

Trailblazing Towards Talent Retention

A Summary of Human Resource Professionals' Opinions about Retaining Talented Working Women, Post-Maternity Leave
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The Idea in Summary

Although women are participating in the labor force in larger numbers than ever, a slight decline has been seen in the US, and there is evidence to suggest that many of those dropping out of the labor force are highly educated, skilled women. The demographic of women who are working is shifting with more employed from generation "X" and generation "Y" than ever before. With this comes a new type of culture in organizations and results in a greater number of women taking leave from work for the birth of a child given the age and stage of their career path.

The impact that maternity and the subsequent leave has on an organization prompted this study on what Human Resource Professionals are concerned about and how improvements can be made.

Like it or not, the reality is that women at all levels of an organization need to take time off and many are taking time off for the birth of a child. How does this impact organizational culture and productivity? How can we ensure that these valued employees return to the organizations they are leaving, instead of moving to other organizations as they seek the type of work environments that are most beneficial to working mothers? How can we avoid this potential brain drain?

Strategic initiatives focused on working women who are leaving for maternity, are away during maternity and then returning post-maternity will assist them in re-entering the workforce more engaged, with greater commitment and productivity.



The Idea in Action

How to ensure that retention targets are reached for working women post-maternity leave? Consider these strategies:

LEVERAGE EAP PROGRAMS AND COMMUNICATE

Ensure that your EAP Programs provide the learning opportunities and support necessary for working women to re-enter the workplace. Communicate this benefit to the employee population, not only as a retention tool but a tool for attracting new talent.

For example:

By dedicating resources for maternity leave transition and providing support and learning opportunities for new working mothers, working women will be better prepared intellectually and emotionally for their return to work. This training could include a curriculum focused on life transitions, work-life balance in preparation for working motherhood and coaching working mothers through the back to work process.

WALK THE TALK

Raise the level of awareness and of the benefits of work-life balance and the negative impact that imbalance has on employees and on corporate culture. Seek out and expend false assumptions in your organization that work-life balance approaches have a negative impact on organizational performance.

For example:

Develop strategic initiatives at the highest level of the organization that focus on a family-centric and dual centric corporate culture. More than flexible work arrangements it is important to ensure that there is an overall sense that a balanced work-life is imperative for everyone in the organization. Create new processes that enable work and life balance by demonstrating to employees that there is trust that work can and will get done, regardless of how it gets done. Educate senior and mid-level managers on work-life balance, employee wellness and the positive and negative impact it has on the bottom line. Help managers and supervisors recognize their own work-life balance and how it will be perceived (positively or negatively) by employees. Recognize and promote women who are in "non-traditional" work arrangements. Deloitte and Touche did this and as a result have attracted and retained more talented women than ever before with their women's initiative.



BE PROACTIVE ABOUT MATERNITY ABSENCES

Explore your absence management practices or create new ones if none exist in relation to maternity leave. Ensure that maternity is not being overlooked.

For example:

Develop proactive absence management processes specific to maternity leave transition out of the workplace and then back in. Provide training and tools for supervisors and managers on managing maternity leaves and require managers to be accountable for the effective transition of their employee out of the work-place, throughout their leave and then back into the workplace.

BE A TRAILBLAZER

The impact of corporate maternity in Canada and the US is only just becoming realized and measured. Become an organization committed to trailblazing towards retaining this talent while attracting new talent.

- Work-life balance for working women; and
- Absence management—in particular, policies applicable to employees returning to work, post maternity leave.

For example:

- Open the dialogue on corporate maternity and bring it “out of the closet” and into the boardroom making it an organization wide business strategy.
- Explore the reasons why women with children are leaving your organization, include a new standard of measure to determine their needs.
- Be clear that you want employees to return to your organization after a leave and develop formal processes to stay connected with them while on leave.
- Leverage your work-life balance initiatives as an attraction and retention tool for your organization and become the benchmark culture in your industry.
- Create absence management strategies that include training for managers and supervisors to ensure accountability in relation to absence management with respect to maternity leave.
- Institute return to work post-maternity leave training programs for your working women that include learning about transition and strategies to becoming an effective working mother.

Maureen Clarke is a coach, facilitator and trainer with over 15 years experience in the private sector in the area of education & development. Maureen is the Principal of The Blueprint Group - taking a strategic leadership approach to creating healthy, high performing organizations through innovative talent retention initiatives.

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