

WHAT'S YOUR DREAM JOB?

THE DEBATE ABOUT WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE RAGES ON. BUT WHAT DO WE GIRLS REALLY, REALLY WANT? **SHARON WALKER** FINDS OUT



It's official: work isn't working for women. As a recent study by the Equality and Human Rights Commission shows, the number of women staying in work is on the decrease. It's

not that women are being thwarted in their attempts to scale the corporate ladder, more that they just don't want to. And who can blame them? With its family-toxic hours and devotion to the five-day week, the

workplace has barely progressed since the industrial revolution. It's no surprise that the Tories might court women voters with a policy of paying mothers £6,000 a year to stay at home and look after babies and toddlers. It's a start, but what is needed isn't so much a makeover as full reconstructive surgery.

So, what's the answer? Style asked a panel to describe their dream "top job": the hours, the creativity, the days, the flexibility. Here are some of the great ideas they came up with.

GEMMA BLACKBURN 31

PRESS OFFICER, DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

What I want from a job is unlimited adventure, but also security. Weirdly, that's what I've got at the moment, because, basically, I'm a civil servant — but in a warzone. By adventure, I don't just mean jumping into helicopters, although that's exciting, but also doing something new, learning about new cultures and amassing life experiences. The Foreign Office is a great place for women to work: if I'm in the UK I can work from home or on ▶

► flexitime. The civil service is forward-thinking in that respect. If you work abroad, people are hired to look after your children. In the foyer of the Foreign Office in London, you see all these nannies pushing buggies over to St James's Park. It's very sweet.

Gael Lindenfield 59
THERAPIST AND AUTHOR, LONDON

I've always had a bit of a rebellious streak. People like me don't fit into big organisations such as the NHS, which can't afford to take risks. I like variety, so a portfolio career suits me. I've been able to mix writing, training and psychotherapy; and working for myself meant I could fit my work around the kids. Now I continue that flexible way of working, because I want to split my time between here and Spain. It's not a setup that brings mega-money, but that's a sacrifice you make.

Judith Clegg 30s
FOUNDER AND CEO OF THE GLASSHOUSE, A NETWORKING AND MEMBERSHIP GROUP FOR ENTREPRENEURS, LONDON

I want to be able to travel and work from different locations. It's all about flexibility. When I was in a high-profile job in the City, I felt that I would never be able to have a family. Now I work seven days a week, but according to my rules. I think that can be better for the children, as long as you have the right support. That said, it's certainly not the easy option. Entrepreneurship is in my blood; that's why I did it. I want a chance to prove myself and make my vision a reality.

Sue Reeve 41
FOUNDER OF CONSIDER IT DONE LIFESTYLE MANAGEMENT, LONDON

My fantasy job would see me switching between worlds — perhaps running a successful online business from a perfectly renovated cottage in the country. It would be stimulating and fast-paced, but as soon as I turned away from the screen, I could sink back into a large leather chair and look out over magnificent views of hills disappearing into the sea. I could leave my desk and stroll into the country garden with my coffee, contemplating how I was going to spend the afternoon, perhaps out on my horse or gardening. But then I could spin back to my desk with a brilliant idea that would boost my business and put me back in touch with the City.

Chantal Tregear 41
DIRECTOR OF THE EXECUTIVE SEARCH FIRM TAYLOR BENNETT, GUILDFORD

What I'm doing now pretty much represents my

BITCHINESS SHOULD NOT BE TOLERATED IN THE OFFICE, AND YOU MUST BE ABLE TO LAUGH AT YOURSELF — GOD KNOWS, EVERYONE ELSE WILL

dream job, because I set out terms before I came back from maternity leave. I do three days a week in the office in London, the other two days I work from home, which means I save three hours on commuting time, plus I can do the school run twice a week. I haven't had to compromise in terms of creativity, influence and impact. Nothing is diluted. Working from home, without office distractions, has enabled me to be more productive and the company to be more profitable: a win-win situation. One of the problems in business is that there are still people who have a "long hours" mentality. The working culture needs to change so that people are valued for making a real contribution to the business, regardless of hours.

Kathleen Baird-Murray 40
NOVELIST, LONDON

I never wanted a top job. It was more important for me to feel creatively fulfilled and have my freedom. Working in an office served a purpose when the kids were both under two and under my feet, but the thought of missing out on long school holidays once they reached school age was anathema. Life threw me a wake-up call — my mother was diagnosed with a terminal illness and my nanny quit. Working from home means I can stop at 3pm to do the school run and take holidays when I like. I get all the outside stimulus I need by promoting my novel in America. And when my film agent said the magic words "franchise" and "sequel", I knew that investing in my creative self was paying off. How could life be better?

Kath Robinson 30
FASHION PR, OXFORD

I would want a job that is diverse and a challenge, involving people who all listen to each other and who are good communicators, not self-seeking egotists, making for a good team environment that lacks the dull politics and drama that so often dominate offices. I would want to work somewhere central and/or interesting — so that it's easy to pop out and get food/clothes — and that has a park to sit in

when you get to escape for lunch. I like being busy, so I don't have a problem with working relatively long hours, as long as there is an element of control — so if you do work late, nobody clock-watches the following morning. I think flexibility and being trusted with your own time is key.

Charley Vincent 29
FILM EXECUTIVE, LONDON

I would like to work less than 30 minutes from home, so I can travel in by bike, scooter or bus, and be near good places for lunch and shopping. As long as the hours are flexible — so you don't feel you are a factory worker — I have no problems with working hard and long hours when necessary. I'd like to work with fun, witty, intelligent, hard-working people who don't have attitude or form playground gangs. Bitchiness should not be tolerated, and you must be able to laugh at yourself — God knows, everyone else will. As for travel, as long as it is by private jet to five-star hotels, with the most gorgeous movie stars for company, then as much as you like... Nothing that involves Slough, please.

Gyunei Boateng 29
SALES AND MARKETING EXECUTIVE OF MOUSSAIEFF JEWELLERS, LONDON

I'd like to be a high-powered lifestyle PA for one very wealthy client. I'd use my creative powers to make their life totally beautiful: buying their clothes, restoring their houses, booking their holidays and even managing their investments, for example, by helping them choose what art to buy.

Katherine Downes 21
DRAMA GRADUATE, FOWEY, CORNWALL

My dream job would be managing artists or a music festival. I'd throw myself into it, doing whatever hours it took, though there would need to be an end to it, as I'd still need time for my family and friends — those relationships are important to me.

Annabel Meggeson 33
FORMER EDITOR OF SHAPE MAGAZINE, LONDON

I really like the idea of project-based work: periods of working intensely with breaks in between. That's what I envy about people such as actors or directors. I think it's easier to work like that if you have children, because there's an end in sight. It's important for a parent to take their children to school — though that parent doesn't always have to be me — so I wouldn't want to start too early in the morning. But it's not just about women being flexible — the father needs to be, too. □