

# In First Person: Anne-Marie Slaughter

Anne-Marie Slaughter, keynote presenter at the 2016 HR People + Strategy annual conference, is president and CEO of New America Foundation and the former Dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. From 2009 to 2011, she was director of policy planning for the U.S. State Department. Her recent book, *Unfinished Business: Women, Men, Work, Family*, and the seminal article she authored in the *Atlantic*, “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All,” have made her a leading voice in the conversation around workplace and talent practices that benefit businesses, employees, and society. Conference chair and guest editor James Papiano caught up with her after the event.

## The High Cost of Not Making Room for Care

**James Papiano:** Let’s start with what’s at stake. What happens if we don’t take up the challenge that you’re presenting to us.

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** If we don’t make room for care, we will be less and less productive and more and more unhappy and stressed in ways that impose not just psychic costs, but economic costs.

**JP:** Psychic costs and economic costs?

**AMS:** Yes, it’s fine to do two full-time jobs without flexibility and real “slack” when necessary—which is what time to care for children, parents, or for an ill or disabled family member is. This creates stress that we now know translates directly into health outcomes—from obesity to heart disease and autoimmune disease and a whole raft of other diseases.

Increasingly, as we look at Ameri-

can health outcomes versus European health outcomes, we are focusing on healthier lifestyles. One of the biggest elements of healthier lifestyles is to reduce stress, and the highest source of stress is a demanding job with no control. Demanding jobs are actually good for us, but demanding jobs where you are caught between a boss and a child or a boss and your parent is terrible. There is also increasing evidence that this kind of mental distraction affects our cognitive ability in ways that make us less good at what we do.

**JP:** When people are faced with tension between the duties of a job or career and obligations to care for a family member, sometimes they have to choose the latter. What are the consequences of this choice?

**AMS:** We’re losing talent if we cannot find ways to let people we have recruited, trained, invested in, and have high

hopes for navigate family and work. Yes, sometimes they absolutely do have to choose family, but our current system means that somehow they’re then lost to work, and that’s crazy. Whether it’s giving people more flexibility about where and how they do their work or doing things like understanding there’s an enormous talent pool of parents whose kids have left home and are willing and eager to get back in the workforce, we can have all that energy of people who are excited about the next phase in their lives.

When we think about America’s future competitiveness and, frankly, future security, we need to cultivate that talent. The view that says, if you choose your family, you’re out of the game, is just a way of losing extremely valuable talent because we can’t see past that confines of a workforce that was designed for having full-time caregivers at home.

**JP:** How do these tradeoffs affect security?

**AMS:** My home turf is national security and foreign policy. I often point out that the part of the American government that best understands the dangers of losing talent or not investing in the next generation is the Pentagon. They see that we need a generation of Americans who are going to be able to operate the weapons of the future to keep us safe. The Pentagon also understands just how devastating it is when you lose someone you carefully recruited and trained, and so they are pioneering programs to let people take up to three years out and still retain the same rank and job when they return. So in terms of security, to keep us secure and to keep us prosperous, we need all hands on deck. That means allowing people to be great workers and caregivers at the same time.

**JP:** You are asking us to rethink some foundational concepts, for example, workplace design.

**AMS:** Today, work is not just a place you go, it's something you do. It's a place you go sometimes, but sometimes that occurs online. That isn't to say there is not value in a traditional office some of the time, but that is really an artifact of the industrial era and we need to redesign our workplace. I think a lot of people are beginning to understand this and certainly those in the HR People + Strategy community do.

Much less well understood is that this also means redesigning our workplaces so that we have absolutely equal expectations of men and women around care. This is a revolution that we are just beginning to see, because policies are still essentially aimed at women.

Really, what's going to have to happen is that for every worker who walks through your door who has children, parents, or other family members, you're going to have to think, "this person is likely to have care obligations as well as work obligations. How am I going to sit down with him or her and talk about the trajectory of his or her career, and how am I going to design

my policy so it applies absolutely equally to men and women, and that I think it is as normal for a man to leave to pick up a child at a daycare center or to show up for a teachers conference or to drive his mother or father to a doctor's appointment as a woman." That's a revolution.

You can't get there halfway. You can't have women in the workplace and expect them to be breadwinners without equally having men at home and expect them to be caregivers. We have to redesign our workplaces to allow both to do both.

Some couples will go the traditional way. The man is going to work all out, the woman is either going to stop working for a while or work part-time. Other couples will be the reverse where the woman is going to have the big career and the man is going to work, but he's going to have the more flexible job, work part-time, take time off. Still other couples will decide they both would like to slow down for promotions or both work part-time.

In any of these configurations, we need to realize that caregiving years are at most 20 to 25 years and that often is spread out differently over a lifetime. You might have five years when you're children are young, another five to seven when they're teenagers, five to 10 years when their parents are ageing. It will be different for every couple, but we have to understand that somebody who slows down in his 30s or 40s can speed up in his 50s or 60s. I see it as intervals like interval training—intense intervals and slower intervals than our standard ladder.

**JP:** You also ask us to rethink leadership styles.

**AMS:** Leading is as much about care as command. One metaphor I have used is that of leading as gardening—cultivating, nurturing, troubleshooting (that's the weeding part). It isn't all love and kindness, sometimes it can be tough, but there's much more nurturing to this vision of leadership than there is in the command and control vision. This is the same metaphor that General Stanley McChrystal, uses in his book, *Team of Teams* where he has a chapter

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called "Leading is Gardening."

When we think about care and valuing care—valuing care for workers who have care obligations and career obligations—we also want to think about the value of care in the workplace, in the way we lead. Although I want to emphasize I don't know anyone who's in a leadership position that doesn't sometimes have to be tough and sometimes make decisions that people don't like and, yes, sometimes commands.

**JP:** Are you seeing more companies making room for care?

**AMS:** You're certainly seeing it in Silicon Valley. I have talked to people who have unlimited vacation time. Now, that can be a two-edged sword because sometimes when you have unlimited vacation if it means that no one takes any—it is just on paper but not in practice.

I think more generally it's part of a millennial philosophy that you treat people as adults, you expect them to get their work done, they can work wherever they are and whenever they want, so if they need to take vacation, they take vacation. They're starting to pioneer more comprehensive family leave policies, particularly parental leave. They are much more equal for men and women because many of the younger men who are becoming fathers are advertising the value of the lead they took and expecting to be equal parents much more than traditionally. They have a long way to go, and they don't have that many women in high ranks, so they're certainly not a perfect model.

I am on the board of the organization Openwork that looks for different companies that are figuring out different ways to get to real and deep

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flexibility. Many of these companies are just driven by the bottom line, and they know that they're losing a lot of very talented workers when the caregiving years strike. They figure that it makes more sense to invest in retention as opposed to constantly facing the churn.

In the public sector, it is really striking to watch cities start requiring paid family leave. It is now in four states, New York, New Jersey, California, Rhode Island, and several cities, from Cincinnati to the District of Columbia, among others. The Labor Department has 10 top cities in red and blue states targeted right now.

**JP:** You foresee the need for public policy changes that support keeping more people in the workforce over the course of their lifetimes. Are you seeing businesses and government starting to have conversations about what's next?

**AMS:** I think what's going to happen is that the patchwork of different regulations is going to become very onerous. Suddenly it's one thing nobody has and a few companies that see themselves as very progressive do have, and suddenly you have to have different rules, different tax and insurance schemes for different states and different cities within states. At some point I think the Chamber of Commerce is going to say, "Look, we may not have wanted this to

begin with, and we didn't want to be mandated, but it's better to have one mandate than 50 or 100 or 150."

**JP:** How are the experiences of other countries instructive to those of us in the United States?

**AMS:** Everyone always talks about the Nordic countries when you talk about family policy, and I do think they are making the most progress around changing expectations with regard to men. That is beginning to change the culture around what you think a good man is. Somebody who's a father who doesn't take paternity leaves because he wants to stay in the office is, as one CEO put it to me, gives occasion to wonder about his character.

The reason I cite the Nordic countries is because they're very competitive economies that manage to keep the flexibility of private enterprise while having much more of a social safety net, more like the other social democracies. In both Australia and Canada you are seeing again much more paternity leave, much more awareness on the part of the government and industries around the need to change up styles of working because of the demographics and changing cultural expectations.

**JP:** You've talked about the economic impacts of a shifting workforce and the

need for good public policy to support what companies are doing. How do you see this unfolding given that we have a number of workers who have caregiving responsibilities related to an aging population?

**AMS:** We are just at the outset of what could be. If we don't get it right, there will be an enormous drag on the economy because we have a retirement crisis already upon us. Most of the people of my generation who are retiring did not save enough to retire. We moved from defined benefit to defined contributions and that defined contribution is not enough. People are living much longer, too. Women's life expectancy now is 86. That means a growing number of people are living into their 90s and up to 100.

So this is one where I think each government must figure out either a heavily subsidized set of elder care facilities or some kind of extended family arrangements. But then you need all sorts of things, like support in having your parents move closer to you. Companies will need to understand that you have parents living with you. It's one thing when you have children living with you; it's another when you have parents living with you. The whole industry of at-home elder care that is just beginning is going to have to be better regulated, better trained,

better professionalized, and better paid if many of us are going to get the kind of care we're going to want. I see economic opportunity. I also see potential economic disaster, if we don't think about this as a *major* social issue collectively.

Again, the simple thing is just that women used to provide public goods and women raised children and cared for parents and the rest of us benefited from that. One of the big changes in terms of caring for parents is that men are going to be much more responsible for caring for their own parents particularly men who don't have sisters, because wives used to care not only for the wife's parents, but also for the husband's. When the wife is in the workforce, the wife will say often, "I'll care for my parents, and you care for yours." So that's just another shift.

**JP:** Balancing care and work is more challenging for people who are at the lower end of the economic spectrum.

**AMS:** Yes. If the very people who are caring for wealthier people's parents are also trying to care for their own, the system doesn't work. From the point of view of society, if we're hiring poor women to care for the children of richer [people], what happens to those poor women's children? If children are not raised well, then all of society pays the price. So it is something where we have to look across the board in terms of how we provide lots of different kinds of support.

The United States has had a huge emphasis on the nuclear family. Yet we have many cultures that traditionally have much more extended family living. There are some economic opportunities in terms of how we develop housing, with how some businesses support us in caring for each other, and some government policy will be needed too.

**JP:** Have you had people, say to you, "Didn't we live through this movement

decades ago? Haven't we already declared victory with more women in the workforce?"

**AMS:** There have always been women who work. This idea that women all stayed at home, that was more true of middle- and upper-class women than working class women who always had to work. We should be thinking about how the cost of not making room for care is much higher because we have 60 percent of women in the workforce and because we actually need more women than that to keep up with other countries in terms of GDP.

Today, if we don't make room for care, our workers will be less productive, sicker, and more costly in all sorts of ways. We will not retain the talent we've trained. All because we haven't adapted to a world in which women now work and men must also provide care—and both men and women need to have room for both in their lives. ■■

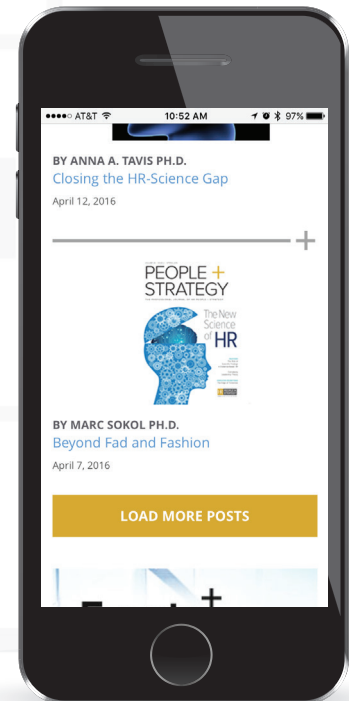
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