

More dads want paid paternity leave ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Marc Carlson, a senior manager at Ernst & Young in Detroit, took two weeks of the company's standard paid parental leave for dads when his daughter, Rebecca, was born last year. Then, when his wife, Diana, went back to work as a physician, Carlson declared himself the primary caregiver and took the maximum four additional weeks of paid leave.

Carlson, 35, changed nappies, took Rebecca for walks and struggled to get the unco-operative baby to drink from a bottle.

"From the beginning, my wife and I really wanted our child care to be shared. And I wanted to be engaged with my kid," Carlson said. "I was a little hesitant about taking the full six weeks off. I wasn't worried about the stigma or whether it would affect my career advancement, but about the mountain of work I'd return to."

Carlson is part of a generation of young fathers who tell pollsters they want to be more than a paycheck or the fun dad on weekends. In a recent Boston College survey of 1 000 fathers, the majority rated paid parental leave important or extremely important, although 96 percent reported they could take two weeks or less. Some said their companies gave them one day.

But a number of companies are expanding paternal paid leave. More than 500 dads a year now take at least the two-week paid leave offered by Ernst & Young, said Karyn Twaronite, partner and inclusiveness officer. State Street, a Boston-based financial services company, has doubled paid leave for fathers to four weeks. And high-tech companies like Yahoo and Facebook offer fathers eight and 12 weeks, respectively, of paid leave.

"Traditionally, it was always the mother who took time off, but we're seeing a real shift," said Lisa Horn of the Society for Human Resource Management. "Companies that offer paid parental leave for fathers are setting themselves up for a real competitive advantage."

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) issued guidelines earlier this month that call for employers to give equal parental leave time to mothers and fathers to bond with a new baby. Mothers may still be given additional childbirth, or "pregnancy-related medical" leave to recuperate.

Norms are not changing only in the US. The International Labour Organisation said recently fathers wanting policies such as paid leave and flexible schedules to take on greater caregiving roles is "likely to be one of the most significant social developments of the 21st century".

Robert Moritz, chairman and senior partner of PriceWaterhouseCoopers, said the professional service network's surveys have found 70 percent of millennial employees see flexible work environments as "hugely important" as do 60 percent of baby boomers. "The difference is, the millennials are willing to walk," he said at a recent White House Summit on Working Families. "They want choices."

Aaron Gouveia, 34, is a case in point. Gouveia was working as a newspaper reporter when his first child was born six years ago and with no paid parental leave, he cobbled together vacation and sick time to be at home with his infant.

He quit and went to work for IBM. When his second child was born, he took the company's two weeks of paid leave.

"The company culture is even more important to me than the company itself," said Gouveia, who writes the Daddy Files blog. "I like to work for a company culture that gets it, to work for bosses who understand we're all human and want to spend time with our families."

Jim Lin, 41, who works in public relations in San Francisco and writes the Busy Dad blog, quit his old job on the spot a few years ago when his boss gave him grief for taking two sick days to care for his son. "My boss implied that was my wife's job," he said. "I just didn't want to be in that kind of work environment."

Views like Lin's - he calls them "Father First" attitudes - are gaining traction as they spread through social media and virtual connections. When Lin began blogging in 2007, there were perhaps 15 other dad bloggers, he said. Now, he belongs to a Facebook group of more than 800. "This generation of fathers is so much more vocal about involved parenting," he said.

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