The Case For On-Site Day Care

Think of all the time and work saved, if the parents on your staff only had to go down the hall to check on their kids.

By Rana Florida

[Marissa Mayer](#) made headlines a couple of years ago when she skipped maternity leave and had a nursery built in her office. But returning to work while keeping your child close is not a choice most working parents have.

Working mothers (and fathers) are making significant contributions to the U.S. economy and the companies that employ them, but they are doing so without the support that they need. Flex-time and other pro-family policies are not simply a "nice" thing that businesses can do for their employees. They make business sense too, as they reduce employee turnover.

And yet, Marissa Mayer herself struck a blow against families, when she changed [Yahoo](#)'s policies on off-site work. "To become the absolute best place to work," she wrote in a memo in February 2013, "communication and collaboration will be important, so we need to be working side-by-side. That is why it is critical that we are all present in our offices." Months later, Mayer did revise Yahoo's parental leave policy to allow new fathers up to eight weeks of fully paid leave and women up to a total of 16 weeks paid leave.

Still, many tech companies leave out working parents when planning to increase employe engagement. For example, Facebook's plans for the mega $120 million housing community that it's building near its Menlo Park campus will include every convenience, including a bicycle repair shop, a hair salon, a pub for employees to gather in, and even a doggy day care center, but no day care for children.

On-site day care would allow parents to commute to work with their babies and toddlers, spend lunch and break time together, seamlessly pop in to check in on them during the day, and leave

with them at night, thus minimizing their time spent apart (and their time away from their desks on family business).

Though not everyone can afford to build their own private nursery, large companies can provide on-site day care. But according to a 2012 National Study of Employers survey, only 7% of companies do nationwide.

Flexible work hours, generous family leave policies, and yes, on-site day care make sense, and not just for the overall well-being of our society and our communities but because it can boost a company's bottom line. The same study found that when an employee leaves (for a company with better benefits or to spend more time at home), the company ends up spending 20% of the employee's salary in productivity losses for time spent searching for, training, and getting new employees up to speed.

Sure there are start-up costs associated with staffing, leasing space, and maintaining insurance, but the rewards in employee productivity are just as real. No distracted parents running out to check on children (or staying home when an older child has a sick day), less commuting time, fewer worries about having to leave early for pickup. Creating a office environment where family and work aren't mutually exclusive and where productivity flourishes should be the new ecosystem or work/life balance.

A company's most important asset isn't necessarily its products or services but its people. It's talent who can turn ideas into the next big discovery or innovation and the fewer distractions an employee has, the more engaged and productive he or she will be. Such an amenity is a no-brainer, serving not just as an employee retention tool throughout a workers' life stages but as a talent attraction tool.

We live in an increasingly knowledge-based economy, in which the investment in human capital and development is increasingly essential. Helping workers raise their families instead of putting roadblocks in their way is not just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing.

And it's long overdue.

--*Rana Florida is CEO of Creative Class Group, and author of* Upgrade: Taking Your Work and Life from Ordinary to Extraordinary.

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