



ADVISORY BOARD Q AND A WITH MICHELLE BAUMAN '89

Vice President of Labor Relations - NBC/Universal Studios

INTERVIEW BY MARYA HUSAIN '09

Q What made you get involved in the Berger Institute?

A The issues that the Berger Institute seeks to address are the issues that are nearest and dearest to my heart. From my own experience and from what I see around me, I see a huge need for more study and discussion about the impact of work on families. I was so thrilled to discover a research institute at CMC that is taking on these important issues in a proactive way. I wanted to share my own experiences and my enthusiasm to support the Berger Institute's mission.

Q Why are work and family issues important to you?

A I am extremely fortunate to have found a wonderful work/life balance that (most of the time) works well for everyone in my family. Since 2000, I have shared my job as Vice President and Labor Counsel at NBC/Universal with a dear colleague and I work between 25 and 30 hours per week. I have an interesting, well-paying job and I pick up my kids almost every day after school. I know that everyone in my family (including me) is better off because I work. My sons are still young (9 and 7) – and I am aware that I don't have too many more years of hands-on-parenting ahead of me. I'm thrilled that I get to spend a lot of time with them. But the fact that I work has given my husband a wider range of job options, it creates more financial stability, it gives me intellectual stimulation and adult interaction, and allows me to get my emotional needs met apart from my relationship with my children. These are just a few of the benefits I've received by staying in the workforce.

Women often come up to me wistfully and say that I have the "perfect" situation – and I am extremely grateful for what I have. But I don't have this role because I'm so special – I believe that there are many more opportunities for women to find a balance that works for their families. It takes willingness to be honest and creative and live with the "messiness" that comes with a rich, full, busy life! I hope that by sharing my experiences I will inspire others to look closely at what might be aligned for their families.

Q Is there some legislation that you think working families are not aware of, and could use to their potential benefit?

A There is a statute (that many people don't know about) that allows working parents to take up to 40 hours of unpaid leave to attend school events.

Q What is some legislation working against working families?

A I believe that the marriage penalty in the tax code (although this certainly isn't my legal expertise) is detrimental to two-income families.

Q What are some of the changes in corporations that you would like to see in their workplace?

A To me, policies have no meaning unless there is commitment behind them. I would like to see corporations do more than give lip service to flexible work arrangements. I would like to see leaders rewarded for their skill in supporting their employees' work/life needs. I would like for leaders to be more willing to test ways to make flexible schedules work. I would like for there to be more discussion and awareness of success stories. I believe that for family-friendly policies to take hold in the workplace – we need visionary and courageous leadership at all levels!

In addition, I would like to see forums created to provide families (and mothers in particular – because that's my interest) with more emotional support for their experience. I believe that women do an excellent job of supporting each other but often we are under the misimpression that the challenges we face are unique or private and we are ashamed to discuss them. I have found that most of the things I've struggled with as a working mom (child care, summer camp, dinner, homework, career ambition and ambivalence, guilt) are shared by everyone else. What a relief it is to get support and advice from someone who really understands! At the same time, I believe we all (but again mom's in particular) sell ourselves short and stay comfortable in our limitations. I would like to see more mentoring and more permission for everyone to find work that not only fits in with other obligations but also aligns our hearts and minds!