

Working Parents and Work-Life Balance – insight for employees and employers...

Are you a working parent? If so, you've got a full plate, and it's not always tasty.

Balancing the responsibility of child care and coping with the competing demands of a 40+ hour work week can be a challenge. Furthermore, it leaves little physical and mental energy for your next job – the care and maintenance of your family and household. All this can make even the most talented multi-tasker feel challenged.

Like it or not, most parents in the 21st century feel forced to repeat this exhausting, weekly cycle out of economic need. Single parents, now a societal epidemic, especially have it rough, with no other income to rely on. Ten to 20 years ago, it was possible to raise a family on one income. So what happened? Inflation? A breakdown of the family unit? Pursuit of economic gain or career?

The days of June Cleaver are long gone, and daycare workers have practically replaced the role of primary parent (assuming that parenting means being physically and mentally available to your child). But despite their best efforts, they can never replace mom and dad. Are working parents comfortable with this scenario? What has happened to the priority of family-first, work second? Americans now spend more time at their jobs than with their families.

While parenting styles, family size and the dilution of the family unit have changed drastically to meet economic demands, in spite of the state of the economy, most would agree that the grounding effect of a physically, mentally, and emotionally available parent for a child cannot be denied. Just ask Dr. Laura Schlessinger, author of *'Parenthood by Proxy,'* in which she emphatically states, "Don't have them if you won't raise them." She cites numerous studies and stories confirming the impact of parents not being physically and mentally available to their offspring. One study refers to a successful daycare center that hired only degreed, experienced child care workers. After five years of operation, and observation of the behavior of children separated from their parents day after day, they closed shop because they felt they were morally and ethically doing families a disservice.

While many workers accept the struggle of work/life balance and daycare as a fact of life, a growing majority are dog tired of the 9-5 rat race, expressing frustration over the lack of time available to spend with their children and families.

So what does parenting have to do with employment? Everything. If you're a job seeking parent and must work, choose carefully. Look for employers who are flexible and have a working environment that is family-friendly. Get employees' opinions on company views regarding family. If interviewing for a job, decide what your boundary lines are between work and family and ask related questions. For instance, is overtime required? If so it may not be a good fit for you if it interferes with your family responsibilities. You cannot serve two masters.

What about the company's benefit package, including health insurance? Are premiums affordable? Do they offer a daycare expense reimbursement? Are sick days allowed in the event of sick children? Are there opportunities to work from home in the event of an extended family illness? If you're a working parent in a less than friendly work culture and it's adding stress to your family life, start looking elsewhere. The Missouri Career Center can refer you to employers and offers many other services to help you find employment and develop job seeking skills. They can be reached at (417)887-4343. For a sampling of available jobs, check out weekly *hot jobs* featured at: www.ozarksjobpath.org.

417 Magazine published an article last year entitled '*Best Places to Work in 417 Land*'. In it, local employers were profiled based on several criteria relating to employee satisfaction. The article states: "A good company is one that has happy employees who want to stick around and do their jobs well. But how does a company get to that point? There's certainly more to it than just having a stellar benefits package (although that's vital)." Out of 55 companies, the best companies excel in work-life balance, time off and work-from-home options, benefits, social activities in and out of work, employee development and more, the article said.

If job seeking parents, or any job seeker looking for a healthy work-life balance would like to find out who the top employers were, visit: www.417mag.com and enter 'best places to work' in the search window.

So what do employers have to do with working parents? Everything. It's been said that 'happier employees provide better services,' so by communicating through policies and actions that a company is supportive of families and a healthy work-life balance, quality employees will be attracted and retained, and the bottom line affected in a positive manner. Employees with families are generally very stable workers and therefore a company asset. But constant turnover wreaks havoc on a company's efficiency, bottom line, and reputation.

When companies are more concerned with the bottom line than the employees who do the work to maintain it, the message sent is that company officials and American society in general values work over family. Other cultures have found ways to balance work and family successfully. In Europe, for instance, employees receive much more vacation time, work fewer hours, and spend more time with their families, yet still get their work done. In Japan, executives take naps during the work day. In the eyes of other cultures, Americans *live to work*, but others simply *work to live*. Two very different approaches.

Can employers learn from other cultures and companies such as those studied in the 417 article how to create a culture of employee work-life balance? Could implementing such changes smooth out workplace wrinkles and plump up the bottom line?

The benefits to employers and employees certainly make it a worthy pursuit.

Job seekers and employers are always invited to contact the Missouri Career Center for assistance finding great jobs and great employees.

Comments/discussion about this topic? Other job related topics readers would like to see? Contact:

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