



On Demand and In Control: How the Gig Economy Offers Women an Option Beyond Leaning In or Out

Insights

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For women, if you're not leaning in at work, you're leaning out, which could prove a career mistake (a concept introduced by Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg). But if you're leaning in, some women feel that they might tip over as they try to balance the demands of career and family, particularly in demanding industries, like finance, law, and technology. The gig economy seems to offer a third option in the form of freelance or contract work. And, according to studies, the number of women who embrace this work model surpasses the number of men.

The problem is well-documented: high-qualified women leave the workforce in droves, either permanently or temporarily, often to spend time with their young children. In past years, these women had few choices to sustain or restart their careers. The on-demand economy offers an appealing new choice: continue, or ramp back into, a career while maintaining the desired level of flexibility. Stay in the game while maintaining the desired level of family time? Seems like a win-win, right?

Sort of. That flexibility comes at a price to some. Contract or freelance positions don't offer job security, benefits, or paid leave. But this is not necessarily a deal-breaker, since many full-time jobs don't offer the job security of yesteryear and the lack of benefits can be equalized by the higher pay frequently associated with self-employment. And don't overlook the most important benefits of gig work for this demographic, at least according to studies: higher levels of happiness and sustained confidence to on-ramp back to a salaried position later, when and if desired. There are also benefits to the workforce at large. Higher percentages of women in the workforce who might otherwise opt out, and an increased acceptance of flexibility in high-drive industries, something that should ultimately benefit both men and women with family responsibilities.

We continue to see more platforms that seek to benefit from the pool of talented women who won't settle for one extreme or the other. Whether geared toward law, tech, or finance, women have more options than ever to stay in or return to their careers while starting families. Many of these platforms, like the On-Ramp Fellowship, offer women support and structure to help them get back in the game after a few (or more) years out. Talk about a win-win: employers get top talent, and all of the benefits that brings, while women stay in control of their work and home lives to an extent not available under traditional "all or nothing" models.

Expect to see more of these opportunities as additional industries realize the benefits of moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach.