

Work-Life Balance

Big improvements for Parental Leave, if Workers Actually Take It

Some corners of corporate America have a new message for new parents: Put down that laptop and pick up your baby instead.

Even as employees are increasingly tethered¹ to the office, a workplace culture that urges new mothers and fathers to hurry back to their offices is beginning to shift.

In recent weeks, companies like Accenture and Microsoft said they would offer more family-friendly benefits like generous parental leave. The trend may be a sign of a tightening² job market, at least for a certain segment of highly skilled performers.

But it also raises the question of whether these new benefits will be more talked up than actually taken. Employees may wonder if doing so is acceptable or if it could hurt their careers. At many companies, the new benefits are at odds with³ a highly demanding, 24/7 workplace culture — a culture that starts from the top.

On Monday night, Marissa Mayer, the chief executive of Yahoo, announced that she was pregnant with twins — and that no one should expect her to take much time away from work when they are born. “I plan to approach the pregnancy and delivery as I did with my son three years ago, taking limited time away and working throughout,” she wrote in a post on Tumblr.

One after another, major companies are announcing more family-friendly policies. Accenture, the global consulting firm, said last week that primary caregivers would not have to travel for the first year of their children’s lives.

Microsoft nearly doubled to 20 weeks its paid leave for women who have just given birth, tripled paid leave for all other new parents and began offering them the chance to ease back into work half-time. Adobe Systems also significantly increased paid leave.

Netflix went the furthest: It will offer fully paid leave for new mothers or fathers for an entire year after a baby’s birth.

At the same time, the new benefits are an acknowledgment that the American economy is struggling to adjust to modern gender roles and the rise of two-income families. More than half of nonworking Americans say family responsibilities are a reason they are not working, according to a New York Times/CBS News/Kaiser Family Foundation poll.

Adapted from *The Upshot*, Claire Cain Miller and David Streitfeld, Sept. 1, 2015

1. *Tethered*: attached

2. *Tightening*: (here) that is becoming more difficult

3. *At odds with*: in contradiction with