



Keep a Job While Caring for Older Relative

Employees Can Be Open With Bosses About Their Needs

By TORY JOHNSON

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Even though eldercare demands require an extraordinary investment of time -- and can easily be a full-time responsibility -- whenever possible as a caregiver, you should try to keep your hand in work, even if it means cutting back hours or changing positions or employers.

While it's definitely not easy, if you can manage to do so there are some distinct benefits to keeping your hat in the ring at work.

Money: This is most obvious of all. Some income is of course usually much better than no income at all.

Stimulation/distraction: It's very difficult to spend 24/7 watching your loved one suffering from illness. For some people, work is a welcome distraction, even if only for a few hours a day. The people I talked to all said it uses another side of their brain and gets them out of the house for a chunk of time. And it enables them to interact with people other than doctors and insurance companies, which can be a welcome change too.

Avoids gap in experience: Ultimately, most caregivers have to go back to work. Either their care-giving obligations end because they lose their loved one or that loved one transitions to a full-time care facility. If you've remained employed and connected to your professional network, the transition is often easier than for those who've had to bow out altogether. Returning to work after a gap -- although not impossible by any means -- can be difficult and depressing, especially at a time when you're least able to deal with yet another blow.

Since only about 25 percent of all businesses offer any kind of eldercare benefits, according to a 2007 AARP survey, most employees must fend for themselves. There are two key issues to keep in mind:

Talk to your employer. Don't be shy about letting your employer know what's going on. You don't have to wear your heart on your sleeve or share every nitty gritty detail of what's happening with mom or dad. That can actually backfire when your boss worries that you're suddenly going to tune-out of work, even though you have no such intention.

I talked to one woman who told me her mom, who lives with her, turned 93 last week. She would have loved to have left work 30 minutes early to pick up a treat for her on the way home. But she didn't do that. When I asked if it was because her boss was strict, she said no, not at all ... it's because she just didn't feel comfortable asking. She said they deserve eight hours a day from her. And while I commend that work ethic, it's ok to ask every so often for a special accommodation. It might mean putting in an extra 30 minutes in the morning or the next day, but don't shy away from asking.

Sometimes we stand in our own way from achieving some support and flexibility. Eldercare isn't a taboo topic - there are an estimated 16 million caregivers working full-time in the U.S., according to MetLife -- so sometimes in the absence of formal benefits, you must be the one to ask for what you need and work with your boss to come to an informal arrangement. Don't wait for the boss to come to you.

Seek community resources. There are also sometimes free local resources that mirror the same types of benefits offered by some employers. These tend to be referral-based. You get access to someone who'll tell you all of the options for care, how to navigate the government bureaucracy, what kinds of facilities to look into -- and this is a great convenience for people who work and just don't have time to do the research. If you Google "eldercare referral services" along with your city, you'll turn up several results. Don't be shy about seeking out such services. (On a national level, [Medicare.gov](#), [Alzheimer's Association](#), and [A Place For Mom](#) may be very valuable.)

A Place for Mom, which provides free referral services (they support dads too), hires home-based eldercare agents to respond to inquires for assistance from families. If you're passionate about helping people with eldercare demands, and you have prior sales experience, this is a full-time, commission-only home-based career opportunity. Successful agents earn between \$40,000 and more than \$100,000 annually.

To find other home-based opportunities in the eldercare field, check with local service providers in your area that hire care managers and referral agents on a salaried, hourly and commission basis.

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