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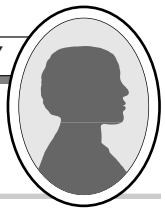
BIOGRAPHY



Lillian Moller Gilbreth

As Henry Ford's assembly line demonstrated, increased industrial efficiency and output were major goals of the 1920s. Lillian Moller Gilbreth, an engineer and industrial psychologist, helped to pioneer methods for reaching these goals. By studying a worker's motions in performing a task, she sought to find the "one best way" to do it—in the shortest time, with the least strain and wasted motion, and, thus, the greatest productivity and profit.

As you read the passage below, think about the effects of motion study on how tasks can be done efficiently.

Lillian Moller's early life, which began in California in 1878, never hinted at an engineering career. Lillian would later remember herself as a shy, introverted child whose interests ran to poetry and music. At the University of California, she majored in literature and earned a master's degree in the field.

Lillian Moller's marriage, in 1904, to Frank Gilbreth put her on a new career path. Already renowned in motion study himself, he convinced her to join him as a partner in their own consulting business. Together they conducted studies, wrote several books, lectured widely (the shy and introverted Lillian became a dynamic public speaker), and ran training sessions in efficient management methods. They produced 12 children—six boys and six girls—in 17 years. Along the way, Lillian also earned a doctor's degree in industrial psychology.

How did she do it all? In later years, she recalled an exchange with her husband: "I asked how on earth could anybody have twelve children and continue a career? My husband said, 'We teach management, so we shall have to practice it.'" Their home became a laboratory for developing household management techniques, such as answering mail by means of a family newspaper and identifying a "birthday gift buyer" responsible for remembering all birthdays and buying all gifts. (Many of these techniques have been amusingly recounted by two of the Gilbreth children in *Cheaper by the Dozen* and *Bells on Their Toes.*)

In 1924 Frank Gilbreth died. Lillian now had to raise her family as a single parent. Business fell off immediately, as clients doubted the ability of a woman to carry on such technical work. The family faced grave financial difficulties.

Dr. Gilbreth carried on the family business—and even branched out into new areas with great success. Declaring that "homemaking is a job," she published several books on efficient home management methods. She also developed techniques to enable the physically challenged to improve their lives and published her findings in *Normal Lives for the Disabled.* In the 1930s, Dr. Gilbreth answered Herbert Hoover's call to serve as a member of the President's Emergency Committee for Employment and the President's Organization for Unemployment Relief. She also served on other government committees and did volunteer work for community groups. Working into her 80s, she encouraged and inspired many other women to become engineers.

Questions to Think About

1. Describe Dr. Gilbreth's methods and goals in conducting motion studies.

2. Why did Dr. Gilbreth meet discrimination in her professional life?

3. Drawing Conclusions What personal traits and skills probably accounted for Dr. Gilbreth's success in raising a family and running a business?