

## Managers and employees who prepare for parental leave reap rewards

By Emma Walsh of Mums@Work and Kate Sykes of CareerMums

Providing support and tools to help employees' better plan and prepare for parental leave is increasingly recognised by employers as a critical part of encouraging and enabling parents to return to work.

Previously employers focused their attention on providing employee benefits such as subsidised childcare and financial incentives to lure parents back to work, however, these 'benefits' are often not provided to employees until after the parental leave has commenced or once they have already returned to work.

"Until recently, little support has been offered to engage expectant parents to consider their return to work options prior to going on leave," says Emma Walsh, Director of mums@work. We're working with a handful of progressive organisations who are thinking carefully about how they can assist their employees and managers to prepare for parental leave in advance."

The crucial difference between the conventional parental leave benefits offered by employers is an organisation's ability to develop an improved 'follow up' approach or 'checking in' process to assist the employee during pregnancy at work and consider their return to work options prior to parental leave. But it doesn't stop there. During the parental leave absence, these employers are working hard to help the employee stay connected to the organisation; making returning to work a smoother transition for both employee and manager.

"At Westpac we are about to launch a whole new series of parental support programs aimed at helping expectant parents plan for leave and for those who have returned to work to feel more supported on an ongoing basis" says Kristen Houghton, HR Manager, BT/Westpac.

Upon returning to work, organisations such as Westpac are developing parent forums that focus on helping employees manage their career and family life as a working parent and advise what additional support is available to enable work life balance.

The transition from work to motherhood is often underestimated. "Smart companies and managers know that to retain top female talent you need to support women through the head and heart transition into motherhood and back into the workforce," says Karen Miles, speaker and author on the topic of motherhood and its impact on women's careers and identity. "Parenting is a tough gig and companies who recognise that a happy and supported person is a high performing, loyal employee will retain staff, it's a no brainer."

Employers who are responsive towards meeting the needs of their working parents they are rewarded for their effort. Employers are reporting higher attraction and retention rates when comprehensive pre and post parental benefits are provided. These benefits include access to flexible work arrangements during pregnancy and upon return; the individual's ability to proactively review their career plans with their manager and a coach pre and post leave; and the opportunity to network with other parents who have already returned to work and make a gradual return to work.

**More information:** To find out more about how about your organisation can help your employees prepare for parental leave develop pre and post parent support tools and forums contact Emma Walsh, Director, mums@work on 02 9966 1697 or email [info@mumsatwork.com.au](mailto:info@mumsatwork.com.au).