



Expecting more than a baby:

Closing the employee experience gap for working parents

How policy and practice don't align for US workers,
the new face of working parent guilt, and how a fresh
generation of working parents doesn't believe it's ever, ever
going to get any better...
and **what employers must do about it all.**

Introduction

There's something of an arms race going on among the US's top employers. In an effort to win the talent war, corporations are expanding parental leave policies, hoping to provide the most attractive benefits for new mothers and fathers.

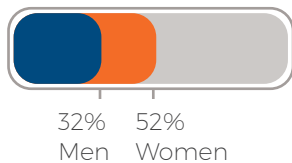
Yet despite the growing availability of paid leave to in-demand talent, parents are reporting a significant disconnect between the support a company **says it offers** to working parents and what they **actually experience**.

Men in particular feel this discrepancy and are reporting greater levels of disconnect, discontent, and guilt than their female counterparts.

66%

of working parents feel they are in some way failing to be the parent they want to be because of work pressures.

AMOUNT OF AVAILABLE PARENTAL LEAVE TAKEN



Shrink the employee experience gap by reducing the stigma and shift workplace culture.

WE SURVEYED 1,036 WORKING PARENTS IN THE US, AND THIS IS WHAT WE LEARNED:

- Two thirds of our respondents say work pressure prevents them from being the kind of parent they want to be.
- Women report taking just over half (52%) of the parental leave available to them, while men take about a third (32%).
- Three quarters of parents said that their organization has policies in place to support parental leave. But more than half (56%) of working parents experienced a significant gap between what their workplace says it's doing and what it's actually doing. Men were more likely than women (65% vs. 48%) to make this point.
- Two thirds say they would have taken a longer parental leave if they had seen coworkers do so (72% men vs. 56% women). And more than half (57%) say they would have treated their leave differently if they'd had manager support.
- Three quarters of parents agree that making parental leave more attractive to fathers is key to helping mothers progress in their career. And yet, 63% of men believe that taking an extended parental leave would be detrimental to their career.
- Men are more likely to say they became less committed to work after becoming a parent, more likely to say their career has slowed down, and more likely to say it's hard to keep a challenging role while being a parent.
- Among employees age 25-34, 76% believe their own children will have it just as hard when they themselves become working parents.

ORGANIZATIONS CAN AND MUST SHRINK THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE GAP

The following paper outlines our findings in more detail. We delve into the pressures facing working parents as well as their views of parental leave and how well their workplace supports new parents.

We also provide suggestions on how organizations can reduce stigma and shift workplace culture around parental leave for both men and women. The latter is necessary if organizations want to have a real impact that reaches beyond corporate policy and into sincere, on-the-ground change for the people they employ.

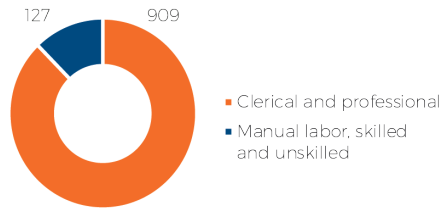
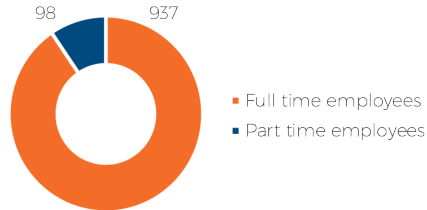
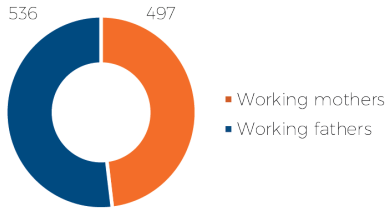
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Talking Talent commissioned in-depth, independent global research from Censuswide. Researchers surveyed 7,087 working parents in the UK the US, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Singapore, China and India. Respondents included a representative sample of professionals across a range of ages, industry sectors, and regions. This report focuses on the 1,036 respondents based in the US.

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US RESPONDENTS INCLUDE:



1. The new deal for new dads: Parental responsibility vs. career progression

Three-quarters of parents (74%) agreed that making it more attractive for fathers to take parental leave is key to mothers being able to progress in their careers. However, nearly two thirds (63%) of men believed that a father would hurt his career by taking an extended parental leave.

64%

of working parents say they would have been more likely to take a longer parental leave if coworkers had (72% of men vs 56% of women).

Working parents report a gap between organizational support for leave and actual cultural norms. Nearly 68% said their employer fully supports parental leave. Yet 64% say they would have been more likely to take a longer parental leave if they had seen coworkers take a longer leave (72% men vs. 56% women). And more than half (57%) say they would have been more likely to “treat my leave differently” if they’d had support from their manager.

Men (65%) felt this lack of manager support considerably more keenly than women (49%). Nearly two thirds of men believe that fathers who take extended leave will be viewed in a negative manner versus half of women (49%) who believe that fathers would be subject to such stigma.

FELT UNSUPPORTED BY MANAGER TO TAKE PARENTAL LEAVE



49% of mothers 65% of fathers

FEARING NEGATIVE JUDGEMENT IF THEY TOOK EXTENDED LEAVE



49% of mothers 66% of fathers

FATHERHOOD PENALTY

This belief in a ‘fatherhood penalty’ is dangerous to organizations because it sets up a vicious cycle.

From a male perspective, it places valuing equal parental responsibility in direct opposition to valuing career progress. This exposes the underlying attitudes that women have had to contend with for years. But gender equality shouldn’t mean that being a working parent has to be as hard for men as it has been for women.

Since we know that sharing of responsibilities is key to shaping a better future for all working parents – as well as being a golden key to retaining and progressing more women – **organizations need to encourage both men and women to view parental leave in a more positive light.**

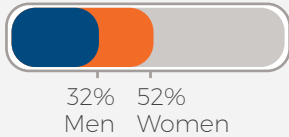
Organizations who fail to address this perceived fatherhood penalty may experience new retention and engagement hurdles as men look for workplaces where all working parents are supported. What’s more, organizations will continue to struggle with a lack of female leadership in the C-suite if workplace norms around parental leave continue to reinforce the message that women are the primary caretakers and men should place work first.

PRESSURE TO RETURN EARLY

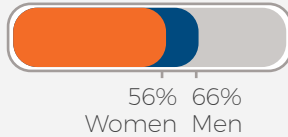
On average, respondents only take about 41% of the leave available to them. Women report taking just over half (52%) of the paid time available, while men take about a third (32%). Yet most respondents (68%) believe they would have felt more engaged on their return to work if they had taken a longer leave.

LEAVE EXPERIENCE BY GENDER

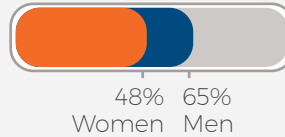
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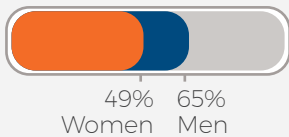
TOOK A SHORTER LEAVE THAN THEY WOULD HAVE LIKED



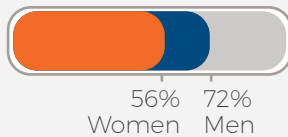
EXPERIENCED A 'SIGNIFICANT GAP' BETWEEN WORKPLACE MESSAGING AND REALITY



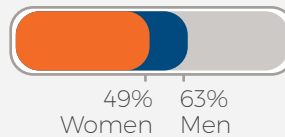
WOULD HAVE TAKEN LEAVE DIFFERENTLY WITH MANAGER SUPPORT



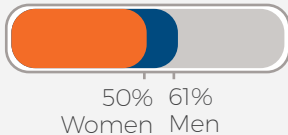
WOULD HAVE TAKEN LONGER IF THEY'D SEEN A COWORKER DO SO



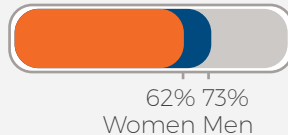
THINK FATHERS HURT THEIR CAREER BY TAKING AN EXTENDED PARENTAL LEAVE



THINK THEIR CAREER HAS SLOWED DOWN IN COMPARISON TO COLLEAGUES WITHOUT CHILDREN



WOULD HAVE FELT MORE ENGAGED ON RETURN TO WORK IF THEY'D TAKEN A LONGER LEAVE



STRUGGLES ALL AROUND

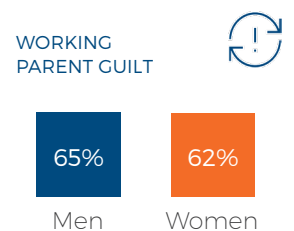
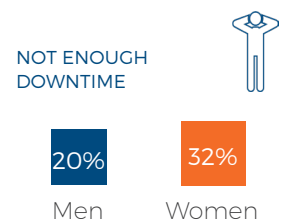
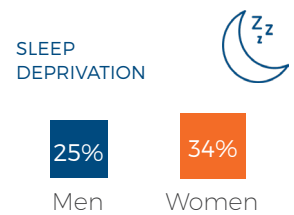
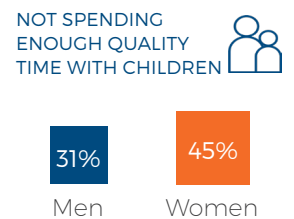
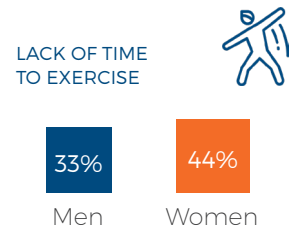
Professional working parenthood may not be a 50:50 split, but **our research shows a staggering overlap between the challenges facing working mothers and fathers.**

Two thirds of all working parents (66%) agreed that work pressures affect their ability to be the parent they'd like to be, with men significantly more likely to strongly agree (39%) with this statement than women (27%).

In terms of the challenges experienced by working parents, women do have a harder time on the personal and home front. This was the case, for instance, in terms of not finding time to exercise (men 33%, women 44%), not spending enough quality time with children (men 31%, women 45%), experiencing sleep deprivation (men 25%, women 34%), and not having enough downtime to oneself (men 20%, women 37%).

WORKING PARENT GUILT

Yet when it comes to 'working parent guilt,' slightly more men (65%) than women (62%) feel guilty about not spending enough time with their children. This despite survey results which show women aren't spending all that much more time with the kids. According to our study, men report spending an average of 2.9 waking hours with their children on a work day, compared to 3.5 hours reported by women.



AVOIDING RE-RUNS

We often talk of the penalties brought by motherhood, but it's about time we start talking about — and organizations start addressing — the fatherhood penalty too.

Organizations must recognize that **promoting parental leave (for fathers as well as mothers) means greater employee engagement from both genders.** Paternity leave, that is leave taken by new dads, takes some of the pressure off working moms, and, on a macro level, promotes gender equality and contributes to closing the gender pay gap.

To some extent, we used to see the 'motherhood penalty' as a grim but inevitable fact, a version of you-can't-have-it-all syndrome. **But attitudes are shifting, and parenting roles are changing.** It's time to take the lead and learn from mothers' experiences by ensuring that positive shifts in workplace practices can benefit men too. Otherwise, we'll end up re-running the same negative experiences — which previously stopped working moms from progressing — for working dads too.

EXPLORING THE FATHERHOOD PENALTY

The research, conducted by University of Massachusetts professor Michelle Budig, found that, on average men's earnings increased more than 6% when they had children, while women's earnings decreased by 4% for each child.

In our study, fathers believe they're penalized for taking leave and they believe their careers have slowed down in comparison to their childless colleagues. So, how do we account for the conflict with Budig's research?

It could be that our respondents' perception of a fatherhood penalty is different from what actually appears in their paycheck. Or, it could be that the stigma attached to paternity leave is short-lived for fathers (i.e. penalties don't extend into their career long-term). Alternately, we may find that workplace practices are changing rapidly.

As paid bonding time for fathers becomes more common, dads who take advantage of that benefit — and who are more involved dads overall — may experience negative career and wage impacts that extend well into their careers.

Attitudes are shifting, and parenting roles are changing.

The results of our survey provide an interesting contrast to a much-cited 2014 study "The Fatherhood Bonus and the Motherhood Penalty: Parenthood and the Gender Gap in Pay."



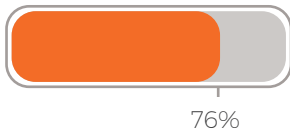
2. Closing the experience gap

Words show what an organization wants to be. Action and follow-through show what it really is.

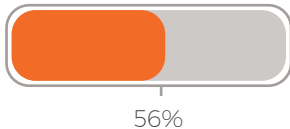
9%

said that their employer still had no policies at all for supporting parental leave.

HAVE POLICIES IN PLACE



HAVE EXPERIENCED A SIGNIFICANT GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND ACTION



30%

of participants agreed that their line manager or HR department was very effective, in the parental transition.

How sure are you that your organization's working parent policies and desired behaviors are actually being implemented?

The overwhelming majority (**76%**) of parents said that their organization has **policies in place** to support parental leave. Take a closer look, however, and the cracks soon begin to show. **More than half (56%) of working parents experienced a significant gap between what their workplace SAYS it's doing and what it's ACTUALLY doing; men were more likely (65% vs. 48% of women) to make this point.** What's more, a disturbing 9% of participants said that today, in 2018, their employer still had no policies at all for supporting parental leave.

INACCESSIBLE POLICIES

Yet even when policies are in place, they can often seem impenetrable to employees. About a quarter of parents (24%) struggled to understand their company's policy on parental leave. This is a significant and underappreciated issue: no amount of workplace support is useful if the employees don't know how to access it. Our research shows that **for mothers the task of understanding the support being offered was harder than it was for fathers:** significantly fewer mothers (23%) than fathers (35%) agreed very strongly that policies and practices were in place. Of course, women have more complex needs in the lead up to maternity leave than men, but organizations need to be prepared for that and ensure that their policies are sufficiently clear for everyone.

How your organization talks about parental leave – how openly it communicates – sends a not-so-subtle message about their commitment to gender equality. To send a clear and positive message, employers need to be transparent and proactive in promoting their policies on parental leave.

MANAGERS CAN DO BETTER

Not only that, but the commitment to supporting working parents needs to be visible and consistent in every area of the organization. Overall, just under a third (**30%**) of our participants **agreed that their line manager or HR department was very effective in helping with their transition to working parenthood;** within this group, women were considerably less likely (24%) than men (36%) to have found their manager a very helpful support throughout their transition to parenthood.

From our on-the-ground experience coaching managers, we know that it's extraordinarily rare to find a manager who would own up to believing they've been unsupportive themselves. While it is human nature to assume that someone else is the problem, more than two-thirds of US managers were viewed as less than very effective by the working parents they employ. It's clear that managers need to improve in this aspect of their job, and they need support to do that.

66%+

of US Managers
were viewed as
less than very
effective

80%

of respondents
reported wanting
a flexible work
arrangement

From the consistent and significant positive impact we see in our management interventions, we know that the change has to start from the top of the organization.

FLEXIBLE WORK

Being open to flexible working practices is, as our research shows, another part of the picture. **About 80% of respondents reported wanting a flexible work arrangement at some time in their career.**

Popular myth would suggest that women ask for flexible work more frequently than men, but in fact 17% of women, compared to just 9% of men, have never made a flexible working request. Either way, the outcome is relatively the same —only 15% of men and 16.5% of women have never had a request turned down.

As for why flexible work requests are rejected, respondents said they were given a number of reasons, such as the nature of their role requiring physical presence, extra costs to the business, negative impact on the team, past misuse of flex options, fear of setting a precedent for others, lack of sufficient seniority, inability to meet customer demand, or a general inability to reorganize the work accordingly.

While it is true that not every single role in every single organization can accommodate flex, improving not just policies, but real-life practices and workplace culture, remains critical to parental engagement and retention.

Here again, it's likely that employees are experiencing a gap between company policy and actual reality. Our past experience shows that even when flex policies exist, manager support can vary widely from team to team. Employees are often denied flex, not because their role couldn't accommodate it, but because their manager doesn't understand or doesn't want to adapt to newer, agile ways of working.

ALIGNING EXPERIENCE WITH MESSAGE

As employers, **it's crucial to find ways of bridging the gap between the policies you advertize and the employee experience you deliver.** Otherwise we're stuck in a vicious cycle that both erodes individual self-confidence and perpetuates organizational ignorance.

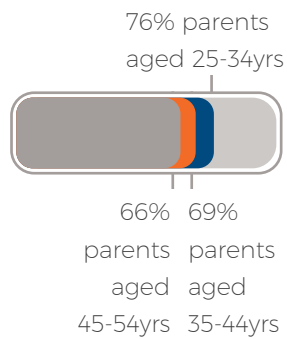
Following through on working parent support policies (e.g. parental leave, flexible work) is the only way to demonstrate that they come from a place of confidence in the importance and good business sense of promoting gender equality. But getting from policy to practice requires active manager support across the organization.

As employees see their employers delivering what was promised, they will have more reason to feel confident and valued in their workplace, and with that comes the attendant commercial benefits of a fully engaged workforce.

3. Younger working parents: New expectations meet rising dissatisfaction

75% of working fathers expect future generations of dads to take a larger role in the practical aspects of childcare. This sentiment is particularly pronounced among younger professionals.

% THAT BELIEVE THAT THEIR CHILDREN'S GENERATION WILL FIND IT AS HARD TO BALANCE WORK AND PARENTING



YOUNGER PARENTS

Yet younger parents, particularly millennials, are less optimistic that future generations will have an easier go of it. Among parents aged 25-34, most (76%) believe their children's generation "will find it just as hard as my generation to balance work and parenting." That's compared to 69% of respondents aged 35-44 and 66% of respondents aged 45-54. Similarly, 69% of younger parents predict that when their children become parents "little will have changed that makes their workplace more supportive."

The overarching pessimism among younger professionals is consistent with the dissatisfaction they express in their parental leave experience. Young professionals report getting greater levels of support at work than their predecessors. **Yet, they are far more likely to report a significant gap between workplace messaging around new parent support and actual experience.**

MORE SUPPORT RECEIVED... AND DESIRED

Younger professionals were more likely to say they 'strongly agreed' that their manager was very effective in helping them transition in and out of leave (35% vs. 9% of workers age 45-54). However, this generation was also most likely to say they would have valued some outside coaching in this area (65% vs. 35% of workers age 45-54.)

As other studies have shown, younger professionals expect greater levels of coaching in the workplace. So, while they rate their managers better at providing support, it could be that this generation is also better at asking for help.

Notably, older parents age 45-54 were far less likely to say their organization provides enough support for people transitioning in and out of parental leave – a whopping discrepancy of 45% to 75% compared to their younger counterparts.

The difference could be attributed to different leave experiences as organizational practices changed over the years, or it could be that older employees feel greater levels of work pressure and other family stressors if they first become parents later in their careers.

Policies themselves do not change the employee experience unless organizational attitudes and habits shift.

USING LESS AVAILABLE LEAVE

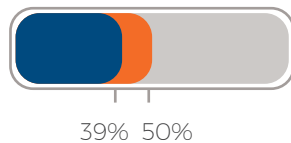
While neither generation took all the leave available to them, **younger parents report taking less of their available time and greater dissatisfaction with the amount of time they did take.**

This shift highlights a key challenge for organizations: policies themselves do not change the employee experience. Many employees will not take the paid leave made available to them unless organizational attitudes and habits shift. This includes greater manager support, encouraging more parents to take leave and model the way, addressing workload issues, and reducing parenthood penalties.

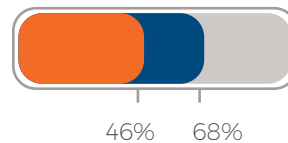
Recognize there may be a blind spot here among senior decision makers who are shaping policy and experience for younger employees.

LEAVE EXPERIENCE VARIES BY AGE

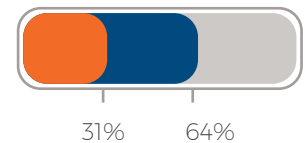
PERCENT OF LEAVE THEY ACTUALLY TOOK



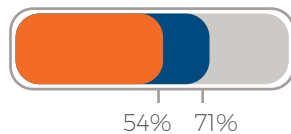
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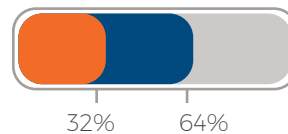
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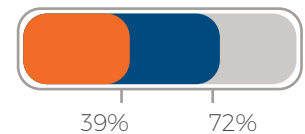
WORK PRESSURES PREVENT THEM FROM BEING THE PARENT THEY'D LIKE TO BE



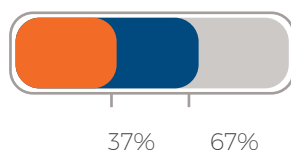
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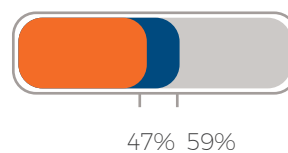
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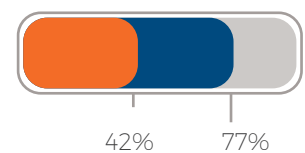
THINK FATHERS HURT THEIR CAREER BY TAKING PARENTAL LEAVE



THINK MY CAREER SLOWED DOWN AFTER HAVING A CHILD



WOULD HAVE FELT MORE ENGAGED ON RETURN TO WORK IF THEY'D TAKEN A LONGER LEAVE



Parents aged 25-34 (dark blue) Parents aged 45-54 (orange)

TOP HURDLE CONSISTENT ACROSS GENERATIONS

Once we move beyond issues of parental leave, generational differences become less pronounced. **The challenges of working parenthood are perennial, shared across age groups.**

The table below reflects the top five toughest challenges experienced on first returning to work after becoming parents, as ranked from first to fifth by working parents of different ages:

1	Spending quality time with your partner	Spending quality time with your partner	Spending quality time with your partner
2	Getting back into the routine	Giving your family enough attention	Feeling like you are being a good parent (tie)
3	Giving your family enough attention	Feeling like you are being a good parent	Financial pressure
4	Managing priorities	Financial pressure	Getting back into the routine
5	Self-care	Being present at your child's first experiences and /or significant milestones	Being present at your child's first experiences and /or significant milestones (tie)

Challenges faced by new working parents.

CONCLUSIONS

Notably, **spending quality time with one's partner was a priority across every generation of working parents.** That's not surprising, as other research shows that marital satisfaction generally declines when partners become parents. Unfortunately, relationship strain has been associated with physical and mental health problems and an overall decrease in life satisfaction. Working parents would do well to keep this issue top of mind and a high priority.

Generationally, we can see that **younger parents rank self-care and managing priorities as a more significant challenge than their older counterparts.** Older parents, including both the 35-44 and the 45-54 age group ranked financial pressures and being present for a child's significant milestones as key challenges on returning from leave.

Being a working parent, in other words, will always be a balancing act. In terms of keeping these working parents engaged and satisfied, one of the biggest areas of risk (and opportunity) arrives early in their parenting experience. Millennials want to take the parental leave available to them, but they don't feel like they can.

Doing that means shoring up manager support, highlighting dads who take parental leave, and showcasing dads who take advantage of other new parents supports, such as paternity leave coaching. Pay particular attention to how you're talking about parenting obligations. Be sure you're framing them as a family issue that impacts all parents.

To effect real change, go beyond messaging and give your managers and employees the coaching they need to buck cultural norms. Give parents support to step away and help transitioning back when leave is over.

Organizations, then, need to do more than shift policies – they have to shift habits and culture.

4. Parent vs. professional: Working parents torn in two

More than 2 in 3 working parents say work pressures frequently diminish their ability to be the parent they want to be.

53%

of working parents agreed that they have become less ambitious and committed to their jobs.

We all know that perfection doesn't exist, but working parents often feel torn between two ideals. For both men and women, the pressure to perform as a professional at work and a parent at home can have compounding effects, as each identity disrupts and complicates the other.

Many parents feel compelled to choose, or compromise, which is why more than half (53%) of working parents agreed that since they became a parent they have been less ambitious and committed to their jobs. And yet, 64% of our respondents said that they often felt guilty for not spending enough time with their children

PARENTS TORN BETWEEN WORK AND HOME

WORK PRESSURES PREVENT ME FROM BEING THE PARENT I'D LIKE TO BE



62% 70%
Women Men

I OFTEN FEEL GUILTY I DON'T SPEND ENOUGH TIME WITH MY CHILDREN



62% 65%
Women Men

I BECAME LESS AMBITIOUS OR COMMITTED TO WORK AFTER BECOMING A PARENT



46% 59%
Women Men

MY CAREER SLOWED DOWN MORE THAN MY CHILDLESS COLLEAGUES



50% 61%
Women Men

IT'S HARD TO KEEP AN INTERESTING/CHALLENGING ROLE WHILE BEING A PARENT



41% 56%
Women Men

59%

of fathers say they became less ambitious.

46%

of mothers said the same.

COMMITMENT TO WORK

Traditionally, women have gotten a bad rap for losing their work mojo after having children. But our research shows that – totally counter to this – **it is men who are more likely to say that they became less ambitious or committed to their work** after becoming fathers (59% for men vs. 46% for women).

This could be because of shared stress-factors, like burnout and sleep deprivation, or it could be that men are simply more confident expressing a shift in their priorities.

SLOW AND UNSATISFYING

Again, when we talk about the responsibilities and challenges of being a working parent, the historic focus has been on working mothers. Yet, when working parents were asked if their career progression slowed down compared to their childless colleagues, **men were significantly more likely (61%) than women (50%) to say this was the case.**

Plenty of column inches have been devoted to the challenge working mothers have in finding career satisfaction – and yes, 41% of women say it's difficult to keep an interesting job while being a parent – but much less has been said about new fathers, despite an even higher proportion of men (56%) finding this a challenge too.

This decline in engagement is a clarion call to employers: Maintaining a positive employee experience and providing support throughout the transition into working parenthood, to both moms and dads, is paramount.

CONCLUSIONS

For parents, striving toward a dual impossibility of perfection creates both mental and physical fatigue. Without proper support, opposing demands between work and home are likely to amplify guilt, as parents feel like they're not doing well enough in either realm. Guilt is distracting, and parents who feel guilty will not be wholly effective employees.

Organizations have a role to play here, both in reassuring employees, and by making the role of 'working parent' seem like less of a binary choice.

Balance isn't just about where working parents spend their time, it's about whether they are made to feel that they should be spending it somewhere else or that they're exactly where they need to be.



61%

of fathers were significantly more likely than women to say that their career progression slowed down.

5. Career-catapult, not career-killer: Parenthood enhances professional performance

What challenges you, changes you.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

If we focus too closely on the inherent challenges of being a working parent, we may become distracted from the transferable skills that parents naturally develop.

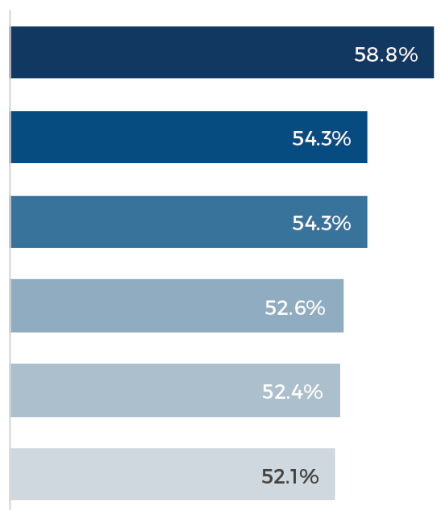
Most parents have a vague sense that all their multitasking, planning and prioritizing – not to mention the constant negotiation with children, family and others – must surely have some positive upshot at work.

After having a child, men reported that their abilities improved in a number of areas such as self-confidence (59%), influence (54%), organization (53%), and managing people (54%). Women reported a similar phenomenon, though often in different skill sets: time management (50%), self-confidence (50%), organization (49%), delegation (48%), resilience (48%), and managing change (48%).

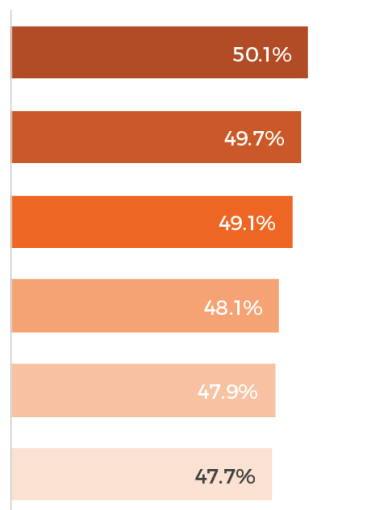
Our survey shows that people absolutely feel more skilled and capable as a result of having kids.

SELF REPORTED SKILLS INCREASE WITH WORKING PARENTHOOD

DADS: SKILL GAIN



MOMS: SKILL GAIN



- Confidence ■ Influence
- Managing people ■ Organizational skills
- Managing wellbeing ■ Time management
- Time management ■ Confidence
- Organizational skills ■ Bounce back
- Managing change ■ Delegation



EARLIER: CONFIDENCE TAKES A TEMPORARY HIT

While respondents did report that confidence increased as a result of being a working parent, they took a different view when asked about confidence immediately following a parental leave.

This is a sensitive time when parents are getting back into the swing of things at work and dealing with new pressures and time constraints.

Viewed in that aspect, 40% of new mothers reported a loss of confidence on returning to work compared to 54% of men.

Here again we see that men report a greater challenge than women. Such a discrepancy could be attributed to a perceived 'fatherhood penalty' as men anticipate more negative judgement for taking time away from work.

Either way, these first months back at work represent a key time when parents need additional support and coaching to bolster their sense of confidence and capability to succeed as a working parent.

LATER: AN 'I'VE GOT THIS' ATTITUDE

In every skill area surveyed, **parents were far more likely to report their skills had increased rather than decreased** as a result of balancing career and family life.

Only in two categories - networking and time management - did at least 20% of respondents say those skills had decreased after parenthood.

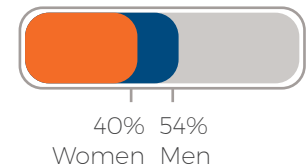
Working parents' ability to manage their wellbeing also merits some attention, with 18% reporting that skill decreased.

CONCLUSIONS

We now have conclusive evidence that many working parents experience a significant positive shift in their self-reported capability and confidence after becoming parents.

Employers who ignore this are wasting firepower. With proactive management, this positive shift in self-perception will have a significant impact on the individuals involved and collectively enhance business performance.

LOSS OF CONFIDENCE ON RETURNING TO WORK



Summary

US parents are confident, and they generally agree that working parenthood comes with all sorts of transferrable workplace skills. Where they are less sure, however, is in how they're handling the home front, with concerns about how much time they spend with their children and their partners.

These parents feel they have a lot to contribute to the workplace and yet **there's a persistent (even growing) dissatisfaction with what they're giving up at home**. Most parents are taking shorter parental leaves than they want to and most say that work pressures prevent them from being the kind of parent they want to be. **Significantly, working dads and millennials are more likely to express dissatisfaction than working moms and older parents.**

Most parents are taking shorter parental leaves than they want to.

New working parents of today are expecting much more than a baby.

- They are expecting paid family bonding time and cultural support to actually use the time allotted to them.
- They are expecting to be involved mothers and fathers AND engaged professionals with interesting, challenging work.

Most say that work pressures prevent them from being the kind of parent they want to be.

We can no longer focus our efforts on supporting women who want to 'have it all.'

All parents want it all.

Unfortunately, **social stigmas around parental leave still exist**, and dads are feeling it. We know that paternity leave plays a significant role in advancing women, particularly when working fathers take the same kind of leave that working mothers take.

Researchers suggest that **fathers who take leave become more involved parents in the long-run, freeing up mothers to advance their own careers.**

Such long-term gains would have an even greater impact if we could overcome the immediate consequences of taking a parental leave – theoretically, judgements and penalties would be equalized if both parents took similar time off work.

For now, it's clear that **workplace habits do not align with workplace policies**. That means closing the gap has to be a cultural effort.

This report challenges all of us, at organizational, line management and individual working parent level, to take stock of what we are doing, how well it is truly working, and whether we are going far enough.

Conclusions and Recommendations



1. PRIORITIZE PAID FAMILY LEAVE

In today's talent market, employees have unprecedented access to information about your culture and benefits.

Organizations that don't offer (and support) paid family leave put their employer brand at risk.

Beyond a recruitment tool, **many organizations view paid family leave as a significant contributor to employee engagement.**

Companies cite **correlations in retention and productivity.** Others frame paid family leave in terms of **living out organizational values**, making sure their own people policies are aligned with corporate ideals. And many understand that **paid family leave is a valuable tool to close the wage gap and get more women in the C-suite.**

Shifting policies and practices around parental leave is one concrete way your organization can make a difference in terms of engagement and gender diversity in leadership. Determine whether you offer equal paid bonding time for all new parents and whether employees are using the time available – men in particular.

Ensure that all employees, at every age and level of the organization, **understand that a period of leave is the natural, ordinary step after welcoming a new child.** Prioritizing paid leave for all employees helps foster a culture in which women have equal opportunities for advancement.

Send the message that it's okay for dads to take time away from work. Or better yet, send the message that it's not just okay to take leave, but that it's expected.

2. WAKE UP TO WORKING FATHERS

Address all aspects of paternal inclusion:

- Enhanced paternity
- Shared parental leave policies
- Cultural norms about men taking career breaks
- Coaching support as their responsibilities and stress levels expand.



Take a long, hard look at your policies, recruitment, and HR messaging and then assess whether the employee experience truly matches up.

3. PLUG YOUR WORKING PARENT POLICY-PRACTICE GAP

Lack of line management support for parental leave will continue to impede inclusion.

Give line managers and senior leadership teams support to create the workplace culture that parents need - through targeted training or on-demand coaching support.



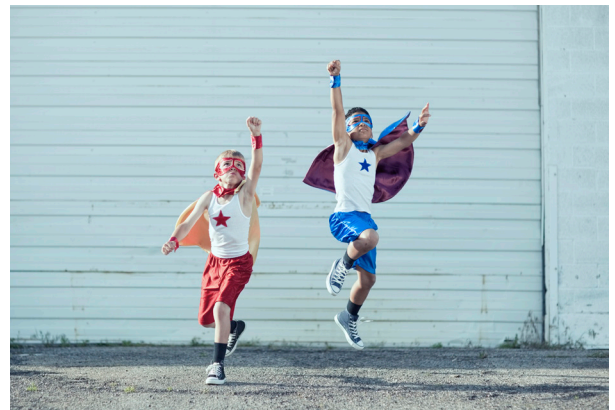
4. RESPOND TO MILLENNIAL PARENT PRIORITIES

Younger working parents are leaning hard into more equitable divisions of parenting roles and responsibilities. Organizations who want to retain talent need to be ready, making sure both policy and culture enable this. Help

younger employees create healthy, sustainable work habits by providing exposure to role models as well as practical support to manage both workload and their perception of leader/team expectations.

5. CAPITALIZE ON PARENTS AS PROVEN PERFORMERS

Parenthood, for all its challenges, **provides your employees with an invaluable boost in essential transferable skills.** When you support working parents with flexible schedules, coaching, and progressive management attitudes, you help avoid discrimination against working parents.



Evaluate advancement and reward practices to determine whether you're undervaluing caregivers and employees who work a reduced schedule. Provide training around caregiver discrimination and coach parents on how to advocate for themselves in the workplace.

Some organizations – perhaps even yours – feel they are already doing a lot to support this critical talent pinch point. Others have dipped a toe or two in the water, haven't yet got traction, and are wondering how on earth they can shift the dial. Many more have yet to make the business case for investment of time, leadership focus and funds into managing the parental transition. Whatever your organization's position, we hope this report will prove a springboard to formulating next steps.

Talking Talent's 13 years' experience leading global best practice support for the transition to working parenthood uniquely positions us to answer the principle question that comes out of this report – WHAT, specifically, to do to address its conclusions?

PARENTAL LEAVE IN US: GETTING BETTER (FOR TOP TALENT)

In 1993, the US passed the Family Medical Leave Act which gave eligible workers **12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a new child – emphasis on “eligible” and “unpaid.”**

While national policy efforts continue to lag, some US corporations are picking up the slack and offering paid maternity and paternity leave to their employees.

In 2016, more than one in three US employers offered parental leave beyond the amount required by law, up from one in six in 2011, according to a study from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM).

Growing talent shortages have created a benefit war among the US's biggest employers. In some of the top-tier workplaces, paid child bonding time is extended equally to men and women, including those who become parents through surrogacy or adoption. In others, parents are delineated as primary or secondary caregivers and given a varying amount of paid leave. In either case, these benefits are typically layered on top of short-term disability benefits exclusive to birth mothers.

To some extent, professional employees with in-demand skills can count on paid leave, inasmuch as they're willing to demand it via their choice of employer. Yet lower-skilled employees and those unwilling or unable to secure a job with an “employer of choice” still get little to no paid time off to care for a new child. Even if you take small business out of the calculation, 40% of the country's medium-to-large employers still offer no paid maternity leave, according to the SHRM report.



We welcome further conversation with you to understand your needs and share specific solutions.

Famously (or rather infamously), the US is the only developed nation that doesn't require paid leave after the birth of a child.

In the US, American mothers still have no guarantee of maternity leave.

40%

of the country's medium-to-large employers still offer no paid maternity leave, according to the SHRM report.



US HEAD OFFICE

1350 Avenue of the Americas,
2nd Floor,
New York, NY 10019,
United States of America

T +1 212 612 3329

www.talking-talent.com

UK HEAD OFFICE (LONDON)

T +44 (0) 1491 821 850

ASIA HEAD OFFICE (HONG KONG)

T +852 528 07375

AUSTRALIA HEAD OFFICE

T +61 414 647 529



info@talking-talent.com



www.talking-talent.com



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@TalkingTalent

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