm specializing in nonprofits. She suggests checking www.idealists.org, which lists more than 8,000 jobs, or www.foundationcenter.org, with more than 900 listings; click on "PND" and "jobs." Also, check Web sites of organizations where you'd like to work; many post openings, Ms. Machlowitz says. Ask for additional Web site suggestions from people working in nonprofit sectors that interest you, she adds.

Gayle Brandel, president of Professionals for Nonprofits, a New York staffing firm serving nonprofits, suggests searching Web sites of professional associations in your field; nonprofits may post openings there or provide referrals to employment agencies specializing in your field. Also, she says, watch for public-service career fairs at colleges and universities in your region.

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(1) <http://www.MomsRising.org>

(2) <http://www.newcomersclub.com>

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