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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Offering family-friendly workplace policies is more than altruism — it's an advantage

By MARGARET OERTLING CUPPLES and special to the Mississippi Business Journal
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Margaret Oertling Cupples

Offering flexible, family-friendly workplace policies isn't just corporate altruism. It's a way for savvy employers to reduce turnover and wasted training, ultimately improving businesses' bottom line.

Companies with flexible and family-friendly workplaces often "sell" those benefits as a way to improve worker wellbeing. For example, Darden Restaurant group advertises that their "broad range of benefits" makes it easier for workers to care for their "health,

finances, and overall well-being.” Entergy says that it “create(s) value” for employees by providing a “safe, rewarding, engaging, diverse and inclusive work environment,” with “fair compensation and benefits and opportunities” for advancement.

My own law firm says on our website that we offer “the highest-quality compensation and benefits packages” in order to “recognize the indispensable contributions of our staff.” And I know we mean that: we offer benefits from on-site massages to discounted gym memberships to paying for MilkStork, a service that lets traveling moms ship their breast milk home to baby, plus, of course, all the usual health care and retirement benefits and various remote work options.

Policies that allow remote work, provide paid childcare, or compensate workers for costs associated with fertility treatments don’t just benefit workers. They benefit the company, too — by improving employee productivity, job satisfaction, and loyalty, thereby boosting the company’s profitability.

Cloud-based wellness company Aduro promotes its services in helping employers create a better work-life balance not just because these policies lead to better employee morale and demonstrate the company’s commitment to social justice and equality (such as by helping more women stay in the workforce by creating better childcare options), but also because these policies help companies attract top talent, reduce absenteeism and increase retention, and help employees “stay on top of their daily tasks.”

This all adds up: analysis by the Center for Community Health & Development finds that a worker who doesn’t have to worry about taking care of family matters can focus on work, so family-friendly policies make employees more productive. Flexible policies like remote work options also result in higher worker satisfaction and better employee retention, as revealed in research conducted by the Utah Women & Leadership Project.

The inverse is also true: Harvard Business Review found that “cut-throat” and inflexible workplace cultures lead to more absenteeism, accidents, mistakes, and higher rates of employee turnover.

In a competitive hiring market, nobody wants to invest time and money into training an employee, only to have her hit the door after a few months. Having a strong culture of supporting not just employees but also their aging parents, new babies, or stressed-out teenagers can make a big difference in recruiting, particularly when employers seek to hire the next generation of workers; millennial and younger workers prioritize workplace flexibility.

The battle for top talent is real, and finding and keeping the best employees is a key part of any company's ability to succeed. So, it makes sense for employers to put a lot of effort into creating and maintaining family-friendly policies. It's good for the employees and their families, but it also directly benefits the company's bottom line.

Win-win-win.

Cupples is an attorney in Jackson. She will join other panelists at the Women's Foundation of Mississippi's luncheon discussion of family-friendly workplace policies, "Thrive @ Work," at the Two Mississippi Museums on Oct. 26. Information and tickets are available at womensfoundationms.org.