Women want to be more than caregivers; men want to be more than employees; traditional workplace policies are risking them both.
Talent shortages are big problems for today’s employers; and with single-digit unemployment, they’re not going away any time soon.

- Unemployment: 17-year-low, just above 4.0%¹
- Projected shortages: 5-million employees by 2020²
- Knowledge-work jobs grow nearly 2 million per year³

In this climate, it’s a business imperative to retain key talent. Yet, millions of employees are perpetually at risk. Why?
WORKING ON OVERLOAD

According to the Bright Horizons® 2017 Modern Family Index (MFI), despite growth in leadership roles at work, modern working women are still expected to be the primary parent and “knower of all things” in the household.

- Twice as likely as men to manage the household
- Three times more likely to manage children’s schedules
- Twice as likely to miss work to take care of sick children
The continuous prioritization and management of family tasks and needs adds up to what’s become known as the “mental load” and it’s following women to the office.

59% of women think about what has to get done at home when they’re at work.

52% say the combined work and family responsibilities are burning them out.
AN OBSTACLE FOR WORKING PARENTS

Mental load is causing nearly 25% of women to consider dialing back careers. And many of the primary sources of burnout are work-related. Four years of research from the Modern Family Index shows that the stereotypes driving the mental load often start in the office, with policies that penalize men for pitching in and pigeonhole women in the role of caregiver.

Men are 2x as likely as women to have their flexibility requests rejected.

1/3 of men felt fatherhood limited their opportunities for advancement.

55% of employed parents in our study said they snuck out of work because they couldn’t be upfront with colleagues, specifically for family emergencies and even picking kids up from school.
The potential fallout of these gender stereotypes is enormous, not only hampering promising careers and wasting skills, but also preventing women from ascending into valuable leadership roles.

- **55%**: percentage of women earning degrees on college campuses
- **Nearly half of households** have a female breadwinner
- Women’s career path **begins to stall from age 32 onward**, significantly increasing the wage gap
- **75%**: percentage of corner offices still occupied by men

And the business impact of losing women in leadership roles is real. In fact, studies have shown a **30% rise** in women leaders is linked to a **15% rise in profits**
For employers, it’s a sign of potential trouble. There are as many as 70 million working mothers and fathers in this country; and many are delaying having children until their 30s or even 40s, when they’re in established professional roles — and expensive to lose. And they’re at risk of heading for the door.

A SIMMERING RETENTION PROBLEM

69% of working fathers say parenthood will likely prompt a job change

56% of working mothers say parenthood will likely prompt a job change
One thing we know for certain is that traditional benefits are not enough to help solve the mental load challenge for working parents. Overall, 89% of MFI survey respondents said they would be willing to give up some form of traditional benefit (a promotion, raise, additional vacation time) in order to spend more time with their family.

To truly support and retain working parents, companies need a comprehensive benefits strategy that supports employees both inside and outside of the workplace and allows them to bring their whole selves to work.
A CULTURE OF SUPPORT

To effectively relieve mental load for working parents, organizations need to identify areas creating this load and establish programs to alleviate the stressors that prevent employees from being productive. Top employers are working to create this type of support culture with programs like:

- Employee-Led Affinity Groups
- High-Quality, Truly Convenient Child Care
- Comprehensive Return to Work Programs
- Reliable Back-Up Care Solutions

These programs create the conditions where employees know they have the supports they need to care for their most important priority: Family.
COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

Guiding working parents to make effective decisions in the short-term can lessen mental load over the long-term. Innovative organizations are creating comprehensive planning programs that bring expertise to employees to help them more effectively tackle some of the largest, most stressful decisions that often take hours away from their productivity.

These expertise programs can include:

- Financial Planning
- College Decision-Making
- Family Building
- Special Needs Programs

Even programs such as career planning can help employees feel supported and more connected to your organization. It can be both aspirational and developmental, helping employees see a long-term future and support system within your organization.
When it comes to feeling supported in their career, millions of employees are at stake including a large percentage of tomorrow’s leaders. Avoiding costly turnover and keeping up in the current talent market will require the full participation of working parents. That means benefits that speak to parents — that address the challenges of both working and parenting — will be critical to compete in the talent wars.
By offering Bright Horizons’ solutions, more than 1,000 top employers support working parents, reduce stress and burnout, and cultivate high performers at all life stages. These solutions include:

- **Back-up child and elder care** that reduces work disruptions caused by gaps in regular care — from last minute cancellations to upcoming school holidays
- **Personalized and expert planning services** for all aspects of college saving, selection, and application planning
- **On- or near-site preschool and early education** that solves one of the largest challenges for working parents: finding affordable, available, and high-quality child care
- **Work/life needs assessment and strategy consulting**, including employee surveys, focus groups, and program recommendations
- **Tuition assistance and student loan repayment programs** that connect employees with education and skills that directly support your organization’s grow

ENDNOTES

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12 Nora Caplan-Bricker, “For the First Time Ever, Thirty-Something Women Are Having More Babies Than Their Twenty-Something Counterparts,” Slate, May 17, 2017