

Theme : Gender Equality

Are 'meternity' leaves for non-parents a good idea ?

CNN, May 7, 2016, by Brigid Schulte

(CNN)When I think back on the happiest times of my life, I immediately think of my two periods of maternity leave after my children were born. And it's not just because of the sheer joy of being with my babies.

It's also because after working flat out and full steam as a daily newspaper reporter for more than a decade, in an era of shrinking staff and expanding appetite for ever more "content," my leave -- partly paid, mostly unpaid -- at least got me out of the office.

Yes, I was physically exhausted, but maternity leave was such a welcome respite from the grinding pace of work. After years of willingly working evenings, weekends and sometimes pulling all-nighters, I was just really, really tired.

So let's get two things straight: Meghann Foye, author of the new novel, "Maturity," about a woman who fakes a pregnancy just to get a break from work, is absolutely wrong when she calls maternity leave a blissful time for "self-reflection" -- an ill-advised claim that has set the Internet on furious fire. (I get it. Maternity leave is not a vacation. On "productive" days with my newborns, I may have managed to clip their fingernails. Most days evaporated in a sleep-deprived haze.)

But Foye is absolutely right that new parents aren't the only ones who need time for something other than work in their lives. And we shouldn't let the backlash against this book (Foye has already canceled media and promotional appearances) obscure the critical questions about our work cultures, structures and policies that it raises. Americans -- whether they have children are not -- are fried. Indeed, beneath the furor over Foye's way of making this point lies the difficult truth that a growing body of research has been showing us for years: The American way of work isn't working -- for anyone.

Professional workers in the United States work among the longest hours of any advanced economy. Many hourly workers can't get enough hours at one job to get by, so they attempt to juggle two or three jobs. Alone among advanced economies, we, along with Nepal, Suriname and Guyana, have no national vacation policy. And, to meet the expectations of our workaholic culture, those whose employers do offer paid vacation don't take it all (or take work along), virtually gifting their earned time off back to the job.

In a 2015 study by Staples Advantage and WorkPlace Trends, more than half the 2,500 workers surveyed reported feeling burned out by their jobs. Half reported eating lunch at their desks, and feeling that they could never take a break. More than three-fourths said they sometimes worked nights and weekends from home.

Is it any wonder that the United States ranks among the lowest advanced economies on work-life balance?

The question is what to do about it. And the answer is to change the way we work. According to Harvard economist Claudia Goldin's research, restructuring jobs to ensure more flexibility in when, where and how work gets done could do more than improve work-life balance. If employers no longer have incentive to reward what Anne-Marie Slaughter has called "time macho" and other researchers unrealistic "hero hours" in their employees, Goldin argues, the gender pay gap "would be considerably reduced and might vanish altogether."

Making these changes won't be easy -- there is no paid family leave, no national infrastructure for high quality, affordable, accessible child and elder care. And our labor laws, too, are outdated and out of sync with the reality of our lives. Under the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, employers have to pay overtime only to hourly workers who put in more than 40 hours a week, even though many would kill to get at least 30. Salaried workers have no such protection from overwork.

But we can do it, by transforming our policies and our culture. Technology allows workers enormous freedom to organize work -- smart phone apps like Shift Worker enable hourly workers to remotely swap shifts. And for knowledge workers, secure, encrypted technology means they can work virtually anywhere, anytime. But unless we change our work cultures to value performance and productivity more than face time as a sign of commitment and dedication, technology won't make work more flexible -- it will just keep us working everywhere, all the time.

Yet here's something that sounds sacrilegious: Working shorter hours may actually make work better. In international comparisons of hourly productivity, countries with shorter work hours, like Norway, often rank ahead of the United States, with France, Denmark and others not far behind.

And though we Americans think that these long work hours are required to get the job done, research proves otherwise. Stanford economist John Pencavel has shown a "productivity cliff," that the longer we work over 40 hours, the steeper the drop in productivity.

Economists and neuroscientists are showing us we can't effectively innovate, be creative or be open to fresh insights when we're crispy around the edges.

So America, it's time to work shorter, more focused hours. Start with the easy stuff: better systems. Knowledge workers sometimes work long hours because they're interrupted every three minutes during the day and can't get the big stuff done. So set up a system for uninterrupted quiet time every day. Take breaks every 90 minutes. Go for a walk. Eat lunch with someone. That can improve the odds of having a breakthrough idea.

Then, tackle the bigger, revolutionary changes and back them up with policy. Rather than judge worker performance by hours, which is easy, do the hard work of figuring out what the mission of the work is and the right metrics to gauge results.

Take advantage of technology. Make flexibility the default for every worker, rather than the rare and stigmatized exception for new parents. Research by Nicholas Bloom, another Stanford economist, has found that workers given flexible schedules are more productive and happier -- and they save companies money. For hourly workers, give them cross-training and predictable schedules with stable hours at a living wage. Support a national paid family leave program, vacation policy and better infrastructure for child and elder care, and create the cultures that support workers actually using them.

And, instead of "meternity" leaves to refresh, reset and have real time for self-reflection, follow the lead of companies who actually give workers sabbaticals, like Nike, Adobe, the Boston Consulting Group, Deloitte, PwC, General Mills, Klimpton Hotels, REI, The Cheesecake Factory, QuickTrip and others.

The point is, if we change the way we work -- to both make work better and to give people time for their lives -- perhaps no one would ever get so worn out and sucked dry that they would have to yearn for a Meternity Leave.

Stalkerware : the software that spies on your partner

BBC, October 25, 2019, by Joe Tidy

Amy says it all started when her husband seemed to know intimate details about her friends.

"He would drop snippets into conversations, such as knowing about Sarah's baby. Really private things that he shouldn't have known about. If I asked how he knew these things, he'd say I'd told him and accuse me of losing it," she says.

Amy - not her real name - also began to wonder how he seemed to know where she was all the time.

"Sometimes he would say he saw me at a cafe where I was meeting my friends and say he was just passing by chance. I started to question everything and trust no-one, even my friends," she says.

For months, these incidents built up, turning an abusive marriage into a nightmare that came to a chilling conclusion after a Halloween family trip.

"We'd been to visit a pumpkin patch and were having a rare good weekend, which basically means my husband hadn't taken anything out on me. Our six-year-old son was playing on the floor and was so happy," Amy says.

"My husband passed me his phone to show me a picture he'd taken at the farm and in that split-second I saw an alert pop up on his screen. It read, 'Daily report on Amy's Mac is ready to view.'

"I felt this chill go through me and I stopped breathing for a minute. I had to excuse myself and pretended I needed the bathroom. I had to be there for my son and pretend that I hadn't seen anything.

"The first moment I could, I went to the library to use the computer and look up the spyware he'd used. That's when everything made sense after months of thinking I was going crazy."

Stalkerware - also known as spouseware - are powerful surveillance software programs typically sold openly online.

On a device, all messages can be read, screen activity recorded, GPS locations tracked and cameras used to spy on what an individual is doing.

According to cyber-security company Kaspersky, the number of people who have discovered such software on their devices has risen by at least 35% in the past year.

Kaspersky researchers say their protection technologies have detected stalkerware on 37,532 devices so far this year.

And principal security researcher David Emm says this is the "tip of a very large iceberg".

"Most people will routinely protect a laptop or desktop, not that many people actually protect a mobile device," he says.

"This information is coming back from installations of our product on [smartphones]... so this figure doesn't even go close to what the total would be."

Kaspersky's findings indicate Russia is the country with the highest levels of stalkerware activity. India, Brazil, the United States and Germany complete the top five, with the UK in eighth place with 730 detections.

Another security company says there are practical steps people can take if they suspect they are already being spied on.

"It's always advisable to check which apps are on your phone and conduct a virus scan where necessary and if there are any apps on your device that you do not recognise it is worth searching online for reviews and deleting them," says Jake Moore, from Eset.

"As a general rule, if you aren't using an app, delete it."

Once Amy realised her computer had been compromised, she developed a severe mistrust of technology, which she is only just overcoming.

Charities say this is a common psychological response to such a trauma.

Jessica was another victim of stalkerware. Her ex-husband routinely spied on her through her phone's microphone and would play mind games by repeating specific phrases she and her friends had used in private conversations.

It's been years since she escaped the relationship but she still leaves her phone locked in the car when seeing friends.

Gemma Toynton, from domestic abuse charity Safer Places, says she see this long-term effect a lot in her cases.

"It reduces someone's trust," she says. "It makes them see a phone or laptop as a weapon, because that's what it's been used for."

"Technology has become, in their minds like a net around them and a lot of people do withdraw from using the internet."

"It really does impact your whole life. The fact that this stalkerware is on the rise is a real concern."

Amy, who is from the US, is now divorced and lives many miles away from her ex-husband.

She has a restraining order preventing him from direct contact with her and he is legally allowed to communicate logistics about their son's care via written letter only.

I tested out one of the most popular consumer products, which costs £140 for three months of surveillance.

I bought it online and installed it on to my work phone. It took me about an hour and I used the 24-hour live support offered by the company when I encountered any problems.

Spyware companies advertise their services as "employee monitoring" or "parental control" products.

In many countries, including the UK, using the spyware on a spouse without their permission is illegal, so many of the companies' websites are littered with disclaimers advising against this.

However, some of the same websites link to articles, seemingly written by associates, recommending the software as a spy tool for "cheating wives and husbands".

In a live chat with the company whose product I was testing, I directly told them: "I want to install this on my wife's phone, will it be secret?"

The customer service-representative responded: "The application will start to work in stealth mode right after installation. I'll be happy to help."

I also downloaded five of the top cyber-security products on to the infected mobile and carried out a free scan.

All of them gave alerts for "potentially harmful software".

The Crown Prosecution Service says there aren't specific laws related to the use of stalkerware but any criminal activity like this can be prosecuted by a number of means including the Protection from Harassment Act 1997.

Amy says more should be done to legislate against the use of these technologies.

"They need to stop hiding behind plausible deniability," she says.

"There is a wink that's given when they send this little disclaimer that says, 'We don't approve of you spying on wives.' They know what their customers are doing though. This software causes real harm."

Why is it good for business to have a woman on top ?

CNN, October 16, 2019, by Jeanne Sahadi

There's more evidence to suggest putting women into top leadership roles is good for business.

A new study from S&P Global Market Intelligence found that public companies with women CEOs or CFOs often were more profitable and produced better stock price performance than many of the companies that had appointed men to those roles.

The study looked at new CEO and CFO appointments for companies on the Russell 3000 Index over the past 17 years. All told, it considered 5,825 new appointments, of which 578 were of women.

Two years after appointing a female CEO, companies were perceived by investors as being less risky, the study found. And the companies saw improved momentum in their stock prices.

Companies with women CFOs were also perceived as less risky bets by investors and were more profitable. Looking across the entire 17-year period, the study found that the women CFOs' companies, during their tenures, generated a combined \$1.8 trillion more in gross profits than their sector averages. For example, one of the firms with a female CFO generated \$208.6 million in gross profits in a given quarter. That was nearly \$33 million more than the \$175.7 million average gross profit for companies in the same sector.

Gender diversity on boards improved as well. Researchers found that companies that appointed a female CEO had twice the number of female board members than the market average during her tenure. And they found firms with high gender diversity on their boards were more profitable than those with low gender diversity.

Women executives may be held to a higher standard

Why did the women CEOs and CFOs do so well? Did they perform their jobs differently than their male counterparts?

The study analyzed the language used in the newly appointed executives' biographies, especially key words that reflect achievements, education and personal traits associated with success -- words like productivity, technology, Wharton and leadership. It found a strong correlation between key words used in all of the women's biographies and those found in the biographies of the most successful male executives. There was not a strong correlation, however, with the key words in the biographies of the less successful men.

The S&P researchers suggest this could mean that common attributes drive success among men and women, but that boards held the women CEOs and CFOs to a higher standard than the men before hiring them.

Or, put another way, boards hire men much more frequently, even though some of the men they appoint aren't necessarily as qualified as some women candidates, as suggested by the outperformance of the women executives in the S&P study.

"The high male-to-female ratio of executives in C-suite positions supports this premise. Being more selective with female appointees means that the board of directors may pass over a more qualified female in favor of a less qualified male," the researchers wrote. "If this is the case, it follows that the remaining pool of female contenders for C-suite positions remains richer with talent."

Vocabulary from the articles :

sheer : pur / simple

flat out : tout net / parfaitement / franchement / absolument

full steam : plein régime

to shrink : rétrécir / diminuer / réduire

staff: personnel / employé

respite : répit

grinding : éreintant / épuisant

to pull an all-nighter : passer une nuit blanche

to get things straight : remettre les choses en place

blissful : bienheureux / béat

ill-advised : mal avisé

backlash : contrecoups / retour de flamme

paid vacation : congé payé

time off : temps libre / repos

to vanish : disparaître

affordable : abordable

overwork : surmenage / surcharge de travail

dedication : dévouement

to take a break : faire/prendre une pause

a breakthrough : percé / découverte / avancée

the odds : probabilité / chances (to beat the odds: braver les obstacles, surmonter les difficultés)

to back up : soutenir / corroborer

to gauge : jauger / mesurer

to reset : remettre à zéro / réinitialiser

to follow the lead : suivre l'exemple

worn out : usé-délabré / épuisé-crevé-éreinté

sucked dry : sucer jusqu'à l'os

to yearn for : aspirer à

snippets : bribes

to lose it : perdre la tête

in a split second : en une fraction de seconde

to pop up : apparaître

spyware : logiciel espion / espioniciel

spouse : époux

to spy on : espionner

to overcome : surmonter

to withdraw : retirer

to monitor : surveiller

to be littered with : truffé de / parsemé de

disclaimer : exonération / clause de non responsabilité

to advise against : déconseiller

stealth : discrétion / furtivité

harassment : harcèlement

plausible deniability : *Plausible deniability is a term coined by the CIA in the early 1960s to describe the withholding of information from senior officials in order to protect them from repercussions in the event that illegal or unpopular activities by the CIA became public knowledge.*

to appoint : nommer

CEO : PDG

investor : investisseur
gross profit : marge brute / bénéfice brut
to be held to a high standard : être tenu de satisfaire à des normes exigeantes
counterpart : homologue
achievements : succès / accomplissements
to drive success : garantir la réussite / être moteur de la réussite (the drive for success: le désir de réussir)
outperformance : superformance
contender : concurrent / candidat

Thematic vocabulary : GENDER GAP

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