



# Beating the Parent Trap

BY LISEN STROMBERG  
ILLUSTRATION BY VERÓNICA GRECH

## As Millennials reach parenting age, smart companies are offering better benefits for young families

Forget gourmet cafeterias, on-site massage services, even good old-fashioned ping-pong tables; the hottest employee perk these days is pumping rooms. And no, these aren't high-end gyms; they're luxurious private spaces where breast-feeding mothers can comfortably pump milk. Consider powerhouse advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather. The company has four suites in its New York City headquarters that have soft lighting, ergonomically designed chairs, heaters, magazines, bottles of water, and refrigerators to store milk until a new mother goes home to her baby at the end of the day.

For women like Lara O'Shea, a global consulting partner at OgilvyRED, a division of Ogilvy & Mather, having that kind of support was critical to helping her ease back into work after she gave birth in 2015. "Many employers don't realize the hidden challenges we face after having a baby," O'Shea says, "but thanks to the supportive environment at Ogilvy, I was able to successfully breast-feed for six months."

Ogilvy's pumping rooms are a sign of the times. With 64 million members of the Millennial generation expected to have children in the next decade, smart companies are doing all they can to support new parents—mothers especially. For many companies, it starts with offering meaningful paid parental leave. According to the United Nations, the U.S. is the only developed country that doesn't offer paid maternity leave, meaning that employers have been forced to fill in the gap. From tech titans to financial services firms and even the U.S. military, many have stepped up: Four months has become the requisite paid leave at tried-and-true employers like Morgan Stanley and Johnson &

Johnson, and some more progressive companies are outdoing that. Advertising agency 72andSunny recently expanded its paid leave to six months, and Netflix offers a full year to both mothers and fathers.

Even after the most generous of paid leaves, there is an adjustment period for mothers upon their return to work. According to Karyn Twaronite, Global Diversity and Inclusiveness Officer at Big Four accounting and consulting firm EY,

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companies are taking steps—like Ogilvy's pumping room—to ease that adjustment. "In the past few years, I have seen an increased commitment by employers to help new moms transition back to work," she says. "It is part of understanding the career life cycle. Retaining female talent has become increasingly important, and companies are realizing that supporting mothers as they transition through each stage is smart business."

The data is definitive: Companies that have gender-diverse workforces

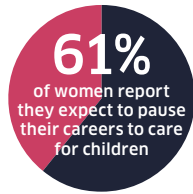
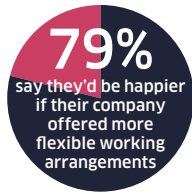
have stronger bottom lines. A recent McKinsey & Company study of 366 public companies across Canada, Latin America, the U.K., and the U.S. showed that companies with more gender-diverse talent pools had 15 percent higher financial returns, regardless of the industry. A separate McKinsey study revealed that companies with more gender-diverse senior management teams had a 10 percent higher return on equity, a 48 percent stronger operating performance, and a 1.7-times growth in stock price. Given these numbers—and given that 80 percent of college-educated women are destined to become mothers—many companies are seeing the importance of family-friendly policies and programs. It's not about social responsibility; it's about business.

Indeed, companies who don't cater to their female employees may be facing a sort of brain drain. A study by a Vanderbilt University Law School professor revealed that 57 percent of Gen-X and Baby Boomer women who graduated from elite colleges paused their careers for a period of time after they had children, and a majority of college-educated Millennial women have reported in studies that they plan to take a career break when their kids are young because they foresee challenges juggling work with new motherhood. A study of nearly 1,500 highly qualified women I conducted for my book, *Work Pause Thrive: How to Pause for Parenthood Without Killing Your Career*, revealed that a majority of those who paused their careers did so because of inflexible work cultures and a lack of support for mothers.

Even in our somewhat more enlightened era, that lack of support is still an issue. Consider the experience of software developer Kathryn Rotondo. When she returned to her job three months after giving birth to her son, she was forced to pump breast milk in a unisex bathroom—one without a lock. "Twice a day, I had to barricade the door just so I could get some privacy," Rotondo recalls. "It was mortifying."

She's not alone. Ask most women who returned to work after giving

**How much does family matter to Millennial workers?**



birth, and they'll regale you with pumping horror stories: Cold storage closets, empty conference rooms, and parked cars are just a few of the places you can find women expressing milk. A recent study by the Jacobs Institute of Women's Health revealed that 60 percent of new mothers in the workforce do not have lactation accommodations, even though it is required by federal law in many cases. (A little-known provision of the Affordable Care Act called the "Break Time for Nursing Mothers Law" requires businesses with 50 or more employees to provide a private space and a "reasonable" amount of time for pumping. But the law only applies to hourly workers, meaning companies, like Ogilvy, that are trying to attract top talent must create their own solutions.)

It isn't just nursing mothers who are asking for help, either. Increasingly, new fathers are demanding support from their employers as well. Twaronite led a 2015 survey of white-collar workers which revealed that two-thirds of Millennial men would or already have changed jobs in order to secure better work/life balance. These men actually reported a stronger willingness than Millennial women to give up a promotion, relocate, or take a pay cut in order to have more time with their families.

"Creating meaningful solutions for mothers in the workplace is absolutely necessary," Twaronite says, "but we can't forget fathers need help too."

Sedef Onar, Chief Talent Officer at 72andSunny, understands this well. With the vast majority of its 650 employees hitting those child-rearing years, the agency wanted to ensure it had policies and programs to meet their needs. After expanding its paid parental leave, the company asked

what other services it could offer. Onar was surprised to discover that new dads wanted coaching. "We learned that men were uncomfortable asking about available resources and that they wanted support to be successful fathers," she says. Consequently, 72andSunny is looking at rolling out a coaching program for both mothers and fathers in the coming year.

The support for fathers makes sense, given the unprecedented challenges that Gen-Y workers face. Unlike Boomers and Gen-X'ers, the vast majority (78 percent) of married Millennials are in two-career relationships. While they may want to have one partner at home caring for the kids, many won't be able to afford it, so both women and men need support integrating work and family. Companies who don't offer such support risk losing female and male employees—after all, Millennial workers have been called the "Go Generation" for their willingness to pick up stakes when their demands aren't met.

And why not? With the demand for talent greater than ever, smart companies are recognizing that offerings like pumping rooms are not "perks" but rather prerequisites for attracting and retaining the best employees. As Ogilvy's Lara O'Shea says, "I get calls from recruiters all the time, but why would I want to leave when I know I can thrive here as a professional and a mother?"

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*Lisen Stromberg is CEO of PrismWork, a culture innovation consultancy, and author of Work Pause Thrive: How to Pause for Parenthood Without Killing Your Career. When she isn't working, she's busy doing the happy dance to celebrate that she's well beyond those pesky breast-feeding years.*