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'Pro-family' approach to health care makes good business sense

by Dr. Kimberly Moran Turner



As an employer, you are undoubtedly concerned about a variety of issues. One of the biggest issues most employers face is recruiting and retaining quality employees. Numer-

ous articles cite health insurance, 401(k) plans, and vacation time as ways to entice long-term employees.

Although women make up more than 50 percent of the current staff in many companies and 91 percent of these women are in their prime reproductive years, little attention is given to what is needed to retain women in the workplace.

If employers are proactive in how they deal with family issues and pregnancy, they undoubtedly will have better long-term success with their female employees.

Such efforts will also benefit male employees (many of them have pregnant wives) as well as those who have finished childbearing. Employees who sense that their boss is "pro-family" are often more productive, have better attitudes, and show greater company loyalty -- all of which ultimately increases the company's bottom line.

The following suggestions are ways to benefit all staff, especially pregnant women or those who may become pregnant.

1. Consider hiring an ergonomic specialist. Ergonomics is the science of equipment and work-flow design that maximizes productiv-

ity by reducing fatigue and discomfort. Have a specialist visit your office and make recommendations for improving the overall workplace. You will be amazed how simple recommendations such as replacing chairs, adjusting the height of desks or keyboards, and putting items at desk level, instead of on the floor, will increase employee energy and productivity. A pregnant woman may find great relief in back pain just by putting her feet on a foot rest while sitting at her desk.

2. Invest in high-quality health insurance. Look at the company's health insurance plans to ensure that each employee has access to high-quality medical care. It may seem obvious, but good medical care sometimes can mean the difference between a high-risk and a low-risk pregnancy.
3. Don't be afraid to give employees breaks. All employees should be given the opportunity to take breaks in order to maintain productivity. Pregnant women need more than just "potty breaks." They need time to stretch, get ample water intake during the day, and eat frequent healthy snacks.
4. Allow for flexibility in scheduling. Pregnant women will most likely need to miss work for one or more prenatal appointments. These appointments are essential and most often are scheduled during normal business hours. Employees should not feel like they are burdening the company when they miss time for these necessary appointments. By

offering flex time or comp time, employers will give the impression that these visits do not create a hardship on the company.

5. Cross-train employees. Make sure that when a pregnant woman holds a critical company position that others are cross-trained in her duties. Pregnancy is an uncertain time for all women and pregnancies can quickly change from normal to abnormal with the need for bed rest or time off from work. Cross-training, job sharing, and telecommuting are all potential solutions to consider when a pregnant woman is placed on bed rest. When these policies are implemented, maternity leave does not alter the company's operations.
6. Modify duties, when possible, for pregnant women. Pregnant women should not be exposed to some chemicals, infectious diseases and fumes. They should avoid heavy lifting and prolonged standing.
7. Don't forget the little things. Thoughtful employers make a huge impact on company morale when they offer preferred parking or other minor conveniences for pregnant women.

Think "pro-family," and all employees will appreciate you by working harder. You may even find that fewer moms want to stay home after maternity leave is over if they feel valued.

"Pro-family" is just good business.

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