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## Many are cutting back, seeking the simple life

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PHILADELPHIA — Dina Fink loved the corporate game, and the corporate game loved Dina Fink.

She was what you might call a player. She was an ambitious young lawyer with a prestigious Philadelphia firm. She was working on high-profile, high-powered cases, sometimes 24 hours straight. "It was very exciting," said Fink, a tall, thin-as-a-pencil 31-year-old graduate of the Wharton School and George Washington University Law School.

Surely, she was headed for the top. Then, after 2½ years of a whirlwind career, Fink had a baby. She decided — surprising even herself — to downshift, leaving the fast lane of law for the gentler rhythms of motherhood and a business based in her home. Her company, *Delivered With Love*, makes personalized baby gifts.

"I really thought I could do both," Fink said of lawyering and mothering. She was wrong. "I needed something I could control." Control — it is a word heard often these days from men and women, but especially women, or at least women of a certain means, who are in search of a simpler, less stressful lifestyle. These women

want a life under control. These women, usually well-educated, highly paid professionals, are cutting back their hours, turning down assignments with travel or increased responsibilities, or leaving boardrooms for family and family rooms.

Cases in point: ■ In one of the most highly visible examples, Anna Quindlen quit her high-profile New York Times columnist job in late 1994 to pursue fiction writing, but also to enjoy time with her children, she said.

■ Rachel Ezekiel-Fishbein left her job at a large Philadelphia communications agency after the birth of her child and opened her own PR business. She considers this new world order the latest status symbol, replacing the fast-track power position of '80s executives.

■ Jackie Needleman was an investment banker for Salomon Brothers Inc.'s San Francisco office, and David Cohen was a Ph.D. candidate in ancient Judaism and Russian literature pursuing academics. Both quit their fields for parenthood and started an on-line magazine on — what else? — parenting.

Some trend-watchers are calling

this a movement and dubbing it "downshifting," "reassessing success" or even "voluntary simplicity," part of the West Coast phenomenon of the same name that extols the virtues of less work, less money, and therefore, less things. (Most of us are more familiar with involuntary simplicity, as in cut-backs and unemployment.)

Whatever the buzzword, a reordering of priorities is taking place. Studies show more men and women are turning down promotions or assignments heavy on travel, reducing hours from full time to part time, and refusing overtime. Most often the reason is simple: They want to better balance work and family, and in many more cases, they want to tip the scale in favor of greater family time.

Women, it seems, are leading the way to a simpler lifestyle. A 1995 poll commissioned by the Merck Family Fund showed that 32 percent of the female respondents reported voluntarily downshifting, compared with 23.5 percent of the men.

But this isn't the '50s revisited. These women still want to work, still want to achieve.

"What we're hearing a lot from men and women is how over-

worked they are," said Marcia Brumit Kropf, vice president of research and advisory services for Catalyst, a woman's advocacy group in New York that consults with companies. "What they're looking for is a different kind of work environment... where they have control over their work lives."

A DuPont Co. study of its work force released in the fall found that employees have made certain trade-offs to balance their work and family obligations.

Of the approximately 6,300 respondents, about one-third of the employees were not available for relocation; about one-fourth turned down jobs that required more travel; about one-fifth refused overtime or a job with more pressure; and 12 percent passed up promotions.

"Family is becoming more important to today's generation," said Cindi Johnson, senior work/life specialist for DuPont. "I believe that's a shift from 20, 30 years ago. Now there's such a time crunch. People are asking for a little more flexibility."

While employees have long complained about stress, lack of time and work/family issues, only more recently have these employ-

ees — at least the ones who can afford to easily give up income and still live comfortably — actually made choices in favor of their families and at the expense of their careers.

It's as if a generation of women, after juggling, balancing, flexing till every muscle ached, is finally turning away from the notion of "doing it all."

Maybe it's the backlash to corporate downsizing. If your employer isn't loyal to you, why should you be loyal to your employer? Maybe it's the midlife crisis. You wonder what's the point of this rat race. Maybe it's simply stress.

Some workplace observers describe downshifting in terms of changes in values and mind-sets, a group of men and women realizing the pleasures of parenthood and self-confident enough to find enough esteem in that.

"When they started their careers, they thought CEO was the be-all, end-all. When they had children, they realized this is a priority and it mitigates the drive for CEO," said Karen Noble, senior consultant for Rodgers & Associates, a division of Work/Family Directions in Boston.

Others are leaving corporate America altogether — either because employers cannot accommodate flexible schedules or because even part-time hours at some major companies amount to long days away from home.

Until recently, Rachel Ezekiel-Fishbein, 31, worked for Earle Palmer Brown.

Then baby Daniel came along. Initially, Ezekiel-Fishbein said she hoped to return to Earle Palmer Brown and work four days a week, some from home, so she'd have more time with her son.

"They tried. (But) the company I worked for wasn't prepared yet for a woman who wants to mix priorities," she said, sitting at her dining table in leggings, a T-shirt and jean jacket while her son dozed in an infant seat. (Lonny Strum, the agency's president, said Ezekiel-Fishbein, who left on good terms, could have worked part time but chose to pursue her own business interests.)

Last month, she started her own PR agency — with her name on it — and landed three clients, allowing her to maintain her income (which was a priority) with only half the hours of her previous job.