



## **Do You Work For A Family-friendly Company?**

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**by Marion Samkavitz**

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When Susan Oates' son, Emmett, was born more than three years ago, it meant two things: Her life would change and so would her work. She left behind a job that required traveling at least five times a year and began searching for a position that would allow her to spend more time at home.

Her search ended after pulling up AstraZeneca's web site, which touted "a work-life balance," she said.

"They were so committed to this work-life philosophy, they put it on their web site," said Oates, who is now the company's strategic communications manager.

Since taking the job, the 40-year-old mother has been able to adjust her hours based on her family's needs. If Emmett has a doctor's appointment, she can take off and make up the lost hours the next morning or later in the week. Also, if her son's day care falls through one day, she can opt for the company's emergency day care back up.

"They show they care about my life outside of work," Oates said.

Such family friendly practices have drawn Wilmington-based AstraZeneca into the spotlight this year. The pharmaceutical giant was one of three companies honored by the Delaware Valley Child Care Council as the area's Best Employer for Working Parents. Vertex Inc., the Berwyn-based developer of tax software and the YMCA of Greater West Chester and Chester County were also presented with the award, which is in its seventh year. The YMCA offers free child enrichment programs to all of its 11 employees. And 91% of them have flexible schedules.

Susan Lundy, Associate Director of the Child Care Council and Administrator of the award, said companies are bending in unprecedented ways to reach out to families and keep employees happy. She hopes this award motivates other companies to pick up similar practices.

Companies are hosting camps, sponsoring trips to the movies and, in some cases, partially funding child care expenses. More common practices include flexible work schedules, where employees can arrange their own work week. Instead of employee sick leave, companies are now offering "family or dependent care sick leave."

"We see more companies redefining sick leave, so employees can take care of their families," Lundy said.

While retaining employees is the obvious draw, in the long run, it saves companies money, she said.

"Companies benefit from high retention," she said, "but they also get a loyal and committed employee." In an environment where nearly half the workforce is female, companies can't afford not to accommodate families.

According to the US Department of Labor, 85% of working women will have babies sometime during their career. A national survey of more than 800,000 workers from 400 US companies reported family issues

and child care as the most frequently cited reasons for unscheduled absences. Together with the findings from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, that report that in the US, the majority of mothers with children under the age of 18 work, including 59% of those with infants, and 74% of those with school-aged children, one can see that the need for family-friendly workplaces has increased.

The US Department of Labor also reports that the number of working men and women with children in this country has increased by 15% in the last 5 years. This leaves companies in a situation where they have to lure potential candidates with family-friendly incentives such as flex time, telecommuting and paid absences. Some benefits that companies never considered providing a decade ago, are now fairly standard among those on the list. These include such benefits as before and after-school care, holiday care, back-up care, summer programs, and sick child care.

Providing a good working environment keeps employees "committed and engaged," said AstraZeneca's human resources director Andrea Moselle.

AstraZeneca offers new parents up to 12 weeks of paid and unpaid leave. They give parents of adopted children the same maternity leave. The company also kicks in \$5,000 to help with adoption expenses.

"This generation of employees is different," she said. "These benefits are important to them. They are a tool for bringing people in and keeping them."

### **Expert Speaks Out**

Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, renowned author and child expert who has written over 30 books, is also a strong advocate of family-friendly workplaces. In his most recent book, *Touchpoints: Three to Six*, he praises job-sharing positions and flexible work schedules as two of the strongest employer trends. He reported that 63 percent of mothers (with children under the age of 18) are working. He writes, "This isn't likely to change, and we need to find ways to adjust that will consider children's best interests first."

Dr. Brazelton reiterated these sentiments when he was in Philadelphia addressing parents and child care advocates last February, 2002. While discussing the numerous stresses parents face and advising on how to raise healthy children, he said companies are finally realizing that taking care of families is in their best interest. Brazelton went on to say that in order for accommodating, working families must initiate and/or support legislation that forces companies to recognize the value of employees with children and do their best to make the work place much more family-friendly.

The Delaware Valley Child Care Council winners for 2001: AstraZeneca, Vertex and YWCA of Chester County, all demonstrated that the employees were important members of the company by offering flex hours and onsite child care.

Marion Samkavitz is a local freelance writer.

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Enter one of the following categories:

Your company has more than 2,000 employees

Your company has fewer than 2,000 employees

Your company has fewer than 200 employees