

# How the gig economy is changing work for women

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Until very recently, women have had only two options: to lean in or opt out of the workplace. But today, a growing number of us are refusing those limitations. Instead, we're remaking the rules and redefining what success means, using the gig economy as a promising third path that opens up options for time, balance and flexibility.

The flight of women from executive level jobs is well documented. According to Sheryl Sandberg's book "Lean In," 43 percent of highly qualified women with children are leaving careers or off-ramping for a period of time. The same is equally well documented, but where are they going? Today, more than ever before, they are fleeing the traditional workforce to join the gig economy. In fact, according to a recent survey, in the last decade, the number of women in the gig economy has outgrown that of their male counterparts.

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That's because technology and rise of the gig economy has offered new options for working women who crave more balance in their lives. Basically, what this freelance, contract work provides ambitious and career-driven women is an opportunity to stay in the game while they start families, launch new businesses or care for a sick child, spouse or parent.

In the past, women could have tapped into for these kinds of consulting jobs, but it was always a struggle. What's different today is that new companies are stepping in to aggregate and harness the power of this talent pool. There's , for women in tech and , a company that matches businesses with experts in marketing and finance, to name a few.

Of course, the decision to work in the gig economy is a privilege. For the most part, these women are able to give up job security, health benefits and sick and vacation leave. Or they have personal circumstances -- like a sick child, parent or health issues themselves -- that leave them with no choice. But the lack of benefits and security means that often, contractors are paid more. According , incorporated, self-employed workers are paid more than salaried employees. (Those who are not incorporated earn less, but there are strategies -- like adding a 10 percent surcharge -- that can offset lack of benefits.)

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For many women, working in the gig economy is a stopover between full-time jobs, a temporary reprieve from the demands and stress of the traditional workplace. Others choose to remain as freelancers, despite the obvious disadvantages, because full-time jobs don't offer the security they once did anyway.

But all working women, no matter what path they've chosen, are deeply torn about the choices they face. For a growing number, the best way to "lean back in" is to start their own business. Thus, . But for those who can't or don't want to start their own business, here are four reasons why the gig economy is a great solution:

## **1. Project-based work provides benefits.**

Women who are choosing to work in the gig economy understand they won't have an executive level salary, job security, benefits or a consistent work

schedule. But they also understand that in exchange, they get freedom, flexibility, balance and ownership of their lives at a crucial moment. They also get a sense of renewed optimism about being able to step back in if and when they desire. In other words, they stay in the game, but on their own terms.

## **2. Part-time working moms are happier.**

show that women who work part-time are more engaged both at home and at work. The reason is balance -- not feeling like their personal equilibrium is off and the stress is too much to bear. Obvious, perhaps and not possible for everyone. But the rise of the gig economy has meant part-time work is an option for more women.

## **3. Freelancing may make flex work the new normal.**

If women stay in the game and take on leadership roles, the acceptance of freelance, contract work as a viable career path may trickle down through the corporate world, even in industries like finance and marketing that haven't typically embraced flexibility. It may even change attitudes toward working parents in general. If the boss sees a positive result from a changing culture, it will create a friendlier place for all people looking to work on part-time and project-based jobs.

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## **4. A more diverse workforce.**

According to , only 14 percent of the top execs are women. Without women in leading roles, a female perspective on things like hiring practices, parental

leave and office hours is lost. and those around them so things can start to change.

Ultimately, businesses that work with freelancers understand the cost benefit of hiring a nimble, efficient and highly-skilled workforce, many of whom have left major jobs and are willing to share their expertise and knowledge. In my experience, smaller businesses and tech companies get this. Other industries are slower to come on board, but the winds of change are unstoppable and the companies that recognize the cultural shifts are the ones that will succeed.