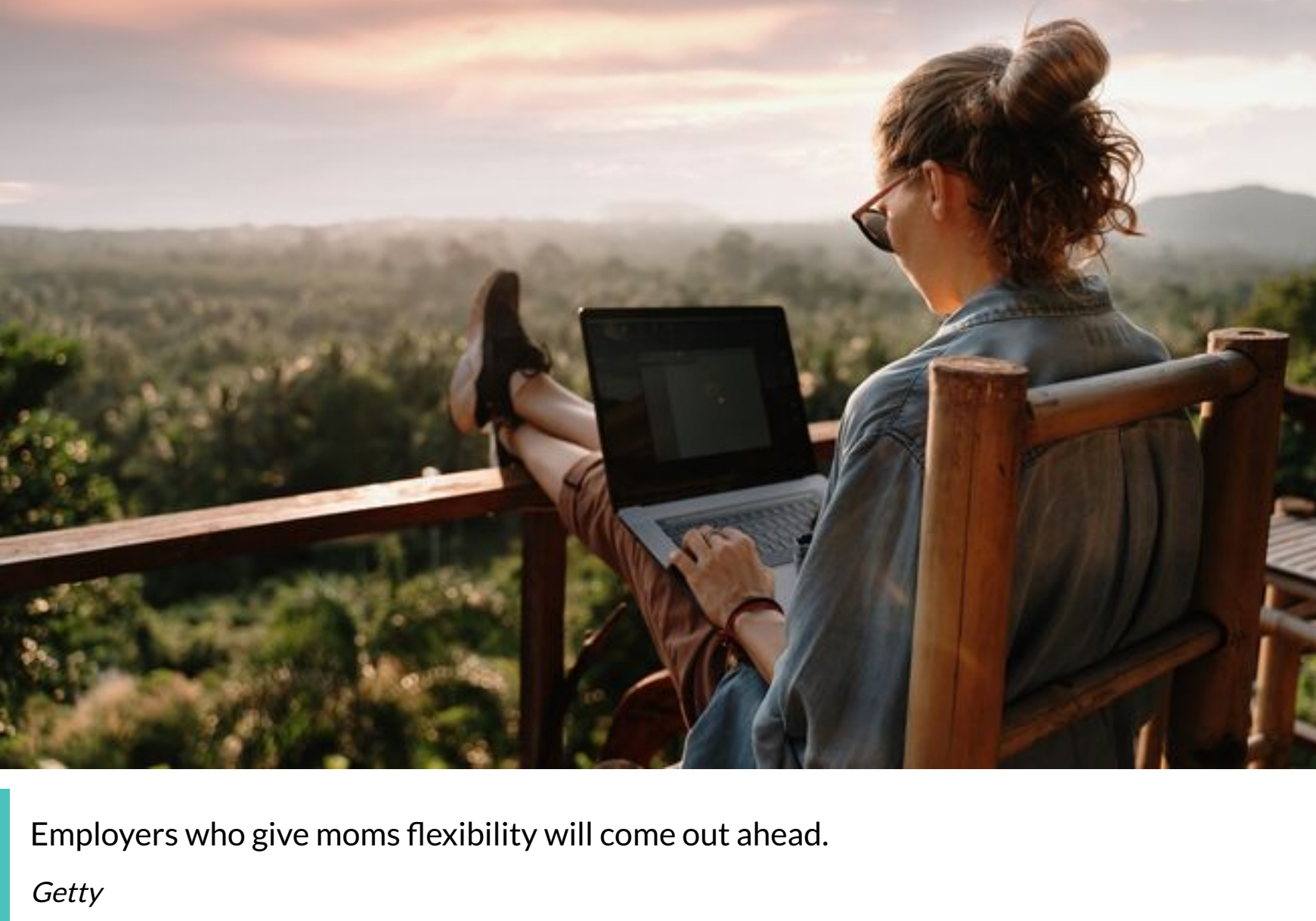


CAREER

I'm a CEO Mom Who Took a Career Break. It Made Me Want to Reimagine the Landscape of Work

Change needs to happen. ASAP.

By Michelle Keefe Yesterday at 1:25pm



Employers who give moms flexibility will come out ahead.

Getty

A friend of mine had a successful career. She had two kids and continued to work five days a week. She had a third child and continued to work four days in the office and one day at home. She had a nanny, who understandably increased her rate with each child but was still more affordable than three children in daycare. Now, my over-extended friend is paying a large salary to her nanny, is only working one day from home, and is retaining very little of her paycheck. She decided to quit her job because her company would not budge on flexibility. Would she have stayed if she had less expensive childcare? Yes. Would she have stayed if her employer was willing to offer her more flexibility? Yes. Is she frustrated because she knows she will have a gap in her career progression? *Very much yes.*



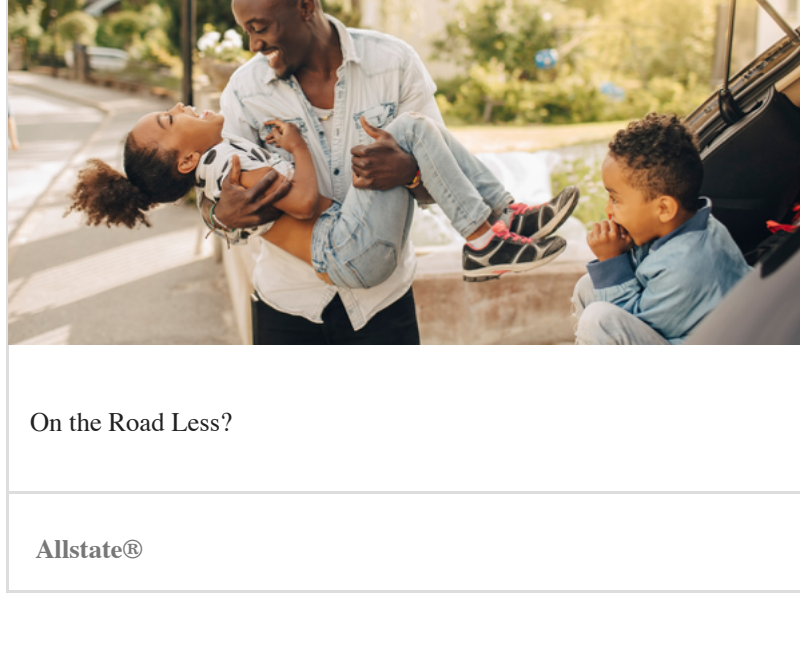
It was on a six-week family RV trip through New Zealand that I began cataloguing what needed to change. My husband had just sold his startup, I was planning my next move and the kids were being homeschooled while we were away. In short: We were on a break from our respective “career tracks” and each of us would be better for it. I realized that while the systemic challenges that make working motherhood nearly impossible—abysmal family leave policies, expensive childcare, etc.—need to be addressed, there are also areas where *employers* can change.



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Adriana Kopinja

Companies can’t afford to lose working moms—and in most cases, moms can’t afford to leave their careers, either. Aside from the obvious loss in income, women who take career breaks also take breaks from contributing to retirement, and lose earning power and retirement savings as they step back from their jobs during critical times for **raises and promotions**, potentially to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars over the course of their careers.



On the Road Less?

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Retaining working moms during COVID is essential, both for the performance of companies and for the overall progress and financial health of working women, who are bearing the **brunt** of a global health emergency. In my role, connecting highly educated moms to companies who value their contributions, I’ve noticed that employers who are successful in attracting and retaining working mothers have a few things in common:

Communication

Superb communication is fundamental to a successful corporate culture, but it’s especially important for a culture that supports working moms. Employees who feel comfortable expressing themselves and what they need can provide the feedback needed to make a workplace more accommodating—and to allow them to bring their best selves to work.

Trust

All employees want to feel valued, included and not judged. *Flexibility* is a buzzword if it’s not accompanied by trust that your employee can produce and deliver on their own time. For a lot of managers, this is the most difficult concept, and employers who are invested in retaining and recruiting working moms should consider training to reduce the unconscious biases that employees with more flexible schedules often face.

Boundaries

Remote work and flexibility have become the norm over the past year, and we expect that to continue post-pandemic in many companies. But remote work isn’t a magical cure, with studies indicating we’re working longer hours and sitting through more meetings, just without the commute. Home office or not, nearly 10 million working moms report suffering from burnout. Creating clear, reasonable expectations and allowing employees to utilize flexibility and benefits that the company offers can help establish boundaries.

Value

As firms put emphasis on diversity in their leadership and ranks, they often forget that being a working mom is a distinct point of view. It’s no surprise that 865,000 women left the workforce in September—four times as many men—but it should alarm us all. There’s inherent cultural value in retaining working mothers, but there’s a financial incentive too. It costs between 20 and 200 percent of an employee’s salary to replace them.

Empathy


Many women will be returning to the workforce after breaks forced by COVID, whether it’s in a few months or several years. Among those of us who work in recruiting, particularly with women, there is a question hanging: How will employers react? Will the mass exodus of women during COVID make them believe it’s a liability to hire a working mother? *Empathy* at work is another buzzword, but in practice in recruiting, it means understanding the value of an employee, even if their path hasn’t been linear or traditional.

For many years, working moms have stepped up and sacrificed to advance their position in the workforce. Now, it’s time for business leaders to do the same, and commit to the best practices in communication and flexibility that will enable working parents to continue to contribute.

Michelle Keefe is the founder and CEO of MomUp, which connects highly educated working mothers with companies who value them.

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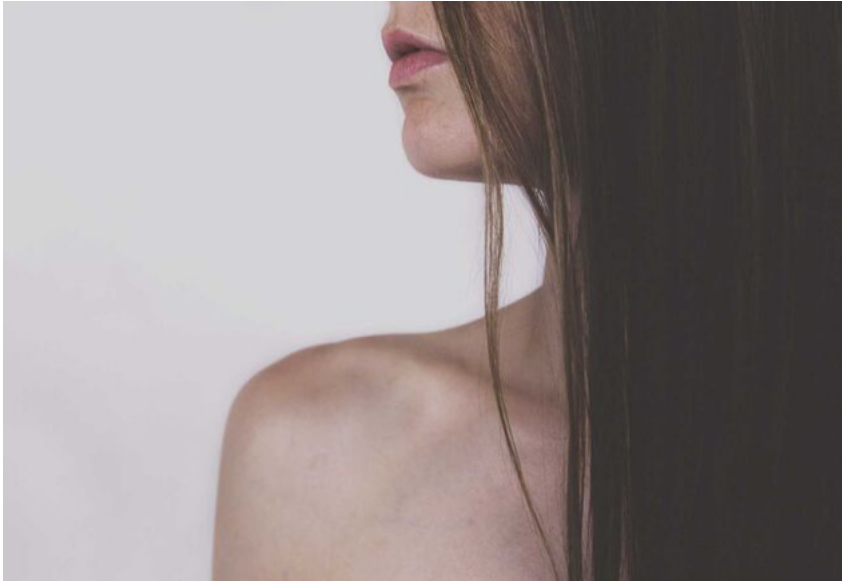
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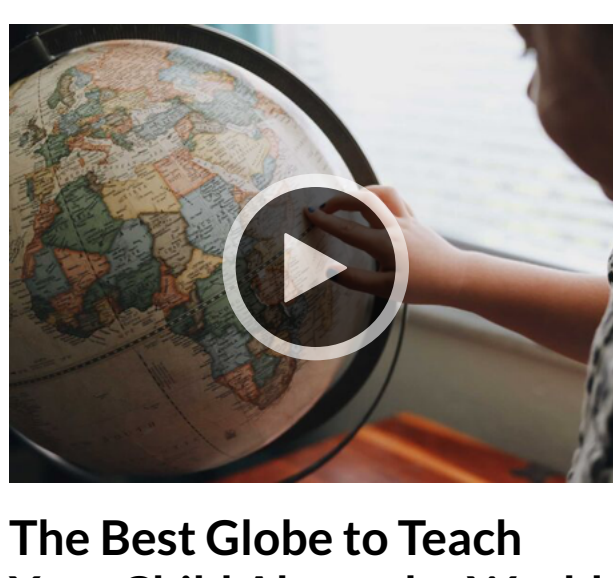
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