

The Fourth Step

A RESPONSIVE WORKPLACE

Job pressures, last-minute shopping, chauffeuring back and forth, paying bills, and a myriad of other chores keep parents on the go and often out of touch with children. Here's how one single mother described the complications of her life: "I feel the biggest problem in the home is what I call 'after-work burnout.' I know this is an important time for my child. I should go over his school day and homework before it gets late and he becomes tired. I tell myself this every day, but by the end of my work day, all I can think about is getting home and relaxing before starting the chores."¹

If every child is to come to school ready to learn, we must have family-friendly work policies. We recommend in this chapter a four-part strategy for employers to consider: First, we call for a parental leave program, so parents can bond with newborns. Second, we propose flextime and job-sharing arrangements, so home and family obligations can be better blended. Third, we suggest that employers help with child care. Finally, we recommend "parent days," so that mothers and fathers may visit children at child-care centers.

In yesterday's agrarian society, families lived on farms, in villages, or in small towns. "Work life" and "home life" were intertwined. Mothers, fathers, and children worked side by side, forming a common economic enterprise and producing, with the help of friends and neighbors, food and other staples needed to survive.² Life was hard, hours long, and financial rewards meager. Still, the social and economic dimensions of family life were connected, with children often serving as apprentices to parents or other mentors, understanding what parents actually did at work.

All this has changed. "The family economy has disappeared almost completely," according to the Carnegie Council on Children. Today, fewer than 3 percent of American families live on farms. Most parents work outside the home. Consider these facts: In 1975, about seven million children under the age of six had mothers in the work force. Today, the number has almost doubled (table 13). Nearly 60 percent of all mothers with preschool children, and approximately half of those with children under age one, are now working.

Figure

Mothers in the Paid Labor Force, 1970-1990

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The gap between work and family life has widened, isolating children from the adult world, putting them in second place.³ Sociologist Arlie Hochschild, describes the situation this way: "For all the talk about the importance of children, the cultural climate has become subtly less hospitable to parents who put children first. This is not because parents love children less, but because a 'job culture' has expanded at the expense of a 'family culture.'"⁴ A kindergarten teacher in rural Missouri made a similar observation: "I believe parents love their children, but in today's society everyone works and they are just plain tired. After all, the job comes first."⁵

In a *Better Homes and Gardens* survey, 77 percent of the respondents said they felt family life was in trouble. Seventy-six percent would be willing to reduce their income or slow their career development in order to spend more time with their children.⁶

According to another recent report, American parents overwhelmingly feel they do not spend enough time with their children.⁷ One parent wrote, "Next to divorce, the greatest problem I see with today's parents is that we are becoming stressed out! That is, trying to juggle meaningful careers, children, community and church activities, household chores. I do not feel we are shirking our responsibilities as parents, but we're simply taking on too much. I seriously believe this will affect our families in years to come."⁸

The point is clear: It is simply impossible to separate work and family life. If children are to get support at home and be prepared for school, family-friendly policies in the workplace are needed—policies that not only strengthen the role of parents, but also give care and guidance to young children. A kindergarten teacher observed, "Since so many families are affected by dual careers, I firmly believe employers must be more concerned about family needs. If children are to be ready for school, we need more on-site day care, more parental leave, more job sharing. After all, workers are parents, too."⁹

How should we proceed? How can the obligations of parenting and the workplace be reconciled, to the benefit of both? As a first essential step, we strongly recommend that mothers and fathers be given time off to be with their babies following the child's birth. Making it possible for parents to interact intimately with their newborn is so basic, it's so essential to the well-being of the child. Psychologist Burton White notes, "the more physical contact babies have in the first months of life, the better for all concerned."¹⁰ This is a time for bonding.

Fifty years ago, the U.S. Department of Labor recommended that all working mothers be given six weeks of prenatal leave and eight weeks of leave after the baby comes—without sacrificing job and seniority benefits.¹¹ Parental leave legislation has, in fact, been introduced and debated in Congress each year since 1985—and, is widely supported by the public. Nearly 80 percent of Americans believe that employers should be required to give new parents, at least *unpaid* leave.¹² Yet, a half century after this visionary concept was officially proposed, little progress has been made. Former U.S. Secretary of Labor William Brock says, "It's just incredible that we have seen the feminization of the work force with no more adaptation than we have had."¹³

The United States is, in fact, the *only* industrialized country that does not have a national policy guaranteeing maternity and infant-care leave.¹⁴ Today, more than 125 countries in Asia, North and South America, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East have

some form of government-mandated parental or maternity leave. Most of our major trade partners guarantee job protection. They provide pay for leave as well. In many countries, working mothers are able to take an average of four to five months of *paid* leave, receiving anywhere from 60 to 90 percent of their salaries.

In Finland, working women get thirty-five weeks of parental leave with full salary (table 14). In Japan, women have the right to a three-month leave at 60 percent of their pay. In Germany, mothers who have worked for at least nine months are eligible for a fully paid leave beginning six weeks before a baby's birth and ending eight weeks after it. Ninety percent of German women take another four-month leave at a more modest rate of pay. Mothers who work in the public sector can actually take several years of unpaid leave, while maintaining job protection.¹⁵ Some countries also give paid leave to fathers.

TABLE ____

Parental Leave Policies: International Comparisons

<u>Country</u>	<u>Weeks of Parental Leave</u>	<u>Number of Paid Weeks</u>	<u>Percent of Normal Pay</u>
Austria	16-52	20	100%
Canada	17-41	15	60
France	18	16	90
Finland	35	35	100
Germany	14-26	11-19	100
Italy	22-48	22	80
Japan	12	12	60
Sweden	12-51	38	90

SOURCE: Women at Work, International Labor Office Global Survey.

Those opposing parental leave in the United States worry about a governmentally-imposed mandate. They wonder where it will lead. Further, it's noted that such a policy will cause special difficulties for small businesses. Also, there is concern about the costs. Yet a recent survey suggests that a parental leave policy can, in the long run, actually *save* money through better morale, increased employee retention, and finally, greater productivity.¹⁶ Sociologist Robert N. Bellah and his colleagues, in *The Good Society*, declare, "It might appear at the moment, when economic competitiveness is such an obsession, that Americans 'can't afford' to think about the family if it will in any way hinder our economic efficiency. Nothing could be more short-sighted. In the long run our economic life . . . depends on the quality of our people."¹⁷

Parental leave should be broadly available, a policy that will strengthen the child's emotional and social well-being, and surely promote learning. Specifically, employers should offer parents of newborn or newly adopted children at least twelve weeks of unpaid leave. It is simply not acceptable that here, in America, where half the work force is female, new mothers are so penalized. It's troubling that they're forced to return to work before fully recovering from childbirth, required to leave their babies in the care of others before bonding, or even deprived of their livelihoods. Consider also how this so undermines the fulfillment of the nation's ready-to-learn objective.

Some companies are demonstrating what can be done. Joy Cone—a small company in Hermitage, Pennsylvania that produces most of the nation's ice cream cones—gives employees up to a year and a half of unpaid parental leave, with job protection.¹⁸ John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance, Hechinger, Ohio Bell, Arthur Andersen, US Sprint, AT&T, and Johnson & Johnson all offer employees one year of unpaid leave. Merck & Co., Inc. gives new parents a six-month leave with partial pay and benefits, and makes it possible for employees to take additional time without pay. Other companies—Lotus, for example—give employees a shorter period of *paid* parental and childbirth disability leave.¹⁹

The SAS Institute, a software company in Cary, North Carolina, provides up to a year of unpaid leave for child care or other personal reasons.²⁰ Human resources director David Russo says that the company endorses the policy's use by either parent. "A lot of businesses look for all the reasons not to get involved with child care. Jim Goodnight, our founder, looked at why we *should* get involved," he said.²¹ Jane Helwig, a co-founder of SAS, herself a working parent, said that the difficulties she faced in balancing her roles as mother and executive paved the way for these family-friendly

policies. Helwig describes the company's philosophy this way: "The feeling has always been that if you treat employees as though they make a difference to the company, they *will* make a difference."²²

The communications company, US West, in Englewood, Colorado, has one of the country's most generous parental leave policies: up to two years of unpaid leave for time with newborns and young children.²³ Board chairman Jack MacAllister calls this policy "an investment." "Our children are our future." He says, "Our choices are to invest our energy in educating them or to become a nation without skilled workers, unable to compete in the global economy, a people whose progress is hampered by social inequity."²⁴

Hemmings Motor News, a magazine published in Bennington, Vermont, has a variety of family-friendly policies, including six weeks of paid parental leave, plus another six months of unpaid leave for mothers and fathers. When Charles Waters and his wife had their first child, they took advantage of the policy, allowing Mr. Waters to spend two or three days each week in the office and the remaining days at home with the baby. "It gave me an opportunity to spend some precious time with my children when they were infants, to bond with the babies," says Waters. "And by spending a few days a week in the office, I was still able to keep up with my work. The company's family policies and flexibility really helped our family."

In the absence of federal legislation, states are creating their own policies. In Oregon, a parental leave program requires companies with twenty-five or more employees to give parents twelve weeks of annual leave, including time off to care for sick family members. Oregon also mandates maternity leave. Health-insurance benefits are maintained during leave periods and employees have the right to return to a former job or to a comparable position after leave.²⁵

Rhode Island's parental leave legislation, which applies to all employers with fifty or more workers, is regarded as a model. Under this program, employees who work at least thirty hours a week are eligible for thirteen weeks of parental leave, with their health-insurance benefits maintained. Employees who take such leave are required to pay premiums for health care coverage into escrow accounts, but are subsequently reimbursed upon returning to their previous position—a right that's guaranteed.²⁶

Beyond parental leave, employers also can strengthen family life by allowing parents to modify the typical 9-to-5 routine with "flextime" arrangements. One mother in Washington State said, "Our school district began offering a preschool program for four-year-olds. I wanted my daughter to enroll, but the program ends at 3 p.m. and I work until 5."²⁷ In such circumstances, parents are forced to spend lots of time on the phone, checking with neighbors or caregivers, interrupting their work. Older children who fill in as baby-sitters often call parents at work, seeking help. Frustration builds, productivity declines. As schedules are adjusted, parents can spend more time with children.

In 1974, the federal government became the nation's first major employer to offer a more flexible work schedule to employees. Eight years later, one-third of a million federal workers were participating in one of the 1,554 alternative work-schedule programs in twenty different agencies. In a survey of employees' opinions, nine out of ten said flexibility was critically important in helping them solve family and work problems, in caring for sick children, in reducing baby-sitting expenses, and in allowing them to spend more time with their children.²⁸ Today, 19 percent of the federal work force uses flexible schedules. Managers believe such reforms are essential to attract and retain a quality work force.²⁹

In the private sector, Pitney Bowes in Stamford, Connecticut, allows individual departments to work out their own schedules. All employees are required to be at work during a core period from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.³⁰ Before and after this period flexible arrangements are permitted. IBM also has flextime. One design-engineer father in Kingston, New York, arranged his work schedule so he can meet his daughter at the school bus. Proctor & Gamble in Cincinnati, Ohio, allows hourly employees to alter work schedules by one hour at either end of the day. "These arrangements were provided to meet the changing needs of employees," Terry Loftus, a company spokesman said. "The work setting is different than twenty years ago. There are more working moms, and we have broadened the company's perceptions to meet these changing needs."³¹ In 1988, nearly 12 percent of all workers in the country were on some sort of flexible arrangement.³²

"Job sharing"—another flexible approach—allows two part-time employees to staff one full-time position. At American Express, for example, one middle-manager took the company's eight-week leave when she gave birth to her first child, returning to work full-time, and placing her daughter in day care for fifty hours a week. After several

months she began to feel that life for her, and her baby, was out of balance. The company agreed that she and a colleague, also a mid-level manager, could split jobs. Thus, both employees were able to spend part of each week with the family and at work.³³ Part-time work and "telecommuting"—doing work from home—also help families, and such arrangements will grow.³⁴

Employers also should consider offering to their workers "parent days," occasions when employees are given time off to be with their children to share experiences and bring their separate worlds together. It is really rather sad the way so many youngsters go off to preschools or day-care centers early in the morning while parents go off to work, with little time together. After all, workers are excused to vote, or serve on juries, sometimes for weeks. Why not give working mothers and fathers at least two days each year to be with their child, especially the first day of day care or preschool, to get to know the teachers and become acquainted with the other kids, and simply get close to their own children? First-hand encounters are the only way parents can really know what is going on in their children's lives.

In Massachusetts Governor William F. Weld recently announced that parents who are state employees may spend time in their children's schools "to visit classroom teachers, to volunteer in schools, and to serve in school governance."³⁵ He also asked other employers to provide released time for such activities, beginning before the start of each school year. "I have challenged business to redefine the model of what constitutes good corporate citizenship," he added. Proctor & Gamble gives parents half-day vacations to attend afternoon programs at their children's schools or to participate in school events.³⁶ North Carolina National Bank gives employees two hours of paid leave each week to work in schools, participate in their children's school activities, or confer with teachers.³⁷ The bank also matches, dollar for dollar, an employee's financial contribution to his or her child's school.³⁸ "Successful parenting is as challenging as successful banking," says an official.

Two years ago, *Hemmings Motor News* began an "education participation day" giving employees two days off each year to visit schools, participate in volunteer activities or observe classes. The program did not evolve from employee pressures; rather, it was initiated by the publisher's owners and managers, who are committed to family-friendly policies. The number of employees participating during the first year was small.

However, the company continued the program and urged employees to participate out of concern for Vermont's children, families, and schools.³⁹

Another approach is to bring children right to the workplace, offering a child-care service close to where parents work. This idea is not new. As early as 1816, industrialist Robert Owen created the first employer-based child-care center in Scotland, establishing an "Infant School" at his mill, for children, ages one to twelve. During our Civil War, businesses that produced ammunition and soldiers' clothing created on-site nurseries to care for the children of women employees. Day-care centers were established at hospitals and war-related businesses during World War I. In the Second World War, nearly twenty-five hundred day-care centers were created at work sites, using government funds provided through the Lanham Act.⁴⁰ However, these were considered "emergency measures" and were dropped when America returned to a peacetime economy.

Parents who have access to on-site child care are more productive, take less leave time, and have better attitudes toward work (table 15).⁴¹ A comprehensive survey of four hundred and fifteen companies revealed that on-site child care brings beneficial results: morale improved, absenteeism declined.⁴² A May 1988 article in *Personnel* magazine reported that "Nyloncraft, Incorporated, of Mishawaka, Indiana, has attributed major reductions in turnover rates—and a drop in absenteeism to less than 3 percent—to its child-care programs. Lincoln National Life Insurance Company in Fort Wayne, Indiana says its child-care program led to reduced absenteeism and improved productivity. At Mercy Richards Hospital, 34 percent of employees said that the child-care center was a factor in their accepting jobs at the hospital.⁴³

Ten years ago, the city of Irvine, California, promised its citizens that by 1992 adequate child care would be available to all parents. Through a door-to-door survey the city found numerous gaps in such services. In response, Irvine's child-care spaces have increased more than 80 percent over the past five years. This includes a \$1.2 million municipally-funded child-care facility in Irvine's new civic center, which reserves space for the children of city employees. Irvine provides after-school care for latchkey children and offers incentives to developers who include child-care space in all new commercial and business projects.⁴⁴

As recently as twenty years ago, child care at the worksite was limited to about two hundred companies. Today, about four thousand offer some form of child-care arrange-

ment—dramatic evidence of the growing corporate concern about family life.⁴⁵ Significantly, two-thirds of Americans believe employers should take, in fact, the lead in helping families meet child-care needs. Seventy-one percent feel the private sector should become involved in child care and 45 percent say that business should fund such programs, even if that would mean reductions in wages and benefits.⁴⁶

TABLE ____

Employers Response to the Improvements of
On-Site Day Care Programs

Better Morale	90%
Easier Recruitment	85
Improved Public relations	85
Less Turnover	65
Less Absenteeism	53
Creating Greater Productivity	49

SOURCE: National Commission for Employment Policy.

Patagonia, an outdoor clothing and equipment manufacturer in Ventura, California, has an on-site child-care center for eighty infants and children. Yvon Chouinard, Patagonia's founder and co-owner, said the company supports the center because of worker satisfaction and low turnover. "Frankly, to replace an employee costs thousands of dollars, so if we can save just a few employees over the year, we're making money," he said. "And that doesn't even factor in lost time due to distractions from child-care problems, improved morale, and lots of other things. Plus, we get suppliers who come into the cafeteria and see mothers eating lunch with their kids. And it has a great effect on them. They trust a company that does that. In fact, most of them want to come to work here. It's good advertising, that's for sure. And it's just plain good business."⁴⁷ Consider again how critically important such time together is to parents, and especially

to children, for a child to have lunch with a parent—uninterrupted time to talk and to share the excitement and troubles of the day—can be emotionally reassuring.

The law firm of Akin, Gump, Hauer, and Feld also has its own child-care center, "the place for kids", across the street from its downtown Washington office, with an emergency child-care service that operates seven days a week. Susan Suarez, director of the program, has outings to parks, picnics at the zoo, swimming during the summer, and movies—all involving expeditions by public transportation, with babies in strollers and the young children holding hands. Attorney Harriet Lipkin's two young children, Joshua and Stephanie, see the center as "their place." If Lipkin's regular child-care arrangements fall through, if her sitter is sick or on vacation, the children can go to the center. The firm also has a child-care committee, a parents' newsletter called "Small Talk," plus a parent support group that has monthly brown-bag lunches, with speakers.⁴⁸

Ben and Jerry's, the ice-cream company in Waterbury, Vermont, has a Children's Center, located in a nearby renovated farmhouse, that cares for children from six weeks to six years of age. "We have all found that having children at the workplace is a very humanizing experience," said Beth Wallace, the director. "Our toddlers and preschoolers visit the plant and see everything from ice-cream production to shipping and processing. When infants are in the yard and the other children are playing, parents and other workers wave at them from the windows. There are lots of smiling faces on both sides."⁴⁹

Small companies—those with fewer than two hundred and fifty employees—have the most difficulty offering such care. They may be sympathetic to parents' needs, but find it economically not feasible to set up their own in-house facilities. Perhaps the best approach for such businesses is a collaborative arrangement, one in which several companies jointly sponsor a child-care center. Alternatively, small companies can give their employees child-care grants to subsidize the costs of care at a local center, or at the very least, provide a referral service to advise parents about child-care options.

A group called "Care Connectors, Inc.," has a computerized national "on-line child-care database" for corporate clients wanting to help employees locate day-care centers.⁵⁰ IBM has set up a \$22 million fund to increase the supply and improve the quality of child-care programs. The aim of this initiative is to increase the range of options for employees and make IBM "a good neighbor."⁵¹ To receive support, new child-care

centers must meet accreditation standards set by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Clearly, much is happening. But still, just 17 percent of the large firms—those with at least ten thousand employees—and only 3 percent of small businesses—those with one hundred or fewer employees—offer child-care services. All companies should, we believe, help their employees locate, evaluate, and if possible, pay for quality child-care and preschool services either on-site or at local centers.

To forge a strong alliance between business and the ready-to-learn campaign, we recommend that a national clearinghouse be established to help employers develop family-friendly policies, gather data on the full range of programs being offered, and give special recognition to companies with creative programs. Such a clearinghouse might be established within an existing organization, such as the National Alliance of Business.⁵²

During the past decade, America's business leaders have been vigorously involved in school reform, continuously reminding us just how directly education is linked to economics and how our ability to compete in world markets is closely tied to the quality of our schools. In the coming decade, corporate America should continue to focus on school reform, of course. To achieve excellence, special attention also must be given to families, and to the care of children. As Stephen E. Ewing, president and CEO of Michigan Consolidated Gas Company, states: "We need to change attitudes about day care so that it is no longer seen as a personal need, but rather a public expectation—a way to invest in the youth of this nation starting at birth. . . ." ⁵³ For all children to be well prepared for school, a responsive workplace is crucial.

NOTES

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