

# ENSURING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Beauty and Hair salons are traditionally thought of as work-places which support the flexibility required by working parents. The work-force is statistically predominantly female, and most in the industry are self-employed with a lot working from home, or organising appointments at the client's own home on a flexible schedule. Perhaps other industries should learn a lesson or two from the flexibility, but that's not to say that the working-conditions are perfect or entirely conducive to a work-life balance.

**Just Beauty met up with Maria Theresa Portelli from the National Council for the Promotion of Equality who gives us useful tips and information which can help maximise the efficacy and comfort of working parents in the Beauty Industry.**



**Just Beauty:** When was the NCPE set up?  
Maria Theresa Portelli: NCPE is an independent, government funded body set up in January 2004 by virtue of Chapter 456 of the Laws of Malta, Equality for Men and Women Act.

**JB:** What would you say are its main aims?

MTP: NCPE works to ensure that Maltese society is a society free from any form of discrimination based on:

- sex/gender and family responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, and gender identity in employment; banks and financial institutions, as well as education; and
- racial/ethnic origin and gender in the provision of goods and services and their supply.

**JB:** From research conducted, how far are Maltese work practices from the ideal when it comes to promoting and facilitating equality among the sexes?

MTP: Family-friendly measures are methods and possibilities created for workers to find ways to balance and reconcile work-related demands with family needs. These measures include various support and work arrangements allowing parents to attend to their child care responsibilities as well as facilitate parental choice on work and care. Such measures include for example, flexi-time, job sharing, reduced hours and teleworking. Currently there is a much higher uptake of family-friendly measures from women when compared to their male counterparts. When looking towards the future, it is imperative that equality in the roles of both women and men in all spheres of society is looked at for men to be able to also make use of family friendly measures and enjoy the upbringing of their children.

**JB:** Is the lack of flexibility at most conservatively run businesses one of the main reasons for the low percentage of parents, mostly women on the work-force?

MTP: There are various reasons for the low percentage of females in the labour market, mainly the type of work women choose; women who prefer not be economic independent; and the caring of children or any other dependent family members. Through the Equality Mark that NCPE is currently awarding to organisations which foster gender equality among the workforce, it is evident that there are organisations which do value and recognise the importance of flexibility in the labour market. A family-friendly organisation tries to facilitate the reconciliation between work and family responsibilities for its staff and to make them feel supported in balancing their work and outside work commitments. Organisations which employ persons with caring responsibilities reap a number of benefits, namely:

- encouraging gender diversity at each level of the organisation and decision-making process means more innovative approaches based on the different skills and experiences of both genders;
- both men and women want challenges and development opportunities from work but also choice and flexibility in order to accommodate their personal lives;
- equal access to family-friendly measures helps organisations retain valuable staff thus leading to decreased training costs; and
- by involving both genders into their decision-making process, organisations are more likely to meet customers' needs and expectations.

**JB: What easy changes can an employer make to enhance flexibility for working parents?**

MTP: Employers are encouraged to be well-versed with the family-friendly initiatives covered by the law, in order to be in a better position to offer more of such measures. It is also suggested to employers to establish a formal policy indicating conditions of access to these measures. Each request for the use of family-friendly measures is to be considered on its own merits, taking into consideration the needs of the employee, employer and business. Therefore, this requires matters to be discussed in order for a compromise to be reached for the benefit of the parties involved. One typical example which involves greater flexibility is the possibility of reporting to work later in the morning while the minutes or hours worked less in the morning are then worked later on in the afternoon, also known as flexi-time

**JB: Does the NCPE have a framework to help employers implement such changes? In other words, where can a small business owner turn to when they need advice and help to enhance their employees work-life balance?**

MTP: NCPE fosters work-life balance and assists employers to implement it. Currently, NCPE is working on an EU co-financed project entitled ESF3.47 – Unlocking the Female Potential aimed

at encouraging equal opportunities to both men and women at the place of work. Through the project's campaign, organisations are applying for the Equality Mark. This Equality Mark is awarded to organisations which prove that they are gender-equal in the opportunities they offer. NCPE is meeting these organisations, and assessing their policies and practices, including recruitment and employment practices and the implementation of family-friendly measures to ensure that a commitment towards gender equality is evident in these entities. Furthermore, on a regular basis NCPE offers guidance to employers in the drafting and formulation of equality policies and offers training on non-discrimination and equality as well.

**JB: Is the NCPE working with other national agencies to improve the work-place infrastructure to accommodate balanced practices?**

MTP: Consultation with other entities is highly important for NCPE's work. A case in point involves the previously mentioned EU co-funded project ESF3.47 – Unlocking the Female Potential where unions and employers' organisations occupy the role of partners with NCPE in this project, assisting the Commission to recognise and understand the needs of both the employers and the employees.

## TIPS ON HOW TO BALANCE WORK AND FAMILY

- Get organised
- Be flexible – forgive yourself when things don't get done
- Foster respectful relationships with family members
- Set time limits at work; get more done during the work day
- Work out a list of tasks to avoid because they are time and energy wasters
- Make a list of your favourite off-work activities and make sure that you maintain those that involve both family time and alone time
- Discover new options available to you that can help you reschedule your work hours
- Build a support network
- Find reliable child care



NCPE can be contacted on 2590 3850, by email on [equality@gov.mt](mailto:equality@gov.mt) or website [www.equality.gov.mt](http://www.equality.gov.mt)

## EQUALITY WORKS BOTH WAYS!

Although we overwhelmingly speak of the female counterpart as being largely discriminated against and underpaid on the workplace, a reader wrote to us, highlighting the fact that in the Beauty industry, it is the male that often gets to experience the sharp edge of the knife!

### KENNETH ABELA WRITES:

'A couple of years ago I paid a visit to the Hotel-run Spa ... to inquire why my applications to work at the Spa were always ignored... At the spa reception desk I was told, 'sorry, we do not employ men'. I complained... to the Hotel Management and even to the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE). I was subsequently asked to attend for an interview, in which the HR manager insisted that they do not discriminate, and 'we even had a male therapist here at one time'. In spite of promises that I would be called and various follow ups from my end, I was not contacted again. A few weeks ago this same Hotel published the same advert and I applied once again, and they did not even have the decency of sending an acknowledgment.'

'The fact that I have successfully worked for over 12 years in the industry, and that apart from various therapy related certificates and diplomas, I am ITEC qualified in physiatry, aromatherapy, beauty therapy and presently completing a spa treatments ITEC course appears to have no value, probably because (a) I am male and (b) I am now 53 years of age.'

### THIS PROBLEM IS UNFORTUNATELY NOT LIMITED TO MALTA.

**A EU SURVEY HAD FOUND THAT 46% OF EUROPEANS THINK THAT DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF AGE IS WIDESPREAD, THE FIGURE FOR MALTA BEING 39%. DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF GENDER IS PERCEIVED BY AN AVERAGE OF 40 % OF THE EU POPULATION, THE FIGURE FOR MALTA BEING 45%.**