

Post Maternity Survey Suggests Employee Engagement Deficit

Results of ETS survey in February 2010 of HR professionals on the experience of women re-integrating into the workplace after maternity leave.

March 11, 2010 (FPRC) -- HR technology consultancy ETS plc polled HR professionals on the issue of women returning to work following maternity leave. In February 2010, HR Managers and Directors from companies with over 1000 employees were asked:

In your experience, do women have difficulty reintegrating into the workplace after maternity leave?

Of the respondents, 41% of HR professionals answered yes and 59% answered no. These results are consistent with a survey conducted by NCT (National Childbirth Trust) in 2008, which polled women directly on their experience of returning to work after maternity leave. Womens' concerns about their return to work ranged from childcare to job performance and the attitude of managers and colleagues. ETS considers this a potentially serious issue in terms of employee engagement.

Pre-emptive action is one way to ease the transition back into the workplace after maternity leave. One example is the implementation of "Keeping in Touch Days". Government regulations provide for up to 10 days in the office by mutual agreement to keep up to date with projects and developments, without affecting statutory maternity benefits. These may take the form of meetings, team events or training days. The aim is to make the return to work less daunting but also may be effective in increasingly the likelihood of return to work.

Dr Lynne Millward is an Occupational Psychologist at the University of Surrey and her research found that a sense of alienation often begins before a women goes on maternity leave. For example, a number of women involved in the study expressed a desire to be consulted on the organisation of maternity cover but felt excluded from the process.

Alienation at work reduces employee engagement and consequently affects performance on an individual level. It is also likely to have a wider impact on the working relationships within a team and therefore a knock on effect on the wider organisation.

Dianah Worman is a specialist in maternity issues at the CIPD and she advises that employers should not make assumptions about what a women needs to smooth the transition back into work. Rather, it is important to open dialogue with new mothers about the support they need so they feel engaged and valued as employees.

"With over a third of women saying that they find it difficult to reintegrate into the workplace, companies who don't take a proactive approach to this issue face paying a high price. It's clear from our research that many large organisations are trying to address these issues, but there's still a long way to go. If organisations can find out the cause of these difficulties, they can work to improve the situation. Taking action will help companies to ensure that they get the best out of the female employees, alongside their family commitments." said Edward Nichols, Director at ETS.

From the announcement of pregnancy through maternity leave and the return to work, the focus should be on ongoing involvement and consultation with the woman. This should be supported by

as much flexibility in working arrangements as is practical in a given situation.

About ETS

ETS designs and develops bespoke HR technology and consultancy. Each solution is tailored to deliver on clients' needs and create their "ideal world". ETS specialises in performance management, 360-degree feedback and employee surveys (including employee engagement surveys).

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