

NEW MOMS[®]

HEALTHY RETURNS

by medela  | mamava



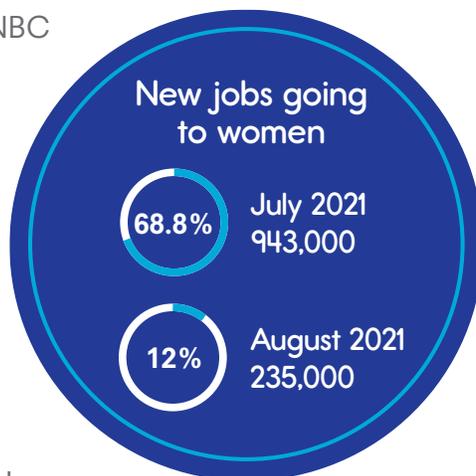
How to Win Women Back in a Post-Pandemic Workplace

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The repercussions of COVID-19 are profound and widespread, affecting every aspect of our personal and work lives. This is especially true for women with young children who are reeling from the pandemic-related impacts on their career and worry about their progression in the workplace. Unless employers take action, the challenges facing these women are expected to continue.

In 2020, women left the workforce in staggering numbers due to the pressures of the pandemic and – for many mothers – a lack of childcare, especially caused by prolonged school closures and the requirement that students remain home for virtual learning. Three quarters of the way into 2021, women are still not returning to the workforce at the pace hoped for or expected. In July 2021, the U.S. economy showed signs of a rebound as the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that employment rose by 943,000 new jobs, while the unemployment rate dropped to 5.4 percent. This proved better than the 5.7 percent unemployment rate economists had predicted, and marked the best payroll increase since August 2020.

As reported by CNBC Make It, of the 943,000 jobs added in July, 68.8 percent went to women, marking the largest one-month increase in women's job growth since August 2020, according to the National Women's Law Center (NWLC). With women disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, the NWLC estimated that women need nearly five straight months of July's job gains to return to where they were before the pandemic. Unfortunately, August did not come



even close to same level of robust recovery with only 235,000 new jobs added, and a mere 28,000 of those going to women,¹ suggesting a bumpy and unpredictable future as the country navigates new variants of COVID-19.

As the economy rebounds, organizations continue to struggle to attract employees to fill positions that were eliminated or vacated during the pandemic. To accomplish this, many are increasingly faced with finding ways to make it more alluring and worthwhile for individuals—and perhaps particularly women—to return to the workforce.

The Pandemic Altered the Benefits Landscape

Today's top employers are expanding beyond traditional benefits and offering policies and programs that are focused on helping create a more equitable, inclusive, and balanced work culture. This has included a much more careful look at the needs of working parents, especially mothers, who were particularly impacted. During the pandemic, employers were heavily burdened with the need to quickly roll out policies that increased safety and reduced virus exposure risks for employees, and also combated the challenges that parents were facing as they tried desperately to manage both work and parental duties. Even though new light has been shed on the need for more family-friendly policies, we still have a long way to go.



3-in-5 women

question whether they even want to progress [in their career] due to:

- Lack of work/life balance (41%)
- Non-inclusive behaviors (30%)
- Lack of flexible working arrangements (29%)

Nearly 70 percent of women who say they've experienced adverse changes to their daily routines due to the pandemic believe these shifts have prevented—or will prevent—they from progressing in their career, according to research by Deloitte. It is also important to note that 3-in-5 women question whether they even want to progress at this time when they consider what may be required to move up in their organizations. The top reasons cited for deciding to hold back on career progression include: lack of work/life balance (41 percent), non-inclusive behaviors (30 percent), and lack of flexible working arrangements (29 percent).²

Millennials account for more than 80% of births in the U.S., and 60% of Millennials say that being a parent is extremely important to their overall identity.

Among millennials, who make up the largest portion of the labor force, 60% said that being a parent is extremely important to their overall identity.³ Millennials also account for more than 80% of births in the U.S. and they care about receiving benefits that support their lifestyle choices.⁴ In a society increasingly aware of the benefits of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the workplace, it is worth noting that 63% of LGBTQ+ millennials plan to start a family through donor-assisted reproduction, adoption, or gestational carrier services. And for any family considering some form of fertility assistance or treatment, a recent study found that 77% of them said they would stay at their company longer if fertility benefits were offered, and 88% would consider changing jobs for access to fertility benefits.⁵ It is clear that the importance of family and parenthood to the working population cannot be overstated.

Despite the value placed on family, another survey showed that 60 percent of Americans reported having a hard time maintaining a good work-life balance between their professional and personal lives.⁶ We are in the midst of a societal shift where companies are realizing that providing a family-friendly workplace is critical to attracting and retaining talent. With a tight labor market and employees having more leverage than they've had in decades, employers need to make sure they create inviting, inclusive environments that appeal to working parents.

Three Keys to Creating a Family-Friendly Culture That Will Attract Talent

Organizations will benefit from developing cultures where parenthood and families are supported and celebrated. When organizations demonstrate their support and investment in employees' needs with thoughtful benefits that recognize individuals as a whole person both at and away from work, they get a more engaged workforce. The leaders behind New Moms' Healthy Returns published an Open Letter* on this topic earlier in 2021, and these key areas of focus remain central:

• Provide paid parental leave

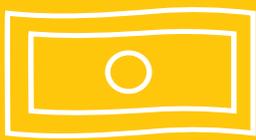
Every new mother must have time to recover from birth, to bond with her baby and establish breastfeeding without facing a loss of wages. The United States remains the only developed nation in the world that does not offer federal paid leave, leaving this responsibility to employers. Employers need to own this responsibility, if not because it's the right thing to do (it is), then for the sake of their

"Paid leave doesn't just improve infant and maternal health outcomes; it bolsters economic impacts."

business. Paid leave doesn't just improve infant and maternal health outcomes; it bolsters economic impacts.⁷ It contributes to talent retention. Consider this: 43 percent of mothers leave within three months of childbirth.⁸ And according to SHRM it can cost up to 200% of an employee's salary to replace them, not to mention the cultural cost of losing female talent. Extending paid leave to fathers, too, is critical to establishing from the outset that caring for children is not just "women's work."

- **Create an inclusive work environment**

Creating an inclusive culture starts at the top. All business leaders must model inclusive behaviors. Every manager and supervisor should be trained on their organization's lactation policies and resources so they are able to support newly-returned team members. In addition to offering inclusive benefits, employers need to talk about them—a lot. This can include establishing employee



More than \$17B would be saved in the U.S. each year if 90% of women breastfed for 6 months (the AAP recommendation).

- **Establish lactation policies and benefits**

More than \$17B would be saved⁹ in the U.S. each year if 90% of women breastfed for 6 months; yet only 1 in 4 mothers make it to this milestone.¹⁰ Every company must have a dedicated lactation space, a clearly defined lactation policy, and other benefits that help mothers meet their breastfeeding goals. This requires ensuring your insurance plan coverage offers adequate reimbursement for a high quality breast pump that allows moms to initiate, build and maintain their milk supply when they are absent from their child. Though hourly breastfeeding employees have some protection under the 2010 amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act, many women still do not have access to adequate lactation spaces, or time to use them, while at work. Employee benefits should fully cover the cost of lactation consulting for breastfeeding mothers, as well as milk shipping if an employee is required to travel for their job.

resource groups and networking programs to support working parents, and employees and leaders at all levels must take reports of non-inclusive behavior seriously.

- **Attracting Women Requires Valuing Parents**

The pandemic made it clear: organizations shouldn't underestimate the value employees place on family. Employers who acknowledge, embrace, and celebrate life beyond work and focus on creating family-friendly policies and programs will reap the benefits of an engaged and loyal talent pool, today and in the future.

This paper was sponsored by Medela and Mamava — the partners behind New Moms’ Healthy Returns. The New Moms’ Healthy Returns program offers a single source for benefits that employers need to attract, support, and retain working parents. This customizable solution offers breastfeeding products and educational resources from Medela; freestanding lactation pods by Mamava; 24/7 virtual support from pediatric experts and lactation consultants; and breast milk shipping services from Milk Stork. For more information contact us at NewMomsHealthyReturns.com.

* <https://www.newmomshealthyreturns.com/post/open-letter-from-the-leaders-behind-new-moms-healthy-returns>

Citations:

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