



Muestras de los ejercicios

Nivel: «Speaking club»

Going Home to Work

“I felt I was spending my life on the road,” said editor Helene McQuade. For five and a half years she spent three hours a day driving to and from her job at a magazine. When she married her husband, Jack, she moved into his home in the country. She did not want to quit her job, so she continued to work. But her office was in the city, 75 miles away. She left the house at 6:00 A.M. five days a week and got home each night at 7:30 P.M. By the time she got home each night, she felt tired, stressed, and depressed. And things only got worse when she and her husband had a baby.

McQuade finally decided to quit her job. But her boss asked her to continue working for the company. He said she could stay in the country and work at home. She only had to drive into the city once a week to pick up and deliver her work or attend meetings. McQuade agreed to try it.

Today fewer people in the United States drive to work. Like Helene McQuade, they have stopped commuting to work. They stay home. They have not lost their jobs or started their own companies—they are a new type of employee: the telecommuter. Over 5 million working people in the U.S. divide their work between home and the office. Some work mostly at home, some work mostly in the office, and some work at home half the time and in the office half the time. Today, with a modern system of communications, many people can work anywhere. An individual only needs a supportive boss and a well-equipped office: a telephone and an answering machine, a computer and a printer, a copier, a fax machine, and a modem. Researchers predict that, in just a few years, 41 percent of workers in the United States will telecommute. Driving to work may soon become something from the past.

Employees like telecommuting because they can have a more flexible working schedule. They can start to work when they want. They can work in the evening and go out in the morning or the afternoon. They don't have to spend as much time sitting in highway traffic. They can take advantage of the fresh air. Moreover, telecommuting gives working mothers and fathers more time with their families. But telecommuting is not the cure for all working people who feel stressed in their jobs. People who work at home alone often feel isolated. They seldom see people face-to-face. With less time in the office, they may spend most of their working hours alone. They usually spend more time in contact with machines than with human beings, so they sometimes feel lonely. In fact, not everyone makes a good telecommuter. People who telecommute need to make their own work schedule. Some telecommuters report that they work more hours when they are in the comfort of their own homes. In fact, they sometimes think their home is work, and this makes them feel confused. When home and work get confused, people feel as if they never leave work. Some families have problems coping with work at home. For example, the children may not understand that they

cannot talk to mom (or dad) when she (or he) is working. In addition, not all jobs or professions can allow telecommuting. An editor of a magazine may be able to spend most of the time working at home. A hospital nurse or school teacher, however, may not. 7 Employers may not accept the idea of telecommuting, either. They may feel a loss of control over employees who work at home. Also, employers often believe that the best work gets done when people work with people. Face-to-face meetings are not possible with telecommuters. Meetings on the phone are not the same. The subtle messages of body language get lost in phone discussions. In addition, when employees work at home, it is not possible to solve problems that need immediate attention. The biggest problem, in fact, may be trust. Can an employer trust the employee to do his or her work without a manager watching? The employer must choose the right person to telecommute.

Yet if employers can manage feeling a loss of control over employees, they may find many advantages. Telecommuting can save money for a business. Running an office will be less expensive if people work at home. Employees will be happier and, as a result, more productive. A California study showed that telecommuters were 20 percent more productive than office workers. Actually, many telecommuters report working ten hour days, rather than eight-hour days, when they work at home. Another advantage for employers is that they can hire more employees who cannot relocate. If an employee cannot move to where the company is, he or she can telecommute. They can also keep employees who might want to leave the company because of long commutes. If a company can keep its employees, it can save on the money that would be needed to train new employees. The benefits of telecommuting may be even greater for society. If more people work at home, there will be fewer cars on the highways. If there are fewer cars on the highways, there will be less gasoline used and less pollution. In addition, if people are able to work at home, more women and workers with disabilities can be hired. As families balance the demands of work and family life, they will be happier and more productive.

But again, is telecommuting the perfect solution for society? As people have more opportunities to work at home, many may move to the suburbs or to rural areas. As they move out of the cities, the cities will be left without their employed population. The unemployed people who stay in the cities will not pay taxes to the cities. Therefore there will be less money to maintain the cities' roads, water supply, electric supply, and so on.

There is a more serious problem than maintaining the cities. As people become more comfortable working alone, they may become less social. It's easier to stay home in comfortable exercise clothes or a bathrobe than to get dressed for yet another business meeting!

"I am happy to keep my job and work at home," says Helene McQuade, "but I feel isolated from my colleagues in the office." Spending more time with machines than people may also add to this social problem. It has been shown that people have become less polite in their electronic mail (e-mail) communications.

Both the crumbling, or breaking down, of our cities and the desocializing of society are not small problems as we consider the possibility of telecommuting.

COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Reading for Main Ideas

Read each statement and decide if it is true or false. Write T or F.

1. Helene McQuade has become a telecommuter. _____
2. More and more people in the United States are telecommuting. _____
3. Telecommuting is the perfect solution for all employees. _____

4. Some employers think there are problems with telecommuting. _____
5. Telecommuting is helpful to the environment. _____
6. Socializing will increase with telecommuting. _____

Reading for Details

Read the questions and circle the best answer.

1. How did Helene Mc Quade feel about her job in the city?
 - a. She didn't like her boss.
 - b. She didn't like her job.
 - c. She didn't like driving to work.
2. What new group is staying home these days?
 - a. People who are unemployed.
 - b. People who have started their own businesses.
 - c. Telecommuters.
3. What arrangements do telecommuters make with their employers?
 - a. They do all their work at home.
 - b. They do some work at home, some in the office.
 - c. They do all their work in the office.
4. Which is not needed for a telecommuter's home office?
 - a. Paper shredder
 - b. Fax machine
 - c. Telephone
5. Why might employees want to telecommute?
 - a. They don't have to see their boss so often.
 - b. They can find better child-care services.
 - c. They can have a better work schedule.

Reading between the Lines

Work in groups. Read the questions. Discuss your answers.

1. What did Helen McQuade mean by "I felt like I was spending my life on the road"?
 - a. She spent too much time in her car.
 - b. She didn't like to drive.
 - c. She was getting old too fast.
2. Why did McQuade finally want to quit her job?
 - a. Her husband could support the family.
 - b. She couldn't find anyone to care for her child.
 - c. She was tired from trying both to commute and to care for her baby.
3. Why didn't people telecommute years ago?
 - a. Their bosses didn't allow it.
 - b. They liked living close to their work.
 - c. They didn't have the necessary office equipment.

4. Why does Helen McQuade feel isolated from her colleagues?
 - a. She has a new baby and they don't.
 - b. She works harder than they do?
 - c. She doesn't work as closely with them on projects.
5. Who is most accepting of telecommuting today?
 - a. The telecommuter
 - b. The employer of the telecommuting.
 - c. Society

Different Ways of Talking

A few hours after Joy Fisher's birth, her parents took pictures of her. Joy's mother put a pink hairband around Joy's head, so that everyone who saw the pictures would know that the new baby was a girl. Even before she was born, Joy's parents knew that she was going to be female. Joy's mother had a sonogram when she was six months pregnant. When the doctor said, "I'm sure you have a little lady in there," Joy's parents told all their relatives and friends that their baby was a girl. Gifts soon arrived, including pink dresses and dolls. Joy's parents decorated her room in pink and white.

A few years later, Joy's brother, Tommy, was born. His room was painted blue, and he received books and a football as gifts. Joy enjoyed helping her mother take care of the new baby. She also enjoyed playing with other girls at school. Now, Tommy has also entered school, where he plays with other boys. The games Joy and Tommy play are quite different. Joy loves jumping rope with her two best friends. Tommy likes to play ball with a large group of boys. Sometimes when they play a game, he is the captain. He enjoys telling the other boys what to do. Joy, on the other hand, doesn't like it when new girls join her friends and try to change the way they jump rope. She thinks that some of these girls are too bossy.

Both Joy and Tommy are growing up in the culture of the United States. They are learning what it means to be a girl and a boy in this culture. Their sex at birth, female and male, is now becoming a gender—a way of thinking, speaking, and acting that is considered feminine or masculine. Each culture has its own way of defining gender, and very early in life gender becomes a basic part of a person's identity. According to Deborah Tannen, a professor at Georgetown University, gender differences are even reflected in the ways that men and women use language. Tannen and others who study communication believe that these differences begin early in life.

For example, in the United States, boys and girls usually play in same-sex groups. Boys might play in large groups in which every boy knows his place. Some are leaders; others are followers. Boys compete with one another for leadership. Many boys like to get attention by boasting, or talking about how well they can do things. The games that they play often have complicated rules, and each boy tries hard to win.

Girls, in contrast, usually play in smaller groups. Sometimes they play with only one or two "best friends." Most girls want other girls to like them, and this is more important to them than winning. Girls may be interested in playing fairly and taking turns. For example, when girls jump rope together, two girls hold the rope while others jump. Then the rope-holders take their turn jumping.

Tannen has found that these differences are reflected in the ways that children use language while they play. Boys often use commands when they talk to each other. For instance, when Tommy is

captain he might say, "You go first. Don't wait for me." As the leader of the other boys, he tells them exactly what to do. But when Joy wants to influence her friends, she uses different forms of language. Instead of using commands, she will say, "Let's try it this way. Let's do this." This is how she tries to direct the other girls without sounding bossy. By using the form "let's," she also emphasizes the fact that the girls all belong to the same group.

As Joy and Tommy grow up, they will continue to speak differently. In junior high school, Joy's status will depend on her circle of friends. If her friends are popular, then Joy may enjoy high status at school. For this reason, Joy and many other girls are interested in gossip. If Joy has some information to share about a popular girl at school, this proves that she has a friendship with this girl. In this way Joy can use gossip to gain more status in her school.

Tommy, on the other hand, may be less interested in gossip. His status does not depend on who his friends are at school. Tommy gains status through his own ability to play sports well or earn high grades. Later in life, Joy may continue to be interested in talking about other people and their lives. Tommy will be less interested in personal talk and more concerned with discussions of sports and news. These give him a chance to gain status by showing others his knowledge.

Different ways of speaking are part of gender. As adults, men and women sometimes face difficulties in their communication with each other. Studies of communication show that if a woman tells her husband about a problem, she will expect him to listen and offer sympathy. She may be annoyed when he simply tells her how to solve the problem. Similarly, a husband may be annoyed when his wife wants to stop and ask a stranger for directions to a park or restaurant. Unlike his wife, he would rather use a map and find his way by himself.

Language is also part of the different ways that men and women think about friendship. Most American men believe that friendship means doing things together such as camping or playing tennis. Talking is not an important part of friendship for most of them. American women, on the other hand, usually identify their best friend as someone with whom they talk frequently. Tannen believes that for women, talking with friends and agreeing with them is very important. Tannen has found that women, in contrast to men, often use tag questions. For example, a woman might say, "This is a great restaurant, isn't it?" By adding a tag question to her speech ("isn't it?"), she is giving other people a chance to agree with her. Unlike most women, men often speak more directly, giving direct commands such as "Close the door." Many women, however, use more polite forms such as "Could you please close the door?"

These differences seem to be part of growing up in the United States' culture and following its rules of gender. If men and women can understand that many of their differences are cultural, not personal, they may be able to improve their relationships. They may begin to understand that because of gender differences in language, there is more than one way to communicate.

COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Reading for Main Ideas

Read each statement and decide if it is true or false and write T or F.

- _____ 1. A child's sex at birth determines how the child will think, act and speak later in life.
- _____ 2. People learn masculine and feminine behavior.
- _____ 3. Men and women learn to use language differently.
- _____ 4. Gender differences can be seen in the ways that children use language when they fight.
- _____ 5. Differences in language between males and females are the same in all cultures.
- _____ 6. Girls gain status by showing their knowledge about sports and news.

- _____ 7. Girls get much of their identity from being part of a group.
_____ 8. Men usually talk more about other people than women do.
_____ 9. For women talking with friends is an important part of friendship.
_____ 10. Sex is biological and gender is cultural.

Reading for Details

Read the following questions and underline the correct answer.

1. In what kind of group does Timmy like to play?
 - a. He likes to play in groups of both boys and girls.
 - b. He likes to play in large groups.
 - c. He likes to play in smaller groups.
2. How did Joy's mother first show that Joy was a girl?
 - a. She put a hairband around her head.
 - b. She put a pink dress around her.
 - c. She painted her room blue.
3. What does Timmy like about being captain?
 - a. He likes boasting.
 - b. He likes telling other boys what to do.
 - c. He likes having the other boys like him.
4. How do boys get attention?
 - a. They argue with others.
 - b. They talk about their abilities.
 - c. They change the rules.
5. What is a reason why girls are interested in gossip?
 - a. Gossip teaches them how to react.
 - b. Gossip allows them to use commands.
 - c. Gossip can bring them status.

Reading between the Lines

Look at the reading to answer the questions below. Which is the most likely answer in your opinion?

Choose your answers and discuss them. (More than one answer may be possible for some questions).

1. When do gender differences between boys and girls begin?
 - a. Before birth
 - b. At birth
 - c. Shortly after birth
2. What might Tommy do if he played with Joy and her friends?
 - a. Argue with them
 - b. Tell them what to do
 - c. invite other boys to join the group
3. Compared to Tommy's friendships, Joy's friendships are probably...
 - a. More boring
 - b. longer lasting
 - c. less competitive

4. What do some men want to prove by discussing sports?
- b. They are knowledgeable b. They are masculine c. They are interested in sports
5. What do the differences in male and female language show?
- a. Human relationships are difficult b. Human communication is simple
 - c. Humans can be divided into two genders.