

Hello ThirdPath Community,

May 2005 ThirdPath Institutes celebrates our 6th anniversary since incorporating as a nonprofit. Thanks to everyone for the on-going support in making our success possible.

Although our work is expanding in a number of different directions (more on our Redesigning Leadership and Working Class/Working Poor projects next update), a central part of our work continues to be supporting families to practice Shared Care.

Why is Shared Care so Important?

We have found most parents share a common desire: to earn a decent living, and to do it in a way that allows them plenty of time to care well for their families. In Shared Care families – whether single parent households, two parent households, or households where parents live apart – mothers and fathers work while sharing the responsibility of caring for children with another parent, extended family or supplemental child care.

Shared Care helps both men and women learn how to redesign their jobs to create time for family. And, as you will see from this month's story about Anita and Brad, this means when children grow up, both parents are equally prepared to enter the next chapter in their lives.

Shared Care also means that the lives of mothers and fathers are no longer so dramatically different. Because of their shared responsibilities, Shared Care moms and dads are well prepared to function on both the home front and at work, and this shows in the ways they operate in world. See if you can guess whether it is Anita or Brad speaking in the quotes listed below. You'll find the answers in the story, but we think part of the fun of Shared Care is that it's often hard to tell.

Anita or Brad? “I am just better at saying ‘here let me hold you’ when the kids get hurt; rather than correcting them for running. Being there and accepting them is extremely important. I learned this lesson well when they were babies.”

Anita or Brad? “I have a guy at work that I supervise who is just like a kid. He wants instant praise for good work. He wants to skip the hard parts and move on to the fun parts immediately. Now I am better at knowing when to talk with him about the situation.”

Anita or Brad? “I feel like I've been a great role model for my kids, where the meaning of my life isn't them. That does not mean my kids don't bring great meaning to my life; I like that they see me as someone who takes pride in my work *and* pride in my family.”

Does this mean that we think all families should practice Shared Care?

Absolutely not. But when you have mothers and fathers - from entry-level to leadership level positions - all advocating for change, anything is possible.

We have created a document that summarizes our mission and goals for the next few years. If you would like to take a look, email us back and we will be happy to send you a copy.

Happy Spring!
Jessica and Hanne

Anita and Brad – Weaving Family and Work for Two Decades

Every Fourth of July Anita and Brad spend time planning for the upcoming year and thinking about their 5 and 10 year goals. Although they couldn't have imagined it when Kelly, their first

child, was a baby, their five-year goals now include imagining a life where Kelly (and then two years after that, Russ) leaves for college.

Like most parents, Anita and Brad wondered when their first child was born, how can we both stay involved with our work and take great care of our family? They had always talked about not wanting the kids to be in “40 hours of child care a week,” however, it was unclear to either of them exactly how they were going to make this happen. Now, 13 years into their Shared Care solution, Anita and Brad can really see how sharing care was one of the best ways for each of them to stay engaged at work while also taking advantage of the time when children were young to create significant time for family.

Initially, the couple solved their work family dilemma by having Brad be the stay-at-home parent. “When we first started it made sense for Brad to be at home because I made more money than he did.” In part this was because shortly before Kelly’s birth, Brad had lost his job, so this seemed like the logical solution for the family. After taking the summer off, Anita returned to full time work as a teacher in a private school when Kelly was 3 months old.

When Brad reflects on that first year of involvement he notes how it set a strong foundation to build on. “I am just better at saying ‘here let me hold you’ when the kids get hurt; rather than correcting them for running. Being there and accepting them is extremely important. I learned this lesson well when they were babies.” However, he also adds, “it was fairly noteworthy that I was a stay-at-home dad. I was sometimes singled out due to my intense relationship with the kids. People used to comment when I was grocery shopping with the kids during a weekday – sometimes in a good way, sometimes not. In either case I didn’t appreciate the notoriety.”

Shifting to Shared Care

When Kelly was about 16 months old, and just before the birth of their second child, the couple put their Shared Care plan in place. Anita re-negotiated her position so that she could work 60% time, and Brad began working 24 hours a week as a landscaper. Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, Kelly was cared for at a family day care provider. Wednesdays and Fridays, Brad cared for Kelly in the mornings and then Anita took over her care in the afternoons.

They continued with this arrangement after the birth of their second child. Anita took a six-month leave with baby Russ, and then returned to her part time position. Around this time, Brad switched jobs and began working a few more hours a week as a furniture builder. While the parents were at work, Kelly attended pre-school, and Anita organized an informal childcare arrangement for Russ with some of the other parents who had children at her workplace. Anita and Brad continued to share care on Wednesdays and Fridays.

They both acknowledged how their Shared Care plan allowed each parent to play to his or her strengths. “Anita’s strength is scheduling, whereas mine is flexibility. I do more fun, spontaneous activities with the children.” Anita agreed, “I do all the planning. I create how the schedule has to work, including solutions for Brad.”

They also could sense some economic impact from their decision. “We definitely accepted a life of simplicity,” Brad said. However, in many ways this lifestyle choice suited them. Anita remarked, “I think it has been better for us not to have everything. My parents’ materialism made me want to not raise my kids in a world where things are more important than people. The time children are young is not very long: it is worth the sacrifice.”

Just as is the case for all families, during this period their kids (as they seem to do) continued to grow and get older. This natural developmental shift brought new changes. Kelly now attended Kindergarten and Russ attended pre-school – freeing up both parents to work almost full days on

Wednesdays and Fridays. Over the next 5 years Anita increased her workload to an 80% schedule, and then again to a 90% schedule.

While Anita increased her workload, Brad started his own construction business, allowing him a flexible schedule that ultimately lead to his present day employment – working 35 hours a week as a museum carpenter. While their parents were working, the children attended school and then after school care Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. On Wednesdays, Brad continued to be the primary parent in charge after school, and Anita continued her involvement with the children on Fridays.

Reaping the Rewards at Work

Both careers evolved throughout this time, yet in different ways. Anita continued to pursue her teaching career, slowly increasing her workload as the children became more independent. Then last year, when she sensed that her family was ready, she made a big change at work. Ready to take on new challenges, Anita began teaching part time at a new school. Shortly after the switch she was singled out to take the lead on a special project. She is now working full-time for significantly more money, but still spends Fridays after school focused on family.

Following a pattern that allowed him to work both creatively and physically, Brad changed positions over time, ultimately leading to the job that he now has no intention of leaving – a job he has also been promoted in, and one that he finds deeply satisfying. “I like being a member of a team ... at work everyone has to overcome their own egos, and we get the show up together.”

Throughout the years, each of them can also see how their involvement at home has had many benefits at work. “I am a much better teacher when talking with parents and helping them to support their children now that I am a parent,” says Anita. Brad describes one of the transferable skills he has learned as, “the patience factor. I have a guy at work that I supervise who is just like a kid. He wants instant praise for good work. He wants to skip the hard parts and move on to the fun parts immediately. Now I am better at knowing when to talk with him about the situation.”

More importantly is the long-term effect Shared Care has had at home. “We are very close. We are way more emotionally connected,” says Brad. “If one of us is grumpy, everyone knows. If someone is really overwhelmed, we can count on each other. We are all more sensitive that everyone gets overwhelmed at times, and everyone needs a little hand.”

Building a Strong Foundation at Home

Looking back Anita and Brad can see that they wouldn't have wanted to set up their lives any other way. “My kids know that we are there. They have inner security. They are connected, secure, and trusting kids.” Anita continues, “I also feel like I've been a great role model for my kids, where the meaning of my life isn't them. That does not mean my kids don't bring great meaning to my life; I like that they see me as someone who takes pride in my work *and* pride in my family.”

Five years from now when Kelly leaves home, and Anita and Brad once again revisit their 5 and 10 year goals, they have a lot to be proud of. Together they have crafted a work-family solution where they have lived and modeled a way of life that has kept them both moving forward in their careers while also continuously prioritizing family.

^ ^

ThirdPath Institute is a non-profit organization that assists individuals, families and organizations in finding new ways to redesign work to create time for families, community and other life priorities.

Initially we are helping families design Shared Care work-family solutions. Shared Care parents maximize the use of parental care while staying actively engaged with work. They accomplish this by reconfiguring work around the needs of family and sharing in their involvement with work, home and children.

Our long-term goal is to organize individuals, families and communities to influence larger systemic change - both within organizations and at the public policy level. The future we hope to shape is one where no person is required to choose between work and children, work and an aging parent, or work and some other life interest. Instead they can follow a "third path," one that allows everyone to integrate work with other life priorities.

To give a tax-deductible donation to the ThirdPath Institute you can make a secure contribution on-line through our website, www.thirdpath.org, or email us and we will send you information through the mail. We'd love to add you to the ThirdPath family of donors. Together we are making a difference by helping people lead meaningful, balanced and intentional lives.

Contact Information:

ThirdPath Institute
4918 Cedar Avenue
Philadelphia PA 19143
(215) 747-8790
info@thirdpath.org

Check us out! www.thirdpath.org