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## Component 5: The Future of Work, and of Boys and Men at Work

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“There’s even more prejudice against men than against women if men attempt to build careers around family responsibilities.”

—Carolyn Quadrio, M.D.<sup>ii</sup>

**Item.** One of every five men 25 to 54 isn’t working.<sup>i</sup>

**Item.** Half of African-American young men ages 20-24 is jobless<sup>iii</sup>

**Item.** Many of the jobs lost in the recession (e.g., manufacturing, construction) aren’t coming back.<sup>iv</sup>

The recession was dubbed a “mancession” because 78% of jobs lost were held by men.<sup>v</sup> According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, men’s unemployment rate in September 2010 was 22% higher than women’s<sup>vi</sup>—one of the largest gaps since the government began collecting such data. And employment for minority men and male blue-collar workers without a college education has been dropping dramatically.<sup>vii</sup>

The future does not bode well for men’s employment. While women are more likely to hold jobs in stable sectors that are more recession-proof, like health and education (averaging 75% women<sup>viii</sup>), men are more likely to hold jobs in sectors that are outsourced overseas—such as computer technology and Internet-based jobs. In the past, the problem was a man’s job going nowhere; in the future, the problem is men’s jobs going elsewhere.

The good news is that the fields women dominate are in growth mode: healthcare and social assistance are expected to grow by 24%; employment in public and private educational services is anticipated to grow by 12%.<sup>ix</sup> The bad news is that the fields men dominate are either in decline or especially vulnerable to recessions—such as construction and manufacturing.<sup>x</sup>

Theoretically, some would say it should make no difference whether a woman or man earns the family’s money. In reality, though, few women choose husbands reading *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* in the unemployment line. A man with little earning potential is less likely to find a wife, more likely to find himself divorced, and, once divorced, more likely to feel disconnected from his children. And as mentioned above, unemployed men commit suicide at twice the rate of employed men.<sup>xi</sup> An unemployed man is everyone’s loss.

### ***Making Work Work: the Council’s Role***

Those of our sons who might formerly have prepared for assembly line work are finding their skills are replaced not only by outsourcing but also by automation. In areas as diverse as

advanced medical devices to wind turbines, a White House Council on Boys to Men can help these boys prepare instead for the type of demand employers need for the future: “people who can operate sophisticated computerized machinery, follow complex blueprints and demonstrate higher math proficiency than was previously required of the typical assembly line worker.”<sup>xiii</sup> A first step is restoring vocation to education.

**Restoring Vocation to Education.** The decrease in vocational and technical education in high schools has left many boys who are less academically inclined feeling there is nothing they are good at. With no sense of purpose, and low self-esteem, they drop out of school—and life.

Two new Obama Administration initiatives look promising: the High Growth Job Training Initiative, which is designed to prepare more people for success in advanced manufacturing, aerospace, biotechnology, energy, geospatial technology and automotive<sup>xiii</sup>; and the Green Career-Technical Programs initiative, a five-state pilot program that will prepare students for careers in wind and solar energy, transportation, and waste management.<sup>xiv</sup>

The Council would co-ordinate these new efforts with the best of current programs such as The Green Hounds Academy at California’s Atascadero High School that prepares students for sustainability careers (while building their skills in math, science, and technology) and that of the Southern Regional Education Board’s Technology Centers That Work, where students learn academics in the context of a technology-centric career of a student’s choice.<sup>xv</sup>

Study Successes in Other Countries.

**Item.** In Japan, 23% of high school graduates study at vocational schools; 99.6% of them find employment after graduation.<sup>xvi</sup>

Japan’s vocational schools are part of its higher education system, but many of its students enter the program without having completed high school.

Finland and Germany have also developed models that bear examining.<sup>xvii</sup> In Finland, 38% of students go to vocational school after completing their compulsory education (usually around age 17).<sup>xviii</sup>

More than two million German students attend its vocational schools.<sup>xix</sup> Germany’s program is distinctive in that students spend part of the week in school and part in an apprenticeship. It is a joint effort of government, unions, companies, and chambers of commerce. Students are paid a modest stipend.<sup>xx</sup>

The Council’s review of such programs might focus on creating a blueprint for their adaptation to U.S. culture and needs.

**Expanding the Concept of Man’s Work.** As the nation shifts from a manufacturing to a service/knowledge economy, health and education are growing sectors. Just as we have supported our daughters to enter STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) careers, a White House Council can co-ordinate efforts to prepare boys in what might be called HE (health and education) careers (instead of health and education being, in effect, “she” careers). Preparing our sons to be elementary school teachers, for example, serves four purposes: our children get a

balance of male and female teachers; our sons are trained for more stable careers; our sons are trained for careers giving them more preparation to raise children; our children's families will have more confidence to exercise the flexibility of a dad raising children.

Just as "man's work" now includes more women as a result of pro-active efforts like scholarships for women in math, science and technology, so integrating men into female-dominated fields such as nursing and social work, may require parallel efforts for boys and men.<sup>xxi</sup> The Council might devote special attention to fields such as social work in which the very mission of the profession—helping families—requires equal sensitivity to both genders. A starting place would be the balancing of social work programs with equal numbers of men—especially men with leadership experience in the communities they will be serving.

**"Team executive" positions.**<sup>xxii</sup> "Men's work" was built on the male-as-sole-breadwinner model in which the most successful men, whether CEOs or MDs, had responsibilities they fulfilled for up to 90-hour weeks. Increasingly men want more time with their family, and many companies see that a good home life benefits work life. Companies that value these men—and their female equivalents— but that also want to compete globally, will need to re-invent the infrastructure of a top-level-executive position. For example, instead of one person handling global demands 24/7 until, as the Japanese say, he or she experiences "Karoshi" ("death by overwork"), the executive position is shared by a team of men and women, allowing each individual to work fewer hours, but the team to be "on it" globally 24/7. Technology is making this possible at the historical moment it has become both necessary and desirable: the technology to communicate and co-ordinate team leadership and division of labor worldwide on selected overlapping hours via video conferencing, smart phones, email, etc. Such innovations would need the support of educational changes such as MBA courses in "Team Executive Training"--educating teams to co-ordinate communication about one function. This will allow men and women to have a viable family life, and companies to have coverage 24/7 at a cost that can be less because more talented people will make the trade-off of less pay for "a life."

**Suicide Prevention.** Whether in a hazardous job or a management position, when a man is in fear of losing his job he is often in fear of a domino effect—a job loss leading to the loss of his wife's respect to the loss of his marriage and potentially the ability to see his children. When combined with his propensity to suppress these feelings rather than express them, it is apparent why unemployed men commit suicide at twice the rate of employed men.<sup>xxiii</sup> A White House Council can identify the best programs in progress, such as Working Minds,<sup>xxiv</sup> to, for example, expand their mission to help MBA programs teach future managers to look under men's masks to discover the symptoms of suicide; work with Human Resource Divisions to detect the signs of depression and suicide; work with unemployment agencies to know how to handle signs of depression and suicide among unemployed men; and identify co-operative ventures with churches to help men have a safe haven and hope.

**Communications Skills Programs at Work.** Similar to the way in which male-dominated work places created Human Resources (HR) divisions to maximize women's potential, in the female-dominated HE (Health and Education) fields, Human Resource divisions can assist women to maximize men's potential. This is long overdue since the responsibilities of men in the workplace over centuries evolved methods of accountability (e.g., hierarchies) and communicating (sport analogies; sexual jokes as ice-breakers; wit-covered put-downs to test for humility) that, even when they served a purpose, were never properly articulated to women. The Council can provide leadership for the next generation's HR mandate to include communicating what men didn't: women can't hear what men don't say.<sup>xxv</sup>

Beyond gender dialogue is the need for both sexes to be better trained in the handling of feedback that is not positive, so fewer workers feel they are “walking on eggshells,” and there is less need for gossip as a substitute for communication. The more complex communication becomes, the nation that is the pioneer of listening to criticism non-defensively will have a global advantage.

**Examining Boys’ Motivation to Work.** A White House Council would examine why young men are pulling back from the very essence of what used to be male: passionate motivation to succeed at work, school and life.

**Co-ordinate with Women.** Since families that succeed in the future will be more likely to have both our sons and daughters able to “row on both sides of the boat” (both sexes able to raise money and raise children) there is a need to co-ordinate the efforts on behalf of girls and women with the efforts of this Council on behalf of boys and men. This includes going beyond government programs, and finding the best of what exists rather than re-inventing the wheel. For example, the program *Are You Man Enough to Be a Nurse?* attempts to increase the number of male nurses;<sup>xxvi</sup> and programs at IBM and Deloitte & Touche<sup>xxvii</sup> help both genders communicate.

If we are to care about our sons, it is to care not only about their contribution to their work, but also about their safety.

### ***Worker Safety vs. ‘Till Death Do Us Part...***

**Item.** 92% of workplace deaths happen to men.<sup>xxviii</sup>

“The day before my husband was killed, he was getting his papers in order, and saying his goodbyes. He told me, ‘Every day I’m getting pressure from higher ups to do things that just aren’t safe.’”<sup>xxix</sup>

—The widow of a man who died on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig,  
on why he believed he would die the day he died.

Each year we see the headlines: in 2010, they were “29 Miners Die in Coal Mine Accident in West Virginia,” or “11 workers die in BP Oil Rig Accident.”

The need for a White House Council on Boys to Men becomes more apparent the more we allow ourselves to be guided by the deeper lessons of these two 2010 casualties.

Start with those headlines. They read miners or workers, not men. We are introduced to the men via their roles (workers). That is, we see the men only as human doings, not human beings. We see them as a number: the BP Eleven. Few people know even the name of one of these men.

Here is what we finally (on day 45 of the spill) heard when the Today show interviewed the widow of Jason, one of the BP Eleven—on day 45 of the spill. Jason’s widow, crying, described how Jason had been getting all his paperwork in order and saying his good-byes for what he feared was his imminent death on the BP and Transocean oil rig. She told the nation how Jason

lamented that his complaints about safety were going unheeded—how, in fact, “Every day I’m getting pressure from higher ups to do things that just aren’t safe.”<sup>xxx</sup>

What is the result of failing to know about any of these men as human beings? Our hearts don’t open up to men’s devotion to their families that includes risking death so their family can have a better life.

What is the policy implication of caring? It was only when we learned of the lives of whales and dolphins that we cared, so we created tougher laws for their protection. Thus the officers of the Environmental Protection Agency have subpoena power; deliberate violations and document falsification that leads to the killing of whales is punishable as a felony, not a misdemeanor. In contrast, for boys and men who are miners, even deliberate violations of safety standards, and even document falsification that leads to their deaths is punishable as a misdemeanor, not as a felony.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Let’s dig deeper. When it comes to our need for energy or lumber, for crabs or tall buildings, we want our needs and desires met cheaply. So we get men to do them, don’t pay the extra costs to make them safe, and the already-hazardous occupations of being a roofer, miner, trucker, lumberjack, or oilrig worker become more hazardous. Getting our desires fulfilled cheaply is our primary thought; the safety of our men is a national after thought.

Just as White House efforts have focused attention on our environment and on saving whales, it can now also focus on saving males.

### ***Conclusion: the Future of our Sons and their Work***

Nothing has defined men more than work. Nothing has confined men more than work. Nothing has made men more worthy of women than work. And nothing has made men’s parents more proud than their son’s success at work. Men’s work has created monuments to men. Men’s work has created straight-jackets for men.

Perhaps the most significant human accomplishment in the U.S. during the past half-century is our new awareness that defining women in one way left women confined to one way. For women, that “one way” was being a mother. We replaced that with an era of multi-option women: married women with children had more permission to work full-time; be a mom full-time; or do some combination of both. Yet one of our great accomplishments has been to retain the value of mothering, expand its flexibility (child care at work), and use technology to support women’s flexibility.

Now it is time for the parallel process to take place for our sons. Replacing the era of the one-option man (being valued only if he works full-time) with an era of multi-option men: for example, if our son is married with children, demonstrating respect if he: works full-time; fathers full-time; or does some combination of both.

One of the great accomplishments of the next era must be to retain the high value of men as workers, and also use technology to support men’s flexibility as workers.

A Council would explore the impact of imparting to our sons that pay is not about power, but that controlling his life is real power. It would help parents, mentors and teachers to guide our sons to consider, prior to our son choosing a career, that few men say on their death bed “I wish I spent more time at work;” and few of their children will go to a psychologist saying “I didn’t get enough money from my dad.” The gift of giving our sons a glimpse of life’s blueprint is the gift of fewer male mid-life crises and more life long marriages; fewer alcoholic dads, and more devoted dads.

Being a great man, like being a great woman, is creating the work-life balance that is appropriate to his personality, cognizant of the trade-offs of each decision, and true to the commitments he makes as he takes the journey from boy to man.

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