

The 10 best ways to retain working mothers

Worried that new mothers may not return to work following maternity leave? Increase the odds by building flexibility into your work culture. Offering options for when and where work gets done is one of the best ways to encourage women to come back—and stay—after they give birth, according to a Baylor University study of 179 new moms.

Here are the best ways to retain working moms, according to Baylor researchers:

1. Set policies that enable flexibility. Having control over her work schedule allows a new mom to respond to the unpredictable demands of an infant. A mom who can decide when to do her work is more likely to be able to tend to her assignments and her family in a way that satisfies both ends.

2. Minimize surprises. Unscheduled overtime and longer-than-expected days can unsettle a mom who has a baby at home. The Baylor University study concluded that job demands, such as mandatory overtime, lead to more turnover among mothers.

Tip: Notify employees in advance of upcoming overtime so they have ample time to make child care arrangements.



3. Talk about job security. Researchers found that the thought of losing their jobs unnerved new moms more than almost anything else at work. Worrying about economic security—the ability to pay their bills—distracts from the tasks at hand.

4. Change your vocabulary. Pigeonholing women onto the “mommy track” if they take time off mid-career to be with their children places a stigma on them that’s hard to shake when they get back to work. You don’t refer to workers who take a couple of years off to get their master’s degrees as on the “student track” or those who take extended leaves to nurse a dying parent as on the “elder care track.”

5. Tap support from executive dads. The managers who perceive their organization's working mothers most favorably are men, especially if they have kids of their own. But a study by Working Mother magazine revealed that men who aren't executives and both men and women who don't have children view working moms as less committed to career advancement and job responsibilities, and less willing to take on additional assignments.

Tip: Enlist executive-level working dads as workplace advocates for working moms. Encourage them to set an example by taking time off to participate in their own children's daytime activities.

6. Promote "career" over "job." Women who identify themselves as having careers are more satisfied, positive and loyal to their companies than those who work only for the money.

In the Working Mother study, moms with careers appeared more satisfied with their decision to work, their professional development opportunities and the support received from managers, compared with moms who consider their work "just a job."

7. Look at the bottom line. Family-friendly benefits like backup child care can seem expensive—until you realize how much they're saving you in absences, productivity and employee engagement.

Tip: Measure the return on investment for the benefits you offer working mothers. For example, child care provider Bright Horizons found that over six months, users of a backup care program were able to work an average of six days that they otherwise would have missed.

8. Pair working moms for mentoring and networking. The best advice for a working mom with a new baby at home might come from another working mom who has been there. Start more than one group so working moms in special circumstances can connect with kindred spirits.

Examples: groups for single moms, mothers whose children have disabilities and first-time mothers.