

# GOLDEN RULES

of Family-Friendly Leadership



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# PREFACE

At RWTH Aachen University, family-friendly working conditions significantly contribute to achieving a balance between the personal lives and needs of University members and the high-performance culture that exists at RWTH in research, teaching and learning. The commitment to research and education as well as to family and community provides the basis to maintain the productivity of university staff in the long term. Also, family-friendly work arrangements increase the attractiveness of the University and help to make it an employer of choice for excellent researchers.

In 2009, RWTH Aachen University participated in the „work and family audit“ and was certified as a family-friendly university by Berufundfamilie gGmbH, receiving the right to use the certification seal of the auditing body. A higher education institution which has successfully passed the audit demonstrates that it assumes social responsibility and implements the legislation on the equal treatment and the promotion of students and staff with family obligations. Thus, for example, the University offers exemplary services and programmes through its Family Services Center, which was established in 2002 by the Equal Opportunities Office.

The present “Golden Rules of Family-Friendly Leadership” should be seen as a further contribution to making the University a family friendly place. They are meant as guidelines for the creation of a working environment which makes it possible for employees to more easily balance work and home-life responsibilities.

Only with your support as an executive at RWTH will we be able to make the family-friendly university a lived reality.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "E. Schmachtenberg".

Univ. Prof. Dr.-Ing. Ernst Schmachtenberg  
(Rector of RWTH Aachen University)

## 1. Communication

Striving for a family-friendly leadership style, executives should take into account that employees need to balance work commitments with a variety of personal and family responsibilities. For this reason, superiors and subordinates should have regular conversations about their needs and expectations, e.g. concerning working patterns and working hours. Such conversations can take place in the context of job and appraisal interviews or in planning meetings. Open dialogue and mutual trust provide the basis for effective teamwork and a healthy work-life balance.

## 2. Equal Opportunities for all Team Members

Whether there are family commitments to be taken into account or not, there should be a fair „give and take“ among the members of a team. It goes without saying that goal-oriented teams work with a focus on results and deliverables, but the ways to achieve these results can be tailored to the needs and commitments of the individual team members. If there are any problems balancing work and family life, existing team working practices should be reviewed and adapted – in situations where some team members have to stand in for others, they should do so in the knowledge that they can expect support from colleagues at other times. In this way, good working relationships and effective team work can be achieved.

## 3. A Sense of Community

Good working relationships can thrive when team members take a genuine interest in their colleagues and consider their needs as a whole person.

## 4. Maintaining a Broad Range of Skills within the Team

A spread of skills across the team makes team working practices more flexible, especially with regard to time and work organisation. Individual competencies can be utilised to full effect, and there is a positive impact on morale and motivation.

## 5. Sensitive Time Management Strategies

In general, employees, especially those with family commitments, need to be able to plan ahead and make arrangements in case of work-related activity outside normal office hours. More specifically, it may be useful to agree on a certain weekday for regular meetings. It should be ensured that part-time employees are able to attend these meetings.

## 6. Maternity Protection and Parental Leave

Especially within young teams, pregnancy and parenthood are normal parts of life. For an employee going on maternity or parental leave, a suitable substitute should be arranged for in due course. A parent's return to work can be facilitated by offering part-time opportunities, flexible working hours, and suitable child care opportunities..



Awardee „FAMOS für FAMILIE“ 2009: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Peter Vary

## 7. Increasing Importance of Caring Responsibilities in the Family

In our aging population, care for the elderly becomes an ever more important social responsibility. This also applies to an increasing number of University staff with care responsibilities. A further problem is that the strain on employees with dependents in their care tends to increase with time – slowly but significantly. In order to support these employees, they should be met with understanding and encouragement. Also, their attention should be drawn to the advisory and other services provided by the Care Unit of the Family Services Center.

## 8. Family-Friendly Information Management

In view of the barrage of information in modern working environments it is a difficult task to maintain an effective information flow within working teams. A family-friendly communication strategy should take employees on family-related leave into consideration, e.g. by including their private email addresses in the email distribution list and by requesting team members to keep in touch with them. As part of a family-friendly communication strategy, employees should also receive regular information on schemes and benefits for university staff, especially concerning topics such as elder care, parenthood, return to work support, worksite health promotion, and financial support opportunities.



## 9. Flexibility in the Workplace, Limiting Overtime Work

Introducing flexitime practices makes it possible to combine stable core times for work with flexible periods in which staff have the opportunity to schedule family-related commitments. A benefit of flexible working is that conflicts regarding time management and teamwork can be effectively addressed. With regard to overtime, it is important to keep the amount of overtime hours reasonably limited. If an employee has accumulated over 60 overtime hours, it becomes necessary to find the reasons for the excessive overtime, discuss ways to avoid overtime in the future, and consider the option of taking compensatory time off.

## 10. Avoidance of Short Fixed-Term Employment Contracts

Employees, especially those with family commitments or those thinking about starting a family, should be in a position where they are able to plan ahead. For this reason, as a general rule, employers should strive to offer acceptably long employment periods. Employment contracts of less than one year in duration adversely affect the employee's long-term planning, and they are not conducive to building a trustful relationship between employer and employee. With short fixed-term contracts, employers run the danger of losing highly qualified staff (cf. RWTH circular A 2011-24 "Vertragslaufzeiten wissenschaftliche Beschäftigte").

Awardee „FAMOS für FAMILIE“ 2010: Univ.-Prof. Marek Behr, PhD



## 11. Part-Time Work Solutions

As a rule, the longer the working hours, the harder it is to reconcile work and family. Employees should be given the opportunity to change between full-time and part-time working modes – in both directions. If a part-time solution is arrived at, however, it must be ensured that the workload is reduced and the assigned work can be done in the number of agreed hours. With such a scheme in place, it is conceivable that employees decide to change their working hours several times during their careers, e.g. to have more time for infants, school children, or dependents in need of care.

## 12. Recruitment of Qualified and Highly Motivated Staff

In times of higher skills shortages a family-friendly workplace is an asset when it comes to the recruitment of qualified staff. For this reason, the family-friendliness of the organisation or workplace should be emphasised in job advertisements, job interviews, job descriptions, etc.

## 13. Leaders are Role Models

Even though executives and team leaders tend to work longer hours than their subordinates, they should encourage their staff to organise work in such a way that they are able to meet the demands of both work and personal life. Of course they also should have an eye on developing their own work-life balance. The University's staff development opportunities, such as the „Starter Kits“ programme for newly-appointed professors, support University

executives in developing a collaborative and family friendly leadership style.

## 14. Cooperation with Partners at RWTH: The HR Department, the Family Services Center, the Equal Opportunities Office, and the Integration Team - Human Resources, Gender and Diversity Management

The members of staff at these university institutions provide advice and expertise on topics such as maternity protection, parental leave, child care services, family and elder care, leave of absence, flexible working policies, and the establishment of offices with parent and child rooms. They also offer assistance with the acquisition of funds for activities promoting equality of opportunities at the workplace.

Equal Opportunities Office:  
[www.rwth-aachen.de/gsb](http://www.rwth-aachen.de/gsb)

Family Services Center:  
[www.rwth-aachen.de/familienservice](http://www.rwth-aachen.de/familienservice)

Integration Team – Human Resources,  
Gender and Diversity Management (IGaD):  
[www.igad.rwth-aachen.de/](http://www.igad.rwth-aachen.de/)

Human Resources Department:  
[www.rwth-aachen.de/personal](http://www.rwth-aachen.de/personal)

# APPENDIX

The “Golden Rules of Family-Friendly Leadership” are part of the Equal Opportunities Policy of RWTH Aachen University. As the reconciliation of family and working life is a prerequisite for the provision of equal opportunities for men and women, the University has been addressing this issue in several equal opportunities initiatives over the last years. For almost 10 years, the University has been offering advisory and child care services for parents, for example.

Experience has shown that such offers and programmes are only effective when they are supported by further structural measures as well as by a change in cultural norms and perceptions. Promoting the reconciliation of work and family life is not only a question of equal opportunities, it is also essential to the sustainability and future competitiveness of the University. At RWTH these important issues are addressed by the so-called “Gender Triangle” consisting of the Integration Team - Human Resources, Gender and Diversity Management; Gender Studies research; and the Equal Opportunities Office.

These developments were mainly triggered by two factors, the challenges posed by the demographic change in Germany and the insights provided by newly-developed gender equality policies, both within and outside academia. Today, policy-making does not only focus on the provision of equal opportunities for men and women, but on the equality of opportunities and the

fair treatment of individuals regardless of gender, language, national origin, disability, and family status. The debate on the compatibility of work and family was extended to include the more general concept of work-life balance, which is to enable all staff to achieve an effective balance between working life and relationships, activities and interests outside the workplace.

Against this background, RWTH Aachen University has adopted a concept of family which takes its cue from the notion of social responsibility: Family is wherever human beings want to be or are there for each other, irrespective of their degree of kinship. The University wants to contribute to making this kind of family life a lived reality, especially by creating conditions which allow employees with family responsibilities to continue their career at RWTH. By achieving the family-friendly certification and continually enhancing the services offered by the Family Services Center, RWTH supports in particular its female students and staff. On the other hand, these initiatives are part of a broader change within the University, which should be supported by all students and staff and from which everybody involved in the University can benefit, both men and women. A family-friendly leadership style helps to advance these developments at RWTH in the area of equal opportunities and gender equity.

Since 2008, in order to support the implementation of family-friendly policies and



practices, RWTH has been undergoing the “work and family audit” certification process. In an integrative approach, programmes, initiatives and structures already in place are being further developed; the individual steps are implemented in a deliberative, sustainable, and participatory process. The audit focuses on nine areas for action which are deemed essential for creating a family-responsible institution. One of these areas is concerned with a modern, family-friendly leadership style. In order to outline

the key dimensions of responsible leadership and provide practical recommendations for action, we have created the present “rules.” Further, there is RWTH’s “FAMOS für Familie” prize, the annual award presented in recognition of a family-friendly leadership style.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the Rectorate Unit for Gender and Diversity Management (IGaD) or the Equal Opportunities Office (GSB).



Awardee „FAMOS für FAMILIE“ 2011: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Martina Ziefle

