
UCF Forum

4-16-2014

Employers Need to do More to Help Maintain Careers of Employees With Babies

Leandra Preston-Sidler
University of Central Florida

 Part of the [Benefits and Compensation Commons](#), and the [Communication Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ucf-forum>

Information presented on this website is considered public information (unless otherwise noted) and may be distributed or copied. Use of appropriate byline/photo/image credit is requested. We recommend that UCF data be acquired directly from a UCF server and not through other sources that may change the data in some way. While UCF makes every effort to provide accurate and complete information, various data such as names, telephone numbers, etc. may change prior to updating. UCF welcomes suggestions on how to improve UCF Today and correct errors. UCF provides no warranty, expressed or implied, as to the accuracy, reliability or completeness of furnished data.

STARS Citation

Preston-Sidler, Leandra (2014). Employers need to do more to help maintain careers of employees with babies. UCF Today, 2014-04-16. Retrieved from <https://today.ucf.edu/employers-need-help-maintain-careers-employees-babies/>

This Opinion column is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in UCF Forum by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.



Employers Need to do More to Help Maintain Careers of Employees With Babies

By Leandra Preston-Sidler
UCF Forum columnist
Wednesday, April 16, 2014

It's amazing how quickly humans adapt to changing circumstances. A few months ago I wrote about how incredibly challenging my first month of life was with a newborn—what many refer to as “baby boot camp,” a perfect term since that's exactly what it was like thrust into a completely new state of being where life is organized around one thing.

Now that I am back to work full-time and trying to write a dissertation and keep my house livable, boot camp has become how to get anything (or rather, everything) done with a very needy little one demanding all my time when I have so many other demands and responsibilities.

In my Women's Studies classes I teach about “the second shift”: women working during the day and coming home to domestic responsibilities, essentially working two full-time jobs. It is more commonly called “doing it all,” one unplanned outcome from the women's liberation movement. While women gained access to the workforce (albeit still unequally), they also predominately maintain primary childcare and home responsibilities.

While we can rightfully cite stay-at-home fathers or egalitarian households to counter this notion, according to the Labor Department's 2011 American Time Use Survey, men spend on average one third less time on housework and childrearing than women. Statistically, significantly more women are primary caregivers and do the majority of housework whether they work full-time.

My situation is unique because I teach online, which means working full-time from home. The upside is I do not spend an exorbitant amount of my salary on childcare, but the downside is actually trying to work full-time at home. When my husband is not home, I temporarily become a single parent during those periods, like others do. But

even when he is home, I still find it hard to get everything done. I am luckier than some, because at least I have a willing partner in all of this.

However, this is not only about me, since many folks—men and women—work at home with children present without the option of expensive childcare or for other reasons. This is an issue of class as well as convenience. My position is a luxury, as childcare is not an option for many working parents but a necessity, whether they can afford it.

Excuse me for a moment. The baby is crying.

When I was pregnant, I was shocked at how things worked. I was permitted 12 weeks of unpaid parental leave. Unpaid parental leave seems like a penalizing oxymoron because having a baby means one needs pay more than ever. My accrued sick time allowed me to receive a paycheck on leave but I was not sick. Being a teacher meant I could only take off six weeks or I would lose another semester, which extended beyond my allowance.

The United States is dreadfully behind other countries when it comes to taking care of folks on parental leave. Sweden and Norway have the best parental leave in the world—more than a year of combined pay for the mother and father. Canada provides a year at partial pay. The United States is the only industrialized nation that does not mandate that parents of newborns get paid leave.

Some argue that having a child is a choice, and institutions should not have to accommodate personal decisions. And it certainly is a choice.

But folks should be permitted to have children and still maintain careers. Loyal employees should be supported whether we choose to have children. The fact is, many people have children—and the strength of professions is in long-term employees. Not being provided a more substantial leave after working for an employer many years is disheartening, particularly if the employees have never taken off for any other reason. To equalize, maybe employers could offer a six or 12 week time off to non-parent employees every five years for personal benefit. Healthy employees mean healthy businesses.

Most days I juggle like a clown—grading, online discussions for class, attending meetings as needed, squeezing in dissertation research and writing, chairing committees, and whatever else work requires.

Then there is the baby. “Duty calls” has become “doodie calls.” She is my number one priority—but meeting expectations and deadlines, obviously, are important, too.

I have an exceptionally supportive work environment so I am better off than most and I want to excel in my career, but I do not want to create the impression that I am falling behind because I have a baby.

But I am falling behind on sleep. And personal time. And showers. And that pesky dissertation.

To first establish my career, I waited almost 40 years to have a baby. I don’t want to compromise that or the developmental and precious time with my baby in her first year of life. Because, as the Rolling Stones say, “You can’t always get what you want.”

But you can certainly try.

Leandra Preston-Sidler is an instructor in the University of Central Florida’s Women’s Studies. She can be reached at Leandra.Preston-Sidler@ucf.edu.