**North America**

**Tonya – USA Atlanta**

I— I worked full-time after graduating from college and once I had my daughter I started working part-time. Working full-time, obviously, a much larger part of my day and week revolved around my accounting work. Now that I’m working part-time I’m wearing a few different hats throughout the … day and week. And … there— there are a couple of things that are very positive about that, obviously I can spend time with my daughter … um … take care of things around the house. The challenge is from the business aspect … um … scheduling becomes difficult: coordinating calendars for several people when I’m only available two days a week can become very difficult. Um … also I— I sometimes feel like I may hold work up because I’m only there two days a week and those are— that’s the only time I can be there. Um … however, to try and counter those difficulties I do check my email several times every day and if there’s something urgent that comes up I try to find time in my days off to address those issues. Um … really the timing and the scheduling are the— the more difficult parts of working part-time. My workload … um … I’m not doing nearly as much work because I just don’t have the time to do it but I have found that I have to be much more efficient. I do not have nearly as much time to … um … have the water cooler conversations, so the— my personal experiences with my co-workers aren’t as deep as they were as a full-time employee because when I’m in the office, I’ve gotta be churning the work out.

I think being a working mum is definitely something that’s feasible and attainable. Um … I feel like I have a great situation. I really enjoy my accounting work, obviously I love my daughter, I’m so fortunate to be able to spend some time working and being a professional, and using my brain and then some time at home with my daughter.

If I had to work full-time and take care of … the family that’s where I feel like things would be breaking down … for me personally. It would— it would just be more difficult if— if I was working full-time. But that— that also goes to the industry … um … accountants generally work very long hours certain times of the year and so if I was working full-time, it wouldn’t just be the standard forty hours per week, it would be closer to fifty or sixty sometimes in the year and that— that’s where it will be really difficult to manage … the work-life balance. Um … the accounting industry can be very demanding in terms of time and requires a good deal of overtime during what we call ‘the busy season’, which is generally around the … um … April 15th filing deadline for personal income taxes. During that time it’s not unusual for accountants to work fifty to sixty-hour weeks, that’s just part of it, unfortunately. I will tell you that being in a … um … management position what I have noticed is that the … new generation of accountants that are graduating from college and starting to come through the ranks, they’re a little less willing to put in the overtime that me and my peers were when we got out of college. Um … just something interesting that I’ve— I’ve noticed across the generations. Um … but, you know, during those busy seasons you put your head down, you get the work done, you look towards that deadline that’s coming up and you know that you’re going to gonna have a few months where— where you’ll have Fridays off, for example. So there— there are rewards associated with it but it’s definitely a commitment and a responsibility and can become a little stressful during those times.

My personal experience with maternity leave is that the company that employed me when my daughter was born provided eight weeks of full compensation for me to be home with my daughter. After that, I was expected to go back full-time. In talking with other mothers and mothers-to-be I’ve found that my experience is not representative of what other people have experienced. For example, I was paid at one hundred per cent of my normal salary while I was out on maternity leave, I’ve talked with other women who … were paid fifty or sixty per cent during their leave period. I’ve talked with some who had less than eight weeks; eight weeks seems like a very short time, in— in my opinion. You have, under the Family Medical Leave Act, you have the ability to take, I think up to three months. But, who can take three months if they’re not gonna be paid for it? So I— I think we need to do a … — I think we need to do something about that. There, you know, the Family Medical Leave Act attempted to address issues with— for new parents and families with medical issues but … when you’re not compensated that— that becomes difficult. What ended up happening for me was I realised there was no way I could go back to work full-time with a two-month-old baby at home, so I didn’t. At the end of my maternity leave, I resigned.

**Kara & Jeremy – USA**

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| Jeremy | I mean you – for me, when I was working in LA you basically just get in your car and you— you go home ’cause you— you live— you probably live pretty far from where you work. Um … you’d be commuting for about an hour, hour and a half, just on the freeways … um … because a lot of commerce is kind of, it’s— it’s in the centre of the city and it’s in hotspots like Hollywood or Wilshire Boulevard or downtown and a lot of people are out in the Valley so it’s— it’s definitely a commuting culture. Um … and we don’t have any— any public transport, so …—you’re kinda left to your own devices. We do have it but no one ever uses it… |
| Kara | There’s a subway but no one knows— knows about it, it seems… |
| Jeremy | I think, like, it’s hard just to— it’s hard to get to the public transport. So you have to commute to get the bus, you have to drive to the bus stop, you know? Because it’s not as integrated and it takes forever. I— I had this dream once I was gonna commute to work and I was working on Wilshire Boulevard and it took me three and a half hours to get from the Valley on buses, I mean, it’s ridiculous.  |
| Jeremy | Yeah, so in Los Angeles the industries that you have there are really focused around … um … media and entertainment. Um … which of course you have that in Europe as well, but Los Angeles is the capital of TV and film so a lot of that is concentrated … um … out of LA. Also the music industry as well … um … those are pretty big ones. I mean, I’m trying to think of other media— sorry other industries that we have in LA. I mean, we do have one of the nation’s largest ports which is, kind of, it’s exploding now because the of— of Asia and China and I think Los Angeles’ Long Beach Port is probably the— the biggest gateway for goods that are coming into the States from … um …— from Asia, so it’s like huge … um … I guess, a huge deal. LAX too is one of the world’s biggest airports so… I mean we— we get a lot of tourism in LA but I think New York you must get more tourism. |
| Kara | Oh yes, definitely, especially when the … um … the euro was so high against the dollar. You couldn’t walk through mid-town without hearing twenty different languages being spoken with people walking around with these gigantic shopping bags. We were all very envious … of the Europeans. Um … and I think the industries in New York are more obviously Wall Street … um … and publishing, book and magazine publishing, fashion industry, and advertising I think are the main ones. |

**Catrina – Canada**

I’m Catrina and I work in international sales. Yeah, I’m from Canada … um … and I live in London now. Um … I just wanted to experience a different culture and a different way of living and um…. Um … I really came over here without thinking of what I wanted to do in the working world. It was really more about the experience of— of living abroad … um … but I luckily managed to secure myself a position before I moved over. I’ve been here for about four years. Things are a little bit different over here but not massively, I mean, you know, Canada has basically … the culture of Canada has grown out of English culture so … um … it’s not totally dissimilar. But, you know, there are little things like … change in your purse and dialects … um … just around even the city of London … um … you know, it’s— it’s quite difficult to— it’s hard to remember actually what I felt like when I first came ’cause there were a number— a number of times when I thought, ‘Oh, I have no idea what this person is saying to me, I’ve never heard this accent before, where are they from?’ Um … you know, Geordie accents, for example, really quite difficult. Now it’s— it’s a part— it’s a part of living here, I— I have grown so accustomed to it that I don’t even think about it anymore but … um… And it’s— it’s quite diverse as well, I mean … the way… Canada’s very diverse as well but London just has such a— a wide variety of people and accents and … um … cultures from … all around the world. Um … that I think— I think are quite diluted back home in a way … um … not in a bad way but just it’s much more vibrant.

Yes, … uh … Canadian culture is— is typically quite outdoorsy and back to nature and— and with that … um … I think everybody really feels more at home with nature and life and therefore is a little bit more slow-paced and … uh … people enjoy taking the time to sort of experience things … um … rather than getting so caught up in the moment. And … um … even in big cities, I mean Toronto’s on a— on a harbour, so … um … you know it’s on Lake Ontario which is one of the Great Lakes, which is beautiful and just to go down to the water at lunchtime and take forty-five minutes to just sit and take in the scenery. I don’t think— I don’t think a lot of people do that in a lot of big cities in the States, obviously that’s a generalisation but … um … I think across Canada that’s sort of the way of life, people typically are laid back just because of their connection to nature.

So working in international sales the team is quite diverse, we’ve got people from— from a variety of places … um … there’s a— a Scandinavian … um … I’m half-Norwegian as well. Um … we’ve got a Liverpudlian who also is— is … um … Kiwi so he has quite a strange accent having grown up in New Zealand as well. Um … it’s a difficult accent to try to describe. Um … and, of course, you know … um … because we’re an international team and because we— we work with people all around the world, we’re always going to different places and dealing with different cultures and different people and … um … different ways of life. Um … which is very interesting … um … you know I— I work with— I work with teams in Australia and New Zealand … um … whose accents are actually drastically different once you get to— once you get to understand the sort of nuances of each— of each accent. Um … and thankfully for me you know it’s quite easy because of— their culture is not dissimilar to the English culture and very similar to Canadian culture as well because, you know, the Commonwealth link. Um … but the rest of the team who deals with— with places in Europe and Middle East and Africa … um … they’re always going around and meeting people that come from such a different background to what— to Western culture.

**Chris – USA, North Dakota**

Of course, a lot of our business is naturally in New York and … uh … that’s not America per se. But … um … a lot of the other customers that I’m working with in … uh … in the States are places— in places like Chicago and Birmingham, Alabama or San Francisco, … um … San Diego, Seattle, Denver … um … Minneapolis. So … uh … a lot, you know, the sheer space and difference of how people approach business, in— even in the same industry is quite interesting. The travel, not so much, not inter-continentally anyway, but … um … I don’t get to … uh … make that hop very often any longer but when it— when it does happen, it’s quite enjoyable. It’s tough to pack for, I must say. Um … I think one of the really interesting things about having a very UK sensibility now is the European sort of mindset that you realise that … uh … how lucky and easy it is to do business in a place, a geographical region like North America where there is a single currency, a single country, the sort of thing where you are talking about thousands of miles as opposed to … um … Europe where the tastes and— and politics and everything can change within the matter of a, you know, an hour’s flight and it can be very radically different. Which means you’ve got to tailor things quite a— quite a bit more than you would necessarily have to do in the States.