



TenStep Supplemental Paper

8 July 2008

Delayed Career Entrants

Organizations are framing various initiatives to retain talented employees who are strongly committed to both family and career. However, these initiatives overlook a small yet noteworthy group of efficient professional employees who choose to delay their entry into a career for the sake of the family. Organizations must scout for this hitherto ignored resource pool of prospective employees.

A predetermined model of the ideal worker is one who completes schooling, moves onto graduation and then sails smoothly into a career. Such a worker religiously clocks long hours of work and years of loyalty. Typically, he would start a family rather late and alongside the career. Many organizations attempt to make family success complementary to professional success and design work-life initiatives for these workers.

People world over are trying harder than ever to compete in the rat race. So every professional strives to fit into the mould of the ideal worker to survive competition. Career-minded working women return to work at the earliest after maternity leave. Men too make little or no use of paternity leave. Despite the hurdles family care and career success are being pursued simultaneously.

Organizations are introducing employee-friendly policies such as telecommuting, flexible working hours, and lactation rooms apart from reduced work hour options. What is noteworthy is the cadre of employees for whom such policies are created. More often the bracket excludes delayed career entrants.

These employees would have consciously made the choice of sequential success (as Mary Blair-Loy puts it). Late entrants, especially women, would've often prioritized family over work.

Organizations seldom take this group seriously. Simply because of a gap in the career graph it is assumed they are likely to be less committed to their career. Research shows that contrary to recruiters' beliefs, these individuals habitually display high levels of commitment to their work (as they do to their family). Having been through hectic home-commitments they are free to take on responsibilities at the work place. Organizations must realize that they would benefit by capitalizing on this lot.

Employers across the globe claim to be non-discriminating. In this attempt, they can acknowledge delayed career entrants. Thus they would be able to tap this storehouse of talent without bias.

Employers need to redefine what counts as 'experience'. They must also rethink their stand on 'gaps' or 'breaks' in career. The implication is an extended absence from the labor force, especially for family purposes. Traditionally, most organizations consider a hiatus or break in one's career with suspicion. Parameters of 'Work Experience' are usually consistency and number of years of service, not merely qualifications and quality of work.



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If traditional discrimination against delayed career entrants continues, the loss to organizations and individuals could be irreversible. Research reveals that these employees often get a raw deal in terms of position and pay. They deserve their due!

It is heartening to note that there are trendsetters such as Queensland University of Technology in Australia. The University has career advancement opportunities designed especially for women who have taken a break particularly for family commitments. Scope for re-entry research is offered such as fellowships and scholarships making them eligible for senior academic positions.

The responsibility of employers does not end with recruiting late entrants. One must remember that these individuals have been through a transition and out of touch with their work. They need time and an environment congenial to rebuild their confidence levels.

First and foremost, entry level positions need to be created to suit this specific category of candidates. Tailor-made training programs would definitely help. This would prepare them to compete and be on par with others in terms of remuneration, promotion and other factors.

Supplementary support services too will ease the comeback. The profession is crucial here. Certain professions are more compatible with breaks and gaps while others are not. Acquiring higher qualifications especially through the distance education mode is another feasible option.

Employees take professional breaks for various and often genuine reasons. Family commitments are usually the primary reason, be it children, ailing parents or a partner. Employers are always looking for a competitive lead in recruitment and retention of talent. Attracting and retaining individuals in such diverse circumstances is the key to it.

Proper planning and reciprocal help from the organization is the answer to scripting a story of symbiotic success.