

Maternity Comeback Coaching

A compelling case

The Talent Keeper Specialists
www.talentkeepers.co.uk



Introduction

Before becoming parents men and women are equally likely to be employed but afterwards 57% of mothers of under fives are in paid work compared with 90% of fathers (Fawcett Society, 2009). However, this is not a reflection of women's desire to work. Researchers at Aston Business School asked mothers to define their ideal family scenario and only 5% said they would prefer for their partners to work whilst they ran the home. 61% of women in the survey said they would work even if there was no financial necessity.

Through researching women's attitudes to their careers and my writing of *Mothers Work! How to Get a Grip on Guilt and Make a Smooth Return to Work* (Hay House, 2011) it is clear to me that the majority of women want to work and they value contact with and support from their employer during the transition into working motherhood.

This paper sets out a business case for investing in maternity comeback coaching and an innovative, inexpensive approach to engaging and supporting maternity leavers across your organisation. You may also be interested in our 'Strategies for Success: Maternity Comeback Report' – a summary of findings from our 2011 maternity leavers survey and tips for employers.

Jessica Chivers
Managing Director, The Talent Keeper Specialists

First published May 2012, Updated 1st May 2014

Contents

- Compelling reason 1 – Keeping your talent
- Compelling reason 2 – Engagement
- Compelling reason 3 – Stoking the talent pipeline
- Barriers and enablers
- A maternity comeback solution
- About The Talent Keeper Specialists

"I get a buzz from being back at work, seeing my team so happy and keen and eager to please and help me. I think you have to put yourself forward, make new suggestions to your boss, propose solutions, get the wider perspective right...but I could only do this because they made me feel confident about coming back."

Mathilde, European Business
Information Manager



Keeping Your Talent

As the average age of motherhood rises it becomes ever more relevant to consider ways to retain maternity leavers who are likely to have accrued a significant amount of organisational and industry knowledge, as well as invaluable 'firm-specific capital.'

In 2012 nearly half of babies (49%, up 2% on 2008 figures) were born to women over 30, with 20% of babies being born to women over 35. (Office for National Statistics, 2013). This is a key time for women shifting into senior roles; the loss from your talent pool is a competitor's gain. Whilst it's possible to put an estimated financial cost on the recruitment process itself, the loss of this capital may be invaluable, particularly for women in senior posts.

In her paper published in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* in 2006, Lynne Millward states that lack of perceived organisational support (both explicitly from managers and immediate colleagues, and implicitly from unspoken prejudice against using family friendly work initiatives) is a pivotal reason why those who do return to work may resign after a short period.

Research from a city law firm, Clifford Chance, which has been offering maternity coaching since 2006 reports an increase in retention in the two years since maternity coaching was introduced compared to the preceding six years (Freeman, 2008). More specifically this study reports a significant decrease in the number of maternity returners exiting the company within the first 12 months of their return (down from 22% to 10%) and in the 12-24 month period after their return (down from 8% to 1%).

We could conclude that maternity coaching has a valuable role to play in retention and also supporting women to remain in the workplace after the 'honeymoon period' of her return. A comment from a career-minded woman we coached before and during her transition back into work after her first baby:

"Something shifted after our conversation and I feel really comfortable about going back to work. I'm the main bread winner and I've got to be comfortable about that but two months ago I was in doubt. It felt really hard. The fact that I'd talked to you before having that conversation with (my boss) made a difference. I'm clear now that if I'm going to leave my baby for 10 hours a day I want to be promoted. I'm going to go for it, I'm clear about what I want." Coachee at HSBC, UK.

"I wanted to thank you again for the fantastic coaching sessions: they were a lot of help from a personal and professional perspective and I had a lot of aha moments. It strikes how much one's blind zones increase as you grow in an organization..." Claire Gubian, Head of Mobile and Retail, PayPal CEMEA



Engagement & Performance

68% of women return to work within eleven months of giving birth and 80% within 17 months (Government Department for Business, 2005). There is no doubt that returning to the workplace after this lengthy period of mental and physical absence involves a period of readjustment and re-engagement. Research by Oxford Brookes University has found a strong correlation between maternity coaching and career re-engagement (see Filsinger-Mohun, 2012).

Psychologists (e.g. see Adams, Hayes & Hopson, 1976) studying how people cope with the impact of (simultaneous) significant life events find that a 'crisis point' comes between three to nine months after impact regardless of whether the life event was viewed as positive or negative, wanted or unwanted - meaning support for maternity returners is needed beyond the first few weeks of their return. If a woman returns to work after a particularly short maternity leave (for instance less than three months after birth) she is likely to still be adjusting to the impact of becoming a mother for the first or subsequent time.

A third of women (survey of 3000 women reported in The Daily Telegraph, 11/1/12) report feeling 'terrified' about the prospect of returning to work and cite depleted confidence from lack of skill usage and contact with their organisation as key factors. In a survey I conducted of 168 women in 2009 about the emotions they experienced in the weeks surrounding their return to work, nearly half experienced a sense of dread, two thirds described feeling anxious and three quarters experienced guilt.

Psychologists and authors of *Coaching Women to Lead* recommend coaching as a way to restore a woman's confidence and get her back into the mindset to perform: *"The first 100 days back at work after maternity leave are almost as important to women as the first 100 days for a new CEO...Confidence and self-esteem is a huge need at this point – both in everyday life and at work – because having a baby is a life-changing event."*

By providing a maternity coaching programme that gives maternity leavers and recent returners the opportunity to come together for group workshops centred around the transition into working parenthood it is likely engagement and 'warmth' towards the organisation will be higher than if she were completely out of touch. Informal contact with immediate colleagues could also be afforded by such onsite workshops and this is likely to reduce the fear associated with returning to work which may inhibit performance.

"There was no formal process for welcoming me back or any kind of support with regard to settling in after nine months absence. My colleagues were very supportive in an informal way, but I'd have liked something more formal provided by my organisation."



Stoking the talent pipeline

Research conducted by Opportunity Now and Bank of America Merrill Lynch shows that women believe that the barriers to them progressing their careers have not diminished in the five years 2005-2010. The single biggest barrier cited by the 857 male and female managers in this study is 'women having to balance work and family responsibilities.'

Helping women rebalance domestic roles and retune their identity - particularly high achieving women who take to showing the world they can handle the so-called 'triple burden' standing on their heads - is a key part of maternity coaching. Providing women space to discuss their concerns about having 'it all' and indeed to challenge assumptions about what 'all' is and what she needs to do to attain it, is particularly relevant if women are to progress their careers.

A 19 year study in the US (Adler 2001) makes it clear as to why we should want to get more women onto UK boards: profitability. His research shows that *"...the 25 Fortune 500 firms with the best record of promoting women to high positions are between 18 and 69 percent more profitable than the median Fortune 500 firms in their industries."*

"There still needs to be more flexibility in the workplace to allow working mothers to fulfil their potential. With technology such as Blackberries and Home working, there is less need to have someone sitting at a desk all day every day in order to perform a role but there still seems to be a culture of face-time which prevents this technology being used to help women balance the role of employee and motherhood."

Lord Davies of Abersoch's report *Women on Boards* commissioned by the Government (2011) has stimulated much debate around whether quotas for women on boards should be imposed in the UK.

In 2010 of FTSE 100 executive directorships, 94.5% were men and 5.5% female. Lord Davies states that "the rate of change is too slow" and "FTSE 100 boards should aim to have 25% female representation by 2015."

Putting aside the thoughtful arguments from men and women on both sides of the quota debate, it is clear that if we continue to leak women from the talent pipeline at the rate we currently do it will be very difficult to change the gender balance of UK boards. One estimate is that it will take 70 years to achieve gender balance at the current rate of change (Equality & Human Rights Commission, 2008, cited in *Women on Boards*).

Women on Boards concludes that the two key issues running throughout the consultation responses are:

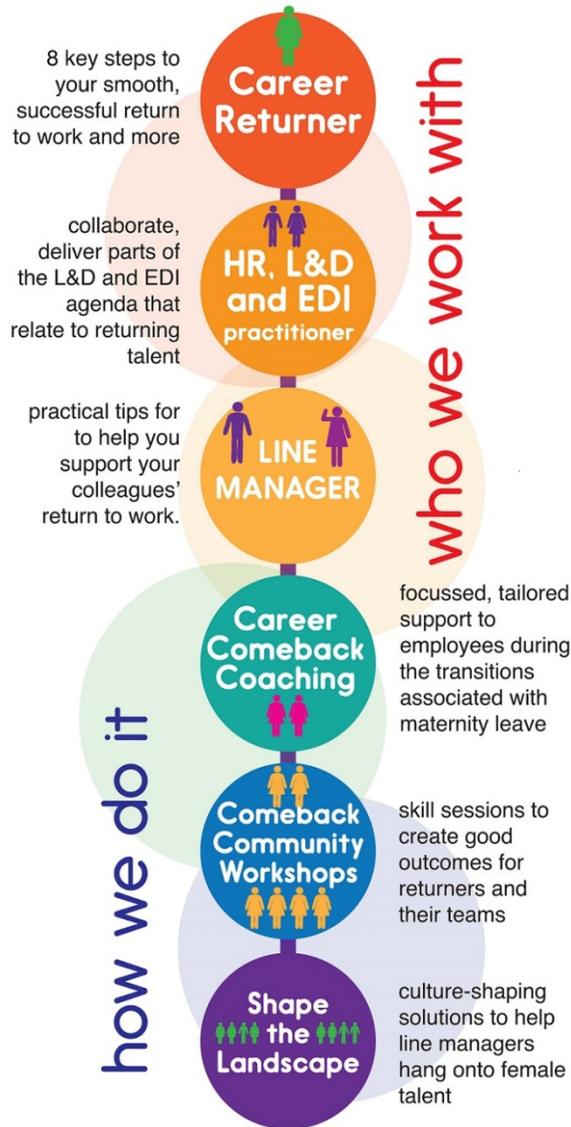
- 1) A lack of flexibility around work/life balance particularly around maternity leave and young families
- 2) The perception of a traditional male cultural environment, the old boys' network and a lack of networking opportunities for women



Barriers and Enablers

BARRIERS	ENABLERS
Feeling 'in the wilderness' on maternity leave	Discussions with line manager/team before maternity leave about amount/type of contact desired on leave
	Opportunities to meet and talk to maternity leavers in same organisation/industry throughout maternity leave
	Participating in 1:1 and/or group coaching workshops focussed on how to make a positive, confident return
	Participating in a parental buddying scheme before and after her return
	Regular, structured contact with line manager and colleagues through Keep In Touch (KIT) days
Decreased professional confidence and credibility	Opportunities to meet and talk to women returners within the organisation/industry via a well publicised and inclusive comeback programme
	Participating in group coaching workshops focussing on personal skills, strengths and solutions
	Participating in a parental buddying scheme
	Regular, structured contact with line manager and colleagues via Keep In Touch (KIT) days
	1:1 coaching to air these concerns and build a values and strengths-based career plan
<p>The 'triple bind* and systemic guilt surrounding working motherhood</p> <p><small>* term coined by academics referring to disproportionate amount of childcare and domestic chores undertaken by women even when both parents work FT</small></p>	Quality part-time roles at middle and senior levels
	Senior male and female role models achieving business priorities and visibly prioritising their young family
	Shifting to a culture of flexible/agile working for everyone, not just working parents
	Impromptu flexible working if childcare problems arise and understanding of the situation by colleagues
	Encouraging employees to get home in time for 'something beyond work' several times a week
	Encouraging male colleagues with young families to get home and take up some of the 'triple burden'
	Bite-size interactive lunch time workshops on how women can combine work, home and career progression
	A copy of <i>Mothers Work! How to Get a Grip on Guilt on Make a Smooth Return to Work</i> for each leaver

Maternity Comeback Solutions



- Initial survey of women currently on maternity leave and recent returners to highlight the bright spots and areas for development in the organisation
- 1:1 coaching including realise2 strengths profiling diagnostic and debrief
- Comeback coaching involving three-way sessions with the returner's line manager and guide for line manager
- Ongoing surveying to capture views of new maternity leavers/returners with intermittent reports to track the impact of the Comeback Programme (in conjunction with the University of Hertfordshire).
- Copy of *Mothers Work!* for all maternity leavers/new returners
- Development of mentoring programme between female 'talent' and male 'sponsor' and creation of a parents' or returners' network
- One day *Comeback Camp* held on or off site before women return, covering the following themes in an interactive format with materials to take away:
 - Clarifying your ideal work scenario: what, when, how, why?
 - Re-igniting feelings of credibility and confidence through strengths-focus
 - How to negotiate your ideal scenario and make it work for your team
 - Ensuring a smooth handover from your maternity cover
 - Finding childcare that fits your family and how to cope if it fails
 - Preparing for a smooth return
 - How to thrive as a working parent
- 2-hour workshops including a 'colleague connection' element for women to meet informally with their team – find out what's going on and keep in the loop:
 - How to meet professional expectations and still have a life
 - How to get a grip on guilt and get on at work
 - How to pitch for flexible working and make it work for you and your team
 - How to stay visible, expand your network and get on relevant people's radar
- Continuous content by e-mail – invitations, event reminders, timely tips
- Development of PR opportunities with your communications team for external recognition – Twitter, Facebook, You Tube, Industry magazines/journals, popular press coverage

About The Talent Keeper Specialists

The Talent Keeper Specialists

Formed in 2012, The Talent Keeper Specialists helps employers keep, retain and develop returning talent through workshops, 1:1 coaching and culture-shaping initiatives aimed at line managers. We provide both off-the-peg and customised solutions through our select team of experienced coaching and talent practitioners.

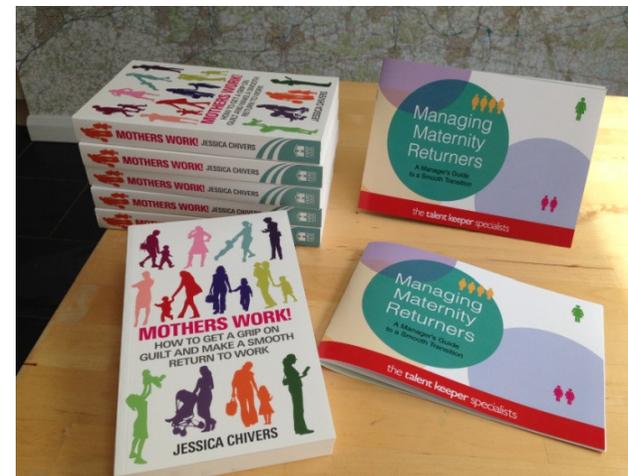
Our founder, Jessica Chivers, is the author of *Mothers Work! How to Get a Grip on Guilt and Make a Smooth Return to Work* (published by Hay House, 2011).

From Veolia, our first client in September 2012, we've gone on to work with Oxfam, Telefonica Digital, Carillion, ICAEW, RBS and PayPal. Read more at www.talentkeepers.co.uk and see a commentary clip from BBC News 24: <http://bit.ly/1i6qNmD>



talentkeepers.co.uk call: 01727 856 169 hello@talentkeepers.co.uk

Praise for *Mothers Work!*



“Smart, warm and incredibly well researched. This is THE book employers should be giving all their women returners.” Karen J. Pine, Professor of Psychology, University of Hertfordshire

“Jessica Chivers is the perfect ally for a new mother who is pondering whether and how to go back to work. Her chatty style, empathy and wealth of anecdotes make this an easy read as well as a rich source of valuable advice.” Octavius Black, CEO, The Mind Gym