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CEO, The Creative Class Group & Author, Upgrade

Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer Has Lost the Plot

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Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer's recent [decree](#) abolishing telecommuting is a gigantic step backward at an important time for women. [International Working Women's Day](#) is March 8. While there is much to celebrate when it comes to women's achievements in the work place, there is still a lot of work to be done.



Marissa Mayer, Photo Credit: JD Lasica/Socialmedia.biz

First a few statistics:

- Women still earn only 82 percent of what men earn on average.
- There are 74.3 million women in the U.S. workforce, and their average wage and salary is \$684 per week.
- Over the past four decades, women's share of the workforce has risen from 37 percent to 48 percent.
- Women own 8 million businesses in the U.S., accounting for \$1.2 trillion GDP.
- The productivity gains that can be attributed to women's increased participation in the labor force amount to \$3.5 trillion in GDP
- A [2011 Harvard Business Review study](#) of 7,280 leaders found that women outperform men in 12 out of 16 core leadership competencies
- Only 21 Fortune 500 CEOs are women
- Of the 44.5 million women working full time in wage and salary jobs, a little more than 1/3 were mothers of children under age 18.

Women are making enormous economic contributions -- but there is still a big gender gap. While some offices have done so much to enliven workspaces, providing fitness centers and gourmet meals on the premises and even allowing employees to bring their pets to work, still very few support working mothers. Having children, one of the most wonderful and precious experiences, is welcomed socially by families and friends but shunned professionally. Our corporations and organizations mostly view it as a hindrance.

Society needs a serious wakeup call -- and current maternity leave practices need a total overhaul. Rather than maternity leave, it should be viewed as the family work/life balance act. Sure, give new mothers time off to adjust to their new situation, but don't shock them back into the workforce just a few months later. Allow them the freedom and flexibility to juggle their new responsibilities on their own schedule. An infant doesn't march to the drumbeat of the nine-to-five time clock. Recognize their need to come in later, pop out during the day, work later or odd hours.

A recent *Forbes* headline about Mayer [read](#), "Back to the Stone Age." The *LA Times* [wrote](#), "Now working moms are in an uproar because they believe that Mayer is setting them back by taking away their flexible working arrangements. Many view telecommuting as the only way time-crunched women can care for young children and advance their careers without the pay, privilege or perks that come with being the chief executive of a Fortune 500 company." Mayer a person who is supposed to embody an ethos of creativity and innovation as the head of a progressive organization did take a step back to the Flintstones era.

But it's not just working moms that Mayer offended. It's top talent everywhere who are motivated by intrinsic rewards. She fails to recognize the needs of the changing workforce and understand that many people would barter less pay for more flexibility and control over their schedule. It's every knowledge worker who recognizes the importance of time. We are all in a time deficit and the costs of commuting are too great. Employers should be forced to tier employees' schedules, allowing their staff the freedom to come in at 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00 or 11:00 a.m. This system would not only allow them to pick the right schedule for their life, but alleviate the congestion on our highways, which look more like parking lots between 7:00 and 9:00 a.m. Not only is commuting a waste of time; a study released by the [Centers for Disease Control](#), [National Institutes of Health](#) and [American Cancer Society](#) has confirmed what many have long suspected: that lengthy car commutes are also terrible for your health.

In a [blog post](#) entitled "The World's Worst Commutes," my husband, [Richard Florida](#), noted, "Commuting is among life's least enjoyable activities, according to research by Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman and others." He goes on to point out that commuting is expensive too. The annual Urban Mobility Report calculates that commuting costs Americans an estimated \$90 billion dollars per year in lost productivity and wasted energy.

Kevin Stolarick, the research director of the [Martin Prosperity Institute](#) (MPI), has found that every minute shaved off America's commuting time is worth an estimated \$19.5 billion dollars. That translates into \$97.7 billion for five minutes, \$195 billion for 10 minutes, and \$292 billion for every 15 minutes saved nationally.

Not all jobs can be performed remotely, of course. If you are a physician or a retail worker, keeping certain hours in the shift makes sense. But why are so many organizations reluctant to adjust to those who work in knowledge jobs? Allow them the flexibility to manage their own workload. If their work suffers, then reevaluate. But the time, money, and resources needed to find and train a new employee far exceeds what it takes to allow just a little freedom, trust, and flexibility into their schedules.

The fact that Mayer is one of the handful of top women CEOs makes it that much more disappointing. Perhaps she's trying to "[lean in](#)" to her job, as [Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg](#) counsels, to show that she's just as ambitious and hard-driving a boss as a man. If so, she fell flat on her face.

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