WORKPLACE REBOOT

A Prescription for Engagement, Productivity, and Retention of Working Parents
With the future of work and school uncertain as a result of the coronavirus crisis, how employers reboot their workplace could make all the difference for working parents - particularly mothers who are most at risk - and the companies who want to retain them in the months and years to come. The sheer size of this group - 40% of the working population - makes the need to address the challenges they face one that could have a significant return on investment and cost savings for employers.

While the impact of the pandemic on working parents, especially the pressure on working mothers, has been widely reported, we set out to identify the specific risks associated with working parents in the short and long term, and offer solutions based on our learnings and collective knowledge in this space.

This report brings together information we collected in a survey of more than 250 working parents and conversations we had with over 25 Human Resources leaders at companies ranging in size from Fortune 500 to startups.

The learnings we gathered from these groups illuminate how employers can meet the immediate challenges of working parents and provide a prescription to build a better working future for everyone. The opportunity to rethink and reimagine is now.
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The risk of burnout for working parents, especially mothers, is high. Without radical intervention, companies will face talent challenges that can hurt business performance during this critical time and beyond.

**COMPUTING ARE NOT DOING ENOUGH**

HR leaders we spoke with described supporting working parents during this time with empathy, flexibility, and existing policies and programs such as paid leave and remote work. But they’re quick to acknowledge they don’t yet have the right solutions in place to address the pressures that are mounting as the future continues to be uncertain, and worse, they don’t see employees taking advantage of the programs that are offered due to fear of the impact on their career.

Moreover, they report being so focused on the crisis at hand that planning for the future has just begun or not started. And they are under pressure themselves to bring everyone on board quickly to pivot company priorities and deploy solutions that could help.

**WHY IT MATTERS**

- Working parents make up 40% of the U.S. workforce
- Employee burnout costs as much as $190 billion per year in healthcare spending in the U.S.
- Burned out employees are 63% more likely to take a sick day and 2.6 times as likely to be actively seeking a different job
- 14% of women are considering leaving their job due to family demands
- Mothers leaving the workforce costs companies $41 billion annually, globally

* SOURCES:
  - Employee Burnout is a Problem with the Company, Not the Person by Eric Caan Apr 6, 2017 Harvard Business Review
  - “Employee Burnout, Part I: The 5 Main Causes” by BEN WIGERT AND SANGEETA AGRAWAL, July 10, 2018 Gallup Workplace
  - “Workers parents are an endangered species” by Andrew Van Dam Feb 26, 2019 The Washington Post
  - 14% of Women Considered Quitting Their Jobs because of the Coronavirus Pandemic: Fortune Magazine 4/23/20
  - KPMG
THE TIME IS NOW FOR BOLD ACTION

HR leaders know that disengagement and attrition are expensive lag indicators that a business cannot afford to wait for in order to initiate action. The big companies that are taking bold steps toward permanent remote work setups and increased leave are challenging the norms of what work looks like, how it is evaluated, and how culture is cultivated. For smaller companies, the need for swift and bold action is likely greater. There is a risk they will see an exodus of talent in search of more stable and supportive work environments.

Working parents, and particularly working mothers, need companies to understand their predicament and institutionalize policies and programs that they can utilize without fear of job loss or repercussions so that they can contribute and be productive.

Through our conversations and survey, we know that as workplaces reboot the work companies need to do to increase engagement and prevent parent burnout requires these three bold actions:

1. Decide who you want to be in the face of this crisis. Working parents are looking for companies to be clear about how the C-Suite is prioritizing support of this population.

2. Do the hard work to establish and institutionalize policies and programs that support working parents.

3. Take action to actively create and foster the culture that allows people to utilize programs and policies without fear of penalty.
THE REAL RISK OF LOSING WORKING PARENTS

Our survey of over 250 working parents, predominantly women, surfaced three key messages for employers:

- Parents are afraid to speak up about what they need for fear of losing their job.
- Employers aren’t doing enough to ease pressure and stress during this time.
- There’s huge worry that progress made toward flexibility won’t stick as workplaces reboot.

THERE IS PERVASIVE FEAR OF SPEAKING UP

Roughly one-third of the parents we surveyed said they’re afraid they’ll lose their job if they tell their employer what they need to ease the stress of the workload while also caregiving and homeschooling.

This fear was especially acute among working mothers who work full time and hold titles ranging from manager to director to VP and above. We heard this fear from HR leaders we spoke to as well, who shared the difficulty of getting working parents to take advantage of programs being offered.

HOW WORKING PARENTS FEEL DURING SHELTER IN PLACE*

- 30% worried if they communicate needs it will jeopardize job security
- 53% afraid of losing their job
- 65% feel stretched too thin
- 75% are exhausted

PARENTS NEED SOME RELIEF

Working with whole families at home and while homeschooling is not a typical flexible work or remote work structure, and employers aren’t offering parents enough help. Eighty percent of the parents we surveyed told us it’s incredibly difficult to work, home school and manage kids and households all at the same time. And 70 percent told us their employers aren’t offering enough.

To make matter worse, nearly a quarter said their workload has increased during the pandemic. More than 80 percent reported no access to child care credits or stipends, which will become increasingly critical as we enter the summer and fall.

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PARENTS LACK ACCESS TO OPTIONS THAT COULD HELP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No access to additional time off with pay</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No adjustment to meeting start time to not align with start of school</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reduction in objectives / workload / responsibilities</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No coaching</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No child care credits / back up child care</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No unpaid sabbatical</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No meal delivery benefits</td>
<td>93%</td>
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WHAT PARENTS WORRY ABOUT IN RETURNING TO THE WORKPLACE*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balancing work and childcare</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of flexibility</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upward mobility</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-integrating with my team</td>
<td>14%</td>
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FLEXIBILITY IS NOT LONGER OPTIONAL

Continuing to balance work and child care and the potential loss of flexibility in the phases post shelter in place are primary worries about the future of work among working parents. While the setup of work from home, school from home and caregiving 24/7 is atypical for most, flexibility has long been a key ask of employers from working parents (and others), and is proving to be a silver lining during the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, over 60 percent of parents said they’re happy to not have a commute.

Parents are no strangers to the challenges of balancing work and caregiving. However, they expressed significant worry around how these two will play out in a return to the workplace. be it partially or fully remote and 40% said they fear losing this new found flexibility in what comes next.
There’s no doubt the pandemic moved the workplace forward by decades in just a matter of weeks. Some companies that had never offered flexible work options were thrust into a new normal of managing fully remote teams, and many shifted into high gear practically overnight to support employees overall as best they could.

But as workplaces open up, the interim and often patchworked approaches won’t suffice, and new challenges will emerge.

Leaders we talked to expressed concern about how a growing rift between employees with caregiving obligations and those without could damage culture and teamwork.

Even well meaning reboot strategies need to be vetted to prevent an uneven playing field among employees. For example, a voluntary approach to returning to the office could penalize those with kids or other caregiving constraints.

Companies that are more prescriptive with strategies that are role or team based, will set working parents and the organization up for greater success in the reboot and beyond. It’s clear that decisions made now will have lasting implications on the talent companies are able to attract and retain in the future.

A thoughtful but focused approach will help employees prevent burnout, drive productivity and retain working parents. The six steps outlined on the following pages, informed by our research, are the foundation for a workplace that’s more stable and nimble - ready to meet the coming demands - and one that’s good for working parents and the entire organization.

WHAT PARENTS SAY WOULD HELP IN A WORKPLACE REBOOT*


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flexible work schedule</th>
<th>Mental health benefits</th>
<th>Better tech set up</th>
<th>Time off with pay</th>
<th>Reduced hours/pay</th>
<th>Reduced workload</th>
<th>More shared work</th>
<th>Child care credits</th>
<th>Coaching</th>
<th>Unpaid sabbatical</th>
<th>Interim different role</th>
<th>Meal delivery benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offered by company during shelter in place</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most helpful in workplace reboot</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
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SET THE TONE FROM THE TOP

Employees need to know it’s OK to utilize company programs that are there to foster a healthy working environment, and the message must come from the C-Suite.

This is probably the most critical and impactful action a company can take during this time of tremendous change and uncertainty. Without executive sponsorship and a supportive culture, all the policies and programs in the world won’t capture the hearts and minds of working parents so that they remain committed to their jobs and the success of the company.

Lead by example through executive modeling

The C-Suite should have open discussions about how they will lead by example to drive the desired culture. The CEO at one company we talked with took a vacation early into shelter in place, and emailed the whole company to let them know. At another company, one HR leader, and mother of two young children, is using extra weeks of paid time off to work three days a week and encouraging those on her team to do the same. Communications and actions like this from the top effectively gives everyone permission to take time out for family.

Demonstrate that employee well-being is a priority

Many companies told us they created COVID-19 task forces, but one branded theirs as a well-being task force, with a focus on the welfare of the workforce. The group meets weekly to discuss how employees are faring, and what policies, programs and communications are needed to support employees during this time. We believe a group like this has a role in any thriving organization going forward.

Reinforce support through consistent messaging

Having the C-Suite align on key messages and incorporate them into their communications is valuable to setting the tone. Also, don’t underestimate the power of a weekly note from the top that reinforces the company position around navigating the reboot. One creative CHRO we talked to repeats a mantra at every employee meeting. You do you. Be good to yourself and set your own boundaries. In just a few words, she empowers employees to define their needs and communicate them to others.
BE BOLD IN REIMAGINING HR INVESTMENTS

The future of work will demand a different allocation of resources if companies want to attract and retain talent. Now is the time to radically rethink where investments are made in terms of policies, benefits, compensation and other programs. For example, the cafeteria may no longer be a desired perk, but take-out options or home delivery services could be. Employee priorities are likely to shift in the wake of the pandemic, and companies that get ahead of these changes could see a greater return on investment.

Invest in policies that enable flexibility

Perhaps not surprisingly, flexibility is the number one request among working parents we surveyed when it comes to the future of work. Many companies we talked with have significantly changed the way they view remote work and are evolving alternative work schedules to increase their flexibility offerings. But permanent remote work options should look very different than during crisis mode, so companies are taking the time now to build policies for the future that help working parents and the enterprise to balance flexibility and optimal productivity.

Resource benefits that ease stress and help working parents be more productive

This epic pandemic experience has radically shifted the thinking of many about what matters most. Employers need to follow suit and look at the benefits they offer through a new lens. Employee needs can vary greatly, so creating a framework of resources and levers that employees can pull upon at different stages of life is important.

While our research shows that flexibility and leave were by far the biggest ask among working parents, leading companies tell us they are offering Employee Assistance Programs, mental health tools and resources, life coaches, telemedicine, childcare credits or stipends, “school’s out” programs and resources, meal delivery, and more.

Establish a transparent job and career architecture

Companies who have a solid outline of jobs, salary levels and the associated expectations related to those roles are better positioned when it comes to looking at the future of work, especially as it relates to creating work constructs that allow for greater flexibility. One HR exec we spoke with has already reviewed every role in the organization and challenged executives to define whether or not the role can be performed remotely.

Devise new approaches to talent management

We heard repeatedly that leaders recognize the future of work will require a completely new way of managing performance. New methods of talent management need to be devised in a way that ensures facetime bias is removed, and managers are laser focused on rewarding outcomes versus time. Companies will need to look at how objective setting works for a variety of work constructs and align reward structures and systems that prevent compensation inequity. Many companies have tabled performance evaluations for the balance of this year, while others are using this time to implement a new objective setting process and system that enables complete transparency, as well as the ability to share and comment across the organization.
EQUIP YOUR MANAGERS TO CURATE SOLUTIONS

Managers hold the keys to employee engagement, but the companies we spoke with that are equipping managers with new skills and tools right now are seeing big benefits in maintaining productivity and preventing burnout. One company shared that they are completely revising their leadership development and training program to invest in leaders who are empathetic and resilient as a critical business continuity measure.

Others, however, have not yet started thinking about what managers need to navigate the future of work, and the burden has rested on the employee to figure out the right construct of work and balancing caregiving during this difficult time. As companies consider their future leadership imperative, it is critical they include components that enable and support not only diverse demographics of employees, but also a variety of work constructs.

Define empathy as a critical competency for the future

Across the companies we spoke with that span a variety of industries and geographies, a common theme of what they believe they have done well and want to keep in the future is leading with empathy. This is easier said than done and the risk is even greater as companies return to the workplace. The economic fallout continues to wreak havoc on companies and there’s potential that the competency of empathy could be pushed to the wayside in the face of increasing pressure. Teaching managers how to lead with empathy today will have unlimited pay off. Some companies are offering coaching to managers and others are working with managers to develop a persona-based approach to supporting their employees more effectively.

Leaders play an essential role in coaching employees to reach their full potential in the work they perform, but also in fostering an environment that promotes optimal productivity at a variety of stages of life. Managers must know the policies and programs available to working parents, how to manage distributed teams and remote workers, and be trained in unconscious bias to prevent unintended consequences. We suggest you incorporate regular education of policies, programs and critical concepts into your manager training.

Upskill managers in organization design concepts

As the future of work evolves, managers will be challenged in new ways to manage teams that could include remote, part time, and alternative work arrangements. This requires a new muscle to figure out how to organize and allocate work across the team in ways that managers have not had to do when the work situations for team members were all the same. HR will need to educate managers to meet this new challenge and equip them with the skills and tools to continuously review and analyze work allocation in a more agile and flexible world of work.

Educate managers to be advocates of HR policies and programs

A critical finding of our research was that even when policies and programs exist, employees are not taking advantage - in some cases because of fear and in others because employees were unaware of the programs offered.
DOUBLE DOWN ON TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE AND WAYS OF WORKING

Many companies have moved leaps and bounds in getting the right technology in place to facilitate remote working and greater flexibility, but what is critical for working parents are new behaviors and ways of working that leverage the technology in a way that is constructive versus overwhelming or additive.

When done right, providing working parents with the tools that can enable greater flexibility can be a game changer, but without careful consideration of when and how to use these tools, the investment could backfire and create unnecessary confusion, bureaucracy and decrease productivity.

Define the technology landscape to facilitate work

Systems designed to enable flexibility in the way work gets done (e.g., project management tools, collaboration/communication tools, intranets, apps, web-based meetings, objective setting/performance/feedback tools, etc.), come with the double-edged sword of creating confusion on which to use for what purpose. Taking the time to evaluate and clearly articulate across organizations what is available and how it is expected to be used can reduce confusion and drive productivity gains.

Embrace the Cloud

While many companies have migrated to platforms that allow access from anywhere, several are still structured in a way that tethers employees to their desks and this has caused them to struggle during the move to a new world of remote work. Even if someone intends to work primarily in the office, equipping working parents to do their job from anywhere is a key cornerstone of the flexibility they are asking for. Whether this enables the ability to work from home, on the soccer field or just means they don’t need to lug their laptop everywhere, providing working parents with the tools and technology that enable flexibility will likely play an increasingly significant role in the ability to attract and retain talent.

Establish team norms for using technology

Managers again play an important role here in defining for their team the technology available, but also the ways of working at an individual and team level. Some people love to have everything in their email, others prefer to get texts, others would rather use collaboration tools. Finding out from the team, and working parents especially, what is going to work best for them can make a huge difference. One manager switched his one-on-one meeting cadence to be less frequent and instead used shared documents to communicate with individuals about expectations and needs each week therefore reducing meeting time and allowing team members to have more effective exchanges with their leader offline.
The recent heightened level of communications and transparency was routinely touted as a bright star for many companies in how they have shown up and responded to the coronavirus crisis. Working parents echoed the critical role this played in their engagement and sense of support from the company in managing the challenges they face.

In light of all the inevitable change in the coming months, HR needs to invest in the skills and capabilities not only to be able to effectively communicate policies, programs and support, but more importantly to promote what is being offered to support working parents. This is key to driving the culture that gives permission for employees to utilize programs and for the company to ultimately achieve the ROI.

**Empower your employees with knowledge about their options**

Many of the HR leaders we spoke with acknowledged that employees may not even be aware of what is available to them. Employees who have a greater understanding of their options and channels to discuss and explore them can be more likely to feel supported and empowered to leverage the resources. By showcasing utilization rates and employee stories of how resources have helped others, companies are giving the needed permission for employees to be accountable for and advocates of their own wellbeing.

**Drive culture through communications**

These are complex times that involve a tremendous amount of change. If companies are to embrace the new level of flexibility and ways of working that enable working parents, it is critical that there is a cohesive campaign of messages that drive the changes in behavior across the organization. Without a comprehensive communications strategy, the efforts put forward by HR could languish and not truly move the needle in the way that is needed.

**Define expectations in a world of greater flexibility**

For companies where this crisis has brought a completely new level of flexibility, the fear that exists for both employees and employers about how this is all going to work can be assuaged by clearly articulating expectations. Employers that take the time to think through and communicate how policies should be leveraged and anticipate potential challenges and roadblocks will experience greater adoption and success in implementation.
The prevalence and purpose of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) is a topic on which there are many different perspectives and opinions. What we heard from employers and employees during this crisis is that these communities, whether formal or informal, have been a lifeline for working parents.

In the coming months and years as the future of work continues to evolve, companies should think about how they can facilitate communities of employees that can be leveraged as a strength, not only for employee engagement, but also as a key resource for employers to have a pulse on what is needed.

**Create a space for connections and sharing**

At one company the working parents group has been meeting weekly and the HR leader reported that employees felt it had been one of the biggest benefits to come out of the crisis. This has given employees a safe avenue to share challenges and garner support as they navigate a new world of working and caregiving.

**Leverage ERGs for valuable input**

Many employers we talked with have leaned on their ERGs to provide them with a pulse of how employees are feeling and to pressure test ideas the company is considering for changes to benefits and programs. When utilized correctly, the working parent ERC can not only provide valuable insight, but can also be a key conduit to driving adoption of programs and helping to promote the culture and vision set forth by leadership.

**Encourage crowdsourcing ideas and resources**

One company merely created a blog for working parents and saw it explode with resources and tools to help parents through the crisis. As the challenges continue to mount and evolve, companies that have facilitated these platforms for sharing are likely to see employees solve many of their challenges on their own, relieving the pressure and feeling of isolation that many experience, especially when working remotely.
THE PRESCRIPTION CHECKLIST

1 SET THE TONE FROM THE TOP
   - Lead by example through executive modeling
   - Demonstrate that employee well-being is a priority
   - Reinforce support through consistent messaging

2 BE BOLD IN REIMAGINING HR INVESTMENTS
   - Invest in policies that enable flexibility
   - Resource benefits that ease stress and help working parents be more productive
   - Establish a transparent job and career architecture
   - Devise new approaches to talent management

3 EQUIP YOUR MANAGERS TO CURATE SOLUTIONS
   - Define empathy as a critical competency for the future
   - Educate managers to be advocates of HR policies and programs
   - Upskill managers in organizational design concepts

4 DOUBLE DOWN ON TECHNOLOGY
   - Define the technology landscape to facilitate work
   - Embrace the Cloud
   - Establish team norms for using technology

5 BUILD YOUR HR MARKETING MUSCLE
   - Empower your employees with knowledge about their options
   - Define expectations in a world of greater flexibility
   - Drive culture through communications

6 FACILITATE COMMUNITY
   - Create a space for connections and sharing
   - Encourage crowdsourcing ideas and resources
   - Leverage Employee Resources Groups (ERGs) for valuable input
HOW WE CAN HELP

How employers approach the remainder of 2020 and lay the foundation for 2021 will dictate if the COVID-19 crisis will propel us forward to a new world of work that achieves a more even playing field for working parents, and women in particular, for generations to come.

Based on our conversations with employers, we are hopeful that HR executives and their C-Suite colleagues are poised to tackle the work that is needed to make this seismic shift. Sadly, there is no quick fix, but we believe that the steps we have outlined in this report provide the framework that is needed to implement real change.

It’s going to take hard work and now is the time for HR leaders to revamp their people strategies, set clear goals and milestones, define the HR skills and capabilities needed, and activate the resources and teams appropriate to drive the work ahead.

Contact us to learn more about how we can help you to:

- Review your workplace reboot strategy through the working parent lens
- Evaluate the state of your policies, benefits, compensation and talent programs in support of working parents
- Facilitate conversations with executives, HR teams and leaders about how to support and retain working parents
- Implement workshops for managers and working parents empowering them with tools to make work work for them

If you are interested in hearing more about the Working Parent Prescription and how to customize for and implement in your organization, let’s talk!

- Stacey Delo & Elizabeth Scott
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**Nua Group** is an independent human resource consulting firm based in San Francisco that provides high quality, independent consulting services to a wide array of companies with a focus on Total Rewards & HR Operations.

**Elizabeth Scott** is a Partner who joined the firm in 2019 with over 20 years of Corporate experience managing and leading HR teams at global companies such as Gillette, UnitedHealth Group, Levi Strauss & Co and Yelp.

Elizabeth lives with her husband and two rambunctious boys in San Francisco and is passionate about bringing together her expertise in HR and experience as a working mom to help her clients implement meaningful strategies that can truly move the needle for the next generation of working parents.

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**Après** connects women returning to work after career breaks with companies seeking talent and diversity.

**Stacey Delo** is a partner at Après, a company connecting women returning to work after career breaks with companies seeking talent and diversity, and co-author of YOUR TURN: Careers, Kids and Comebacks- A Working Mother’s Guide (Harper Business 2019).

Stacey is a frequent speaker at women’s conferences and has appeared on CNBC, Yahoo Finance, Fox Business and The Oprah Winfrey Show. She lives in San Francisco with her husband and two children.

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ABOUT US

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