

Story-Behind-the-Story

Excerpt from the Findings for *Negotiating the Culture of Work and Technology* (Ben Link here to document 23) To read the scenario these findings are based on, click here (Ben link here to document 24)

Week Two Monday at 5:00 p.m. – Community Support

In a cloud of dust and smoke Jake and Christina Roberts finally arrived at the Emergency Room. With the aid of a hospital staffer, between contractions Christina was carefully seated in the wheelchair and brought inside, immediately checked by the attending resident doctor and moved quickly off to the hospital's delivery suite.

Melissa has been asked to work a double, covering the 3:00-11:00 PM shift on the tail of her own daylight shift. The nearest day care she can afford ends at 6:00 PM, so she calls home whenever she gets a break. The neighbor looking after her child has to go to work herself at 8:00.

Knowing she is responsible for filling out the Roberts' admittance, Melissa sends an internal email up to the delivery suite. She asks someone to tell Jake Roberts to come down for a formal admissions interview and turns her attention to more immediate tasks.

What is Melissa thinking?

About her child:

- I can't stop thinking about my child – what will I do if no one can watch him after 8:00? I can't stay here if my child is left alone – but I don't feel I can leave either!
- I'm reluctant to talk to my boss about my childcare needs, because he will keep thinking I'm just another "welfare mom."

About her job duties:

- I am preoccupied and overwhelmed right now. I'm still trying to learn the computer program, I can't stop thinking about my kid, and I am trying to get several jobs done at the same time. I'm doing whatever I can, and I can only hope it is good enough.

About pulling a double shift:

- It is ridiculous that they asked me to pull a double shift when I am so new, and without any advance notice! How am I supposed to make arrangements for childcare? Are they even allowed to ask me to stay on such short notice? I am angry and frustrated right now – I am not sure the low pay and no benefits of this job are worth the trouble.
- I would have tried to negotiate with Mr. Snyder when he asked me to work a double, but I didn't know how to approach him without losing face or looking bad. What can I do in a situation like this without one or the other of us losing?

What is Mr. Snyder thinking?

About Melissa's childcare needs:

- I hate hiring people with kids, especially these welfare-to-work people — where's the father of these kids?
- She knew she could have been asked to work a double – why didn't she plan ahead?
- Why don't we have childcare for employees? So many problems would be solved if we had onsite, around the clock childcare.

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About her working a double:

- I can't read people's minds. If she couldn't work a double, she should have told me. I would have found somebody else — of course I don't expect people to work if they don't have child care!
- She is really able to balance a lot of stuff at once – I didn't think she would be able to get through the double shift “whole”!

What is going on here? What is the problem, if there is one?

A welfare-to-work counselor says:

- Expectations don't take into consideration the family life. Welfare-to-work needs to cover those bases, helping her arrive at plans for family care.

A human resources recruiter says:

- The option of onsite, round-the-clock childcare sounds good, but there are many considerations that prevent this type of daycare to work out. For Melissa's workplace, onsite daycare might not be an option.

A CBO board member says:

- Why didn't she look at the manual she was provided with? I'm sure it has all of the procedures described step by step. If she used the manual as a reference, she wouldn't have felt so overwhelmed.

A community housing policy analyst says:

- The welfare-to-work staff didn't know about the networks out there – so many people working and living in inner-city communities don't know about all of the resources that already exist.

Decision Point #5: Community Support

The employee is distracted when the demands of child care, overtime and transportation exceed the resources of her limited (and also struggling) network of support.

Option #1: Melissa makes arrangements ahead of time for unexpected overtime.

A welfare recipient says: Child care for low-income people is often informal, and you can't count on it at all times, every day. What if her caregiver gets sick, or if she has other obligations?

An employee says: Why is Melissa being asked to work a double in the first place? Workplaces shouldn't expect parents to work overtimes like this when they have important obligations at home. And if she is being asked to work a double, she should be given some warning.

Option #2: Since Melissa can't afford formal child care with extended hours, the hospital creates a back-up support for sick children or overtime situations.

A human resources manager says: A major cause of anxiety and lost work days is removed. Parents will be able to do their work without being constantly distracted about where their child is or the quality of their care.

A welfare recipient says: On-site child care is a solution, but what about when your child is sick. Or what about summer vacations? Or suspended children?

The welfare recipient's Story Behind the Story: I have older children who have different needs than infants and small children. What happens to them when they are on spring break or summer vacation? And my child was just suspended for two weeks, and I don't know what I am going to do with her. I can't bring her to work, and day care is for young children.

A corporate executive says: It is not our responsibility to parent children. Our responsibility is to get a job done and to pay you for that job. Your parenting is your deal – I shouldn't have to pay for it or to make excuses for your absences or child care needs.

Option #3: Melissa finds out about subsidized child care for women on welfare returning to work.

A community leader says: People on welfare are entitled to free child care for their first year back to work. This entitlement affords new workers time to get back on their feet without needing to worry about the cost or quality of child care.

A welfare recipient says: I was told subsidized child care is for people who make \$21,000 or less. If I make \$30,000, I can't afford to pay for child care, housing, clothing, and food. Subsidized child care only works if you have a very low paying job.

The welfare recipient's Story Behind the Story: I am looking for a job right now, and I am afraid to take anything that pays less than \$36,000. My caseworker has not helped me at all with child care choices I have. In fact, I just found out today that all welfare-to-work recipients are entitled to free child care for a year – regardless of income.

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A human resources manager says: Companies could provide, as benefits, advocates for welfare-to-work employees who know all of the ins and outs, rules, entitlements, and helping programs out there for them. Caseworkers don't often – or usually – know about the programs that are out there for welfare recipients. Human resources managers know even less. If we hired someone who specifically is an expert in all of the services available to people returning to work from welfare, many of these personal or life problems would be