

# Seven Ways to Retain Working Parents

## Labor & Employment Law Update

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The Pandemic Era brought in droves of new challenges for employers, including The Great Resignation – an unprecedented trend of employees voluntarily quitting their jobs starting in 2021 and continuing to today.

The unemployment rate is low and employers' demand for labor is high meaning that it is more important than ever for employers to implement strategies for employee retention. Employers may want to kick-start these retention strategies with an eye towards working parents. After all, a large share of the workforce's working parents are Millennials (ages 25-40), a generation already known for generally valuing work/life balance and requiring it all the more while currently in the throes of caregiving duties to younger children.

What's more, the employers' entry-level and junior employees – though childless now – are closely watching how their employer is accommodating working parents and deciding whether they will stay at their employer long-term and into the future when they may start their own families. Below are seven ways to retain working parents.

1. **Provide flexibility in location.** The pandemic accelerated already existing trends in remote work. Where work can be accomplished remotely without loss to productivity or quality, employers should consider providing the option to work remotely. Concerns with remote work, such as a lack of in-person collaboration and collegiality, can be addressed through offering a hybrid in-person/remote work model where employees can work from home a set number of days per week.
2. **Allow employees flexibility in working time.** Not only is flexibility in work location important for working parents, but also flexibility in working time. Where possible, employers should prioritize work outcomes rather than the schedule or hours worked. In addition to allowing working parents some flexibility in when they accomplish their work, employers can also consider additional acts of flexibility such as scheduling meetings and other in-person engagements during hours most convenient to working parents. For example, working parents who need to drop off one child to daycare and another child to a different school may find it difficult to be ready to go for a standing 8:00 a.m. meeting. If the employer can just as easily accomplish its goals by meeting at 9:30 a.m., it may want to offer this act of flexibility and understanding to the working parent.

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3. **Offer childcare benefits.** If an employer already offers wellness programs or stipends as part of its employee retention strategy, it may want to consider adding benefits geared towards working parents to its offerings. For example, a stipend of childcare expenses may be provided.
4. **Ensure that all benefits for parents are gender-neutral.** As the rate of two-parent working homes increases, employers should provide flexibility to both mothers and fathers alike. This includes leave time, work from home options, and flexible hours.
5. **Expand the definition of a working parent.** Make sure that any policies extended to parents also extends to foster parents, stepparents, and extended family if those employees are taking on primary caregiving duties for children in their lives.
6. **Provide these benefits and accommodations in a visible way.** Employers may initially wish to provide the above-described benefits and acts of flexibility discretely so as not to set a precedent for everyone. But, that is not serving the larger goal of creating a culture of flexibility that incentivizes *all* employees to stay.
7. **Foster a culture of open communication and support.** The starting point for employers to effectively retain working parents is to understand what their working parents' need. This can look different from family to family and an employer is only going to have full access to this information if employees feel comfortable bringing concerns and requests to the table. Employees may need customized schedules, late start times, the ability to work from home on days that a special needs child has a doctor's appointment, or one of many other accommodations. Of course, employers will not be able to accommodate every need that each of its working parent requests. However, giving these employees' the confidence and comfort to open dialogue on these needs is valuable in itself and can kickstart conversations where the employer can meet the working parent even halfway. Employee retention is not only about specific accommodations and benefits extended to employees but also about making sure that employees feel valued and heard.