



# THE SEVEN HABITS BEHIND HIGH MATERNITY RETENTION RATES

Each Human Resources department will excel in a particular area. This may vary from recruitment to diversity or employee productivity. Those who are interested in employee wellness and retention recognise the importance of maternity leave support. Maternity leave transition is a complex stage in woman's career, but the implications of supporting returning employees well are huge for both the female employee and her employers.

In putting together this report I :

1. interviewed HR directors of some companies that made the 2016 and 2017 Times Top 50 Employers for Women
2. interviewed HR directors of organisations that did not make the list
3. spoke with maternity coaches, diversity and retention experts,
4. held focus groups of women who transitioned back to work from maternity leave in the last 3 years.

# The origin of the Seven Habits

Through the many conversations I had, I began to notice certain key behaviours that were common to the organisations with high maternity retention rates. Not only were these companies excelling at supporting women as the re-engaged with their careers after maternity leave, they were also popular as aspirational places to work among the ambitious and talented women I interviewed.

I'm not an HR Expert, but as a paediatrician I am trained to spot patterns of behaviour. As I listened to hundreds of stories, I observed that these seven key habits were prevalent in the organisations with high rates of retention after maternity leave.



## HABIT 1: ENCOURAGE KEEPING IN TOUCH DAYS

All the organisations that reported high retention rates encouraged returning employees to have a staged return or use Keeping In Touch days to ease back into work. One in three women described the transition back to work as "difficult" or "very difficult". There is anecdotal evidence that women who used Keeping in Touch (KIT) days found the experience of returning to work much easier and were less likely to leave within two years.

## HABIT 2: ASSIST WITH CHILDCARE:

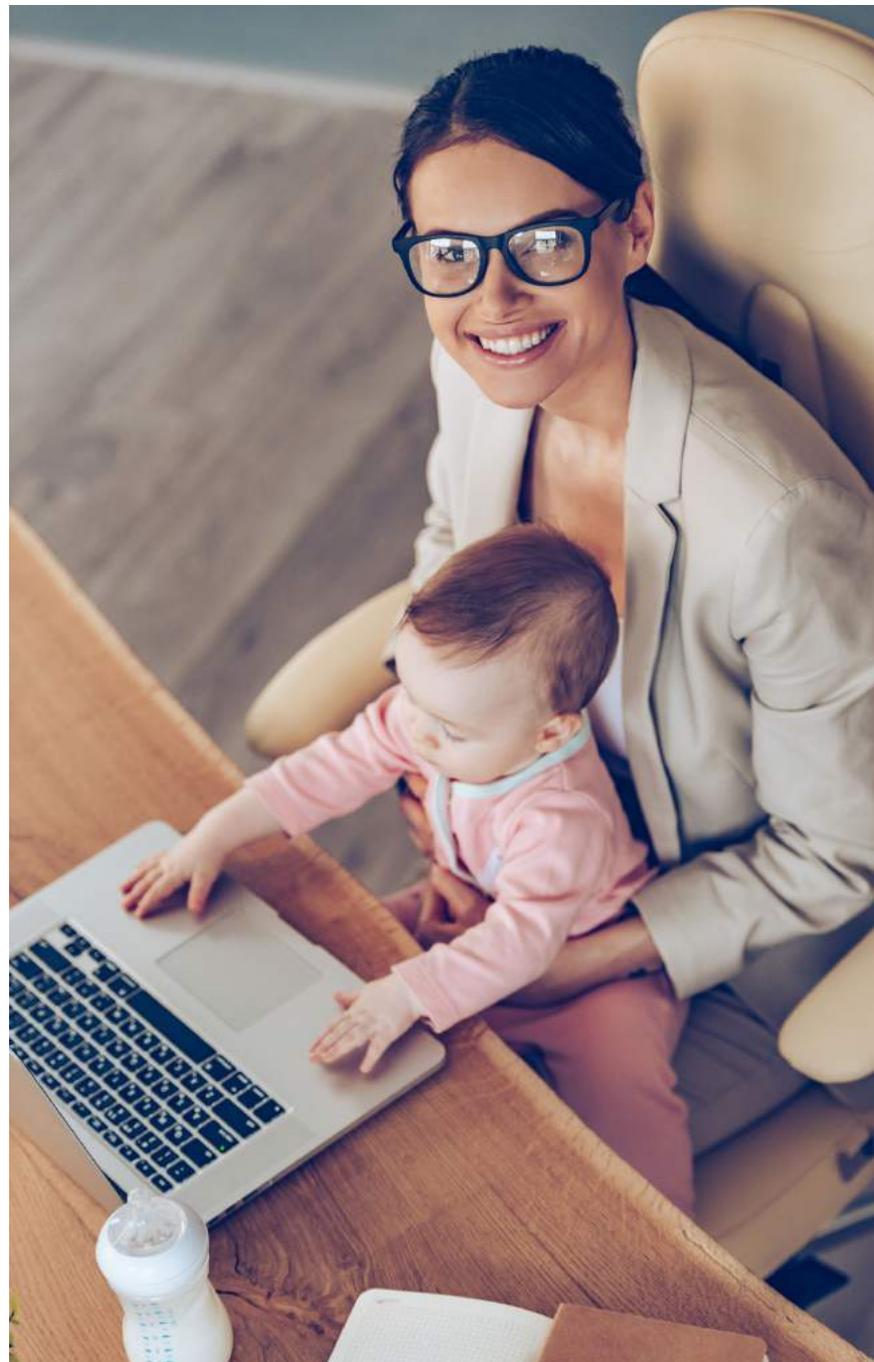
The recognition of childcare as a significant concern of women returning from maternity leave correlated with measures of engagement and retention, especially of women in senior roles who could afford to leave their jobs. Some organisations had nurseries on site, others provided emergency childcare while others had partnered with larger nursery franchises to ensure preferential rates for their staff members.

## HABIT 3: OFFER REWARDS AND APPRECIATION:

Two-thirds of women we surveyed said that they would like to continue working even if they did not need to financially. When choosing where to work, a job with purpose and appreciation were crucial factors to these women. Managers who reported high retention rates had a habit of rewarding employee loyalty, celebrating long service and made small gestures of appreciation and inclusion.

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HELPER BEES



## HABIT 4: COMMIT TO THEIR PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT

One in three participants (32%) in our focus groups felt that they were often overlooked for opportunities in the workplace after returning from maternity leave. Many of those who worked reduced hours felt that they were rarely considered for promotions or career-defining projects. They felt further hindered by their inability to attend evening events, away days and socialising out of work. We strongly recommend that you have a plan to review and support your employee's career aspirations.

## HABIT 5: OFFER A FLEXIBLE WORKING PATTERN:

In our research, we identified a study of 1500 UK women in which over 80% of mothers wanted to work flexibly on their return to work. Nearly half of the participants worried that their requests for flexible working would be turned down, and one in ten eventually changed employers due to a refusal for flexible working. Organisations with high retention rates were proactive in having conversations about flexible working and open to a range of working patterns.

## HABIT 6: MAINTAIN AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE:

A culture of friendliness at work and support of colleagues were important to women returning to work. Managers who reported strong retention rates were keen to invite employees on maternity leave to Christmas parties, colleagues leaving dos, conferences and award ceremonies. Updating and sharing information with those who were unable to attend, also contributed to employees feeling included.



## HABIT 7: SUPPORT BREASTFEEDING:

The World Health Organisation encourages women to feed for up to 2 years. Employees who support mothers in giving their children the best chances in life, were celebrated by women in our focus groups. In the United States companies that actively supported their female employees to breastfeed had retention rates of 90% and above, compared to those who did not address breastfeeding needs.

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80-85% OF WOMEN WILL FALL PREGNANT DURING THEIR WORKING CAREERS.  
HELPER BEES WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT YOUR FEMALE EMPLOYEES TAKE UP  
MORE KEEPING IN TOUCH DAYS,  
SO THEIR TRANSITION TO WORK IS A SMOOTHER EXPERIENCE  
PLEASE CONTACT US TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR  
**KEEPING IN TOUCH PACKAGE**

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