

# work/life TODAY

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## Employers can help parents of special kids

*Up to 20% of workers care for children with physical or emotional problems*

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Each of Bart Reid's three children had unlikely childhood emergencies, ranging from a kidney defect to the need for open-heart surgery. And three times, his employer, Deloitte, gave him all the time off he needed.

"They said, 'Family first. Come back when you're ready,'" recalls Reid, now the human resources director for the firm's three south Florida offices.

He did go back to work after each crisis passed, and he has stayed—so far—for 20 years. "It's given me such a sense of loyalty to the firm," he says. "I don't think for my situation there could be a better place to be all these years."

Now Reid bends over backward to accommodate other Deloitte parents whose children have special healthcare needs by extending

their family leave or fashioning part-time jobs.

Reid's experience helped him recognize something most employers do not: Up to 20 percent of working parents care for a child with a physical, mental or emotional problem that can wreak havoc on an employee's routine.

"One of the things we discovered is that many companies did not even know about employees who might have a child with special needs," says Christina Fluet, director of a federally funded study sponsored by MassGeneral Hospital for Children.

Many people consider only children who use wheelchairs to be disabled, she says. But parents of kids with asthma, congenital heart

*"The first feeling these parents express is extreme frustration and confusion."*

*— LifeCare's Marianne Stook*

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## AWLP affiliates with WorldatWork, moves to AZ

The Alliance for Work-Life Progress on Nov. 20 became affiliated with WorldatWork in an arrangement that leaders of both organizations say is a strategic fit.

The seven-year-old AWLP will move its offices from Alexandria, Va., to WorldatWork's Scottsdale, Ariz., headquarters.

AWLP will keep its name, employ an executive director and maintain a strategic advisory board.

Membership in the two organizations will remain separate, and AWLP will host its already-planned 2004 conference Feb. 18-20 in Phoenix.

"This provides an infusion of energy and resources into AWLP," says AWLP Co-President Linda Roundtree. Co-President Denise Montana calls the move "progress for the profession."

"WorldatWork members will benefit from new access to work/life knowledge, while AWLP members will benefit from access to new 'total rewards' knowledge," Roundtree adds.

WorldatWork is a 25,000-member trade association that specializes in what it calls "total rewards": benefits, compensation and the work experience.

AWLP Executive Director Stephanie Trapp says her organization's members gradually will see "upscale member benefits" and a larger AWLP staff.

She says the merger is in the best interests of AWLP's 570 members. "If you look at the work/life field, the number of folks who are work/life professionals has been shrinking for several years," she says. "Work/life is part of everybody's agenda, particularly those in the HR department. This is a way for AWLP to really be at that table in an exciting way."

**Contact:** *Stephanie Trapp at [strapp@clarionmr.com](mailto:strapp@clarionmr.com) or Linda Roundtree at [linda@roundtreeconsulting.com](mailto:linda@roundtreeconsulting.com).*

On the web at  
[www.worklifetoday.com](http://www.worklifetoday.com)

## Parents have special work/life needs

*continued from page 1*

disease, obesity or attention-deficit disorder routinely face extra doctor visits, meetings with teachers, physical therapy assessments, high medical bills and problems at day-care.

Yet they're reluctant to ask their employers for help, says Marianne Stook, vice president of marketing services for resource and referral service LifeCare. "Employees are somewhat embarrassed about admitting it," she says.

Those parents depend on their employer-sponsored healthcare plans, says Linda Roundtree, president of Roundtree Consulting in Renton, Wash., whose son has Down's syndrome, and might fear they will lose their jobs if they ask for help.

### Flexibility tops list of needs

Yet employers can help, she says, by granting flexible schedules and allowing parents to work from home—or, in Roundtree's case—from her son's hospital room, where she spent many nights. "That was an amazing benefit to me," she says.

Fluet says she expected parents of special-needs kids to tell her about problems with healthcare coverage during interviews. Instead, they talked about their work/life problems.

The good news, she says, is that many companies already allow the flexibility these parents need. "Their needs are really not different from employees who are caring for an elder parent or other relatives with a chronic disease or disability."

Still, they need help with the paperwork and assessments that are necessary before their children can enroll in community and school programs that cater to their situations.

A company's resource and referral program, notes Stook, can educate parents about what they need to do and find caregivers who are qualified to look after a child with a dis-

ability. "We save them all the legwork," says Stook.

### The personal toll

The employer also can refer an overstressed parent to the employee assistance program for help in finding a support group, counselor or even respite care.

"The first feeling these parents express is extreme frustration and confusion," says Stook. "They just get so much relief from talking to an expert who can calm their fears."

At Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, Employee Relations Director Terri Ireton doles out comfort.

She works out flexible schedules with parents of special-needs children on a case-by-case basis, and says she's sure most of them would have to quit their jobs if she didn't.

And her firm, she says, gets "loyal, dedicated employees" in return. "We have not gotten a tremendous number of requests, but the good will that those people feel and express goes miles for us."

Fluet isn't surprised. "The discretionary effort that they exert far exceeds employees in a different situation because these employees are so thankful, and they're willing to put out the extra effort for their employer," she says.

**Contact:** Christina Fluet at [cfluet@partners.org](mailto:cfluet@partners.org).

### ENABLING ACTS

To help working parents with special-needs children, employers can:

- Supply information about public programs for special-needs children.
- Collect contact information for parent support groups.
- Find day-care centers and summer camps that cater to special-needs kids.
- Picture children with disabilities in company benefits literature.
- Allow flexibility, including permission for parents to move from full- to part-time work.
- Sponsor dependent-care assistance plans so employees can pay for care with pre-tax dollars.



## SPOTLIGHT: A WORK/LIFE BEST PRACTICE

# Parents get extra personal leave for first day of school

*Paid benefit keeps workers 'authentic and honest'; helps company with recruitment effort*

Jennifer Perue, an administrative assistant at Colgate-Palmolive Co., gets as many jitters on the first day of school as her 8-year-old daughter, Danielle.

"Every first day is just as exciting as pre-kindergarten," she says. "A new class, a new teacher, a new challenge. It's important for me to be there."

Normally, working parents would have to use a personal half or full day to send kids on their way. But for the past seven years, the New York City-based company has found offering employees an extra personal day for the first day of school has prevented employees from sneaking sick days, aided in recruitment and made workers "authentic and honest," says Philip Berry, vice president of global employee relations and Best Place to Work.

Berry says the company tries to keep the strategy simple: Every year, immediately before schools start, managers send a letter to all workers reminding them they have the option to request a full day off and asking them to arrange the time with their supervisor. Although it's a paid day off, it is not counted as an employee's vacation or sick time.

"It's a corporate mandate to say, 'This is good for us,'" Berry says. "And the best way to do it is to make it easy for everyone."

Both mothers and fathers are switching briefcases for backpacks on their kids' first days at several company locations around the country.

Prior to Colgate-Palmolive's offering the time off, some employees felt responsible both to their jobs and their kids, so they would only request a half day off, Berry says. Absenteeism around first days of school had increased slightly as well.

"If they didn't offer the benefit, I'd find a way to take it off," Perue says. "As a single parent, it puts my mind at ease, and my daughter's. I'm able to drop her off and pick her up. ... And I know my supervisor won't be upset."

Enacting the practice at Colgate-Palmolive was easy, Berry says, because it fit into the corporate culture: The company has always stressed education for the family and for its own employees, he says.

"It's important for the teacher to see the parent and for the parent to know what's happening," he adds. "If an employer can develop a policy to deal with these needs, you're going to have more productivity."

Berry adds: "Don't look at the cost. See how satisfied the employees are."

**Contact:** Allison Klimerman, manager of corporate communications, at (212) 310-3770.



## WHAT WORKS: IDEAS FROM COMPANIES AROUND THE COUNTRY

### 'Monster Den' boosts creativity, morale

The scattered bean-bag chairs, pool table, foosball games and bright monster-character murals make Monster's multi-purpose room look more like an adult's indoor playground than a place to conduct business.

But Monster uses this colorful, giant room—big enough to gather its 600 employees—for meetings and breaks alike.

Welcome to the Monster Den. When the company moved its headquarters to Maynard, Mass., in 1998, executives wanted a space where employees could keep work lively and feel innovative and creative, says Kevin Mullins, public relations manager for Monster, an online service for job seekers and employers with jobs to post. The result: a high-traffic area equally welcoming to brainstorming and de-stressing.

"If you need that break, you can take that break," Mullins says.

"If you are happy and feeling appreciated, you're driven to help the company stay successful."

The area is perfect for the company's employee gatherings, too, Mullins says. Three times a year, Monster holds laid-back, after-hours theme parties—which the firm's founder has been known to deejay—celebrating everything from March Madness to the Olympics.

Once, the company threw a "suitcase party": Employees arrived with packed suitcases and waited to learn which of them would be randomly whisked away for a weekend trip to Las Vegas.

**Contact:** Kevin Mullins at [kevin.mullins@monster.com](mailto:kevin.mullins@monster.com).

# WEIGHING IN

by Guest Columnists Margery Leveen Sher and Jim Harris

## Use sound scientific research to show work/life benefits

Let's be perfectly honest. A lot of us have mixed feelings about return-on-investment studies. What if the study shows that my—or worse, my boss's—pet program is showing little return on investment? If we are winning awards for work/life, why rock the boat with numbers? How do we know the study is really valid anyway?

Those questions become less relevant when we realize that sooner or later, all programs and policies will have to prove themselves. Budgets tighten, bosses change and everything becomes eligible for the guillotine.

To maintain credibility, work/life professionals must use return-on-investment tools based on sound scientific research. Yet the most common tools are based on national statistics and trends—research that is unsubstantiated and precludes us from determining whether improved outcomes are due specifically to work/life programs or to other change factors.

Fortunately, a whole body of organizational development research has been conducted with representative samples of the population. This research can help isolate and identify the effect of work/life programs on desired organizational outcomes.

Most ROI tools factor in compensation, average hours worked, average unscheduled absences, turnover rates and program use. But it's simplistic to assume that a popular work/life program automatically increases retention rates, boosts morale and spurs greater productivity.

Those are the result of more complex forces.

### Measure impact, not use

The good news: Scientific research proves that work/life programs influence those outcomes through the impact they have on the perceptions and attitudes of employees. So it's possible for companies to measure the impact of their work/life programs—not just how many people use them—by gauging employee perceptions.

For example, some people may feel that their company is supportive of employees because it offers work/life programs. This perception can positively influence the attitudes of employees, even if they personally do not use the programs.

On the other hand, some people may already hold such negative perceptions about the organization that even those programs can't change their minds.

It is also important to properly interpret return-on-investment numbers. Low ROI may not indicate poor program design or prove the programs are incapable of high return. It could be that other factors are impeding the effectiveness of otherwise well-designed programs.

Scientifically-based models for measuring ROI can help determine the factors that contribute to or restrain program effectiveness.

It is important to keep in mind that:

- Work/life programs influence job perceptions, beliefs and attitudes.
- Existing research shows that perceptions, beliefs and attitudes have an impact on employee commitment, reduced turnover and job performance.
- Work/life ROI tools should be scientifically-based and use existing research to have true validity.

Work/life professionals can use return-on-investment information to determine which programs are most important to employees, and which ones make the most sense for further investment.

*Margery Leveen Sher is the principal of the Child Care/Work-Life Group and Jim Harris is the principal of the Personnel Research Group at Caliber Associates in Fairfax, Va. Contact them at (703) 385-3200.*

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Contact Editor Sharon O'Malley at [somalley@worklifetoday.com](mailto:somalley@worklifetoday.com) to become a *Work/Life Today* guest columnist.

Work/life programs influence job perceptions, beliefs and attitudes.

## Book groups promote networking, ease day's stress

*Discussions allow members to practice speaking and leadership skills, talk about work/life*

To take the edge off of a hectic day, members of Bristol Myers Squibb's Women in Technology group took an off-hours field trip to a New York art museum to look at Vermeer paintings. It seemed a logical next step after reading and discussing author Susan Vreeland's *Girl in Hyacinth Blue*, a novel that supposes Vermeer created a painting by that name that the world had overlooked.

The group's year-old book club, which is just as likely to choose a tome on leadership, work/life or career management as a novel, is a "forum to network with colleagues from other departments and to give members a time-out," says Linda Phillips, senior research investigator and book club participant.

And because any member can suggest a book, group meetings are an opportunity for members to practice public speaking and demonstrate their own leadership skills, she says.

Company-sponsored book discussion groups are "a great way for people to begin networking, understand colleagues and to talk about what's important to the company and to their lives," says Leatha Ritchie, director for regional manager development at Bright Horizons Family Solutions, which

began a formal book club two years ago. "We look forward to what the next book is going to be."

Bright Horizons has given books to employees for years, notes Ritchie. But the firm formalized the practice by scheduling book discussions at twice-yearly regional managers meetings, which draw about 100 managers of day-care centers.

Before each meeting, the company sends books to attendees, sometimes highlighting particular chapters for focus. At the meeting, the firm sponsors a guided discussion about the book.

At software maker SAS, Laura Wallace, supervisor of work/life programs, holds quarterly brown-bag lunches to discuss a book—usually about parenting or another work/life issue—chosen by the work/life staff. Up to 100 employees


have attended the sessions.

Wallace says a book club is inexpensive. At SAS, employees buy their own books at a discount arranged for by the work/life staff. Bristol Myers Squibb book club participants buy their own books, while Bright Horizons springs for books for all conference attendees.

And Suzanne Beecher, a contributing editor to *Working Mother*, who hosts the online book club DearReader.com, points to studies that say reading for just a few minutes a day can change how employees feel about themselves and their work.

**Contact:** Leatha Ritchie at [lritchie@brighthorizons.com](mailto:lritchie@brighthorizons.com) or Laura Wallace at [laura.wallace@sas.com](mailto:laura.wallace@sas.com).


### case study



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## Duke offers elder care help to employees, community

### *America's oldest federally funded aging center finds quick solutions for urgent dilemmas*

When holidays bring together young and old family members, the brightly wrapped boxes under the tree don't hold the only surprises.

In fact, says Lisa Gwyther of Duke University Medical Center's Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development, holiday visits can expose an older family member's frailties to the rest of the clan.

That's why the center's Family Support Program staff fields a flood of calls between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day from Duke University system employees wondering what their options are when it comes to helping elderly relatives in need.

The 48-year-old center is the oldest federally funded aging center in the country. Aside from helping professionals and elderly members of the community with their geriatric needs, the center's Family Support Program opens its doors year-round as an elder care work/life program for the university's 25,000 workers.

Every day during normal business hours, the center staffs two social workers to answer elder care questions immediately, in person, by phone or through e-mail specifically for the university's employees.

"Most people don't even need to come in to ask their question," says Gwyther, the director of the center's family support programs component. "But it's important to be available right when needed."

Still, the service is not a general employee

assistance program or counseling service, Gwyther stresses. Rather, the social workers consult with workers to help decide if an elderly loved one should move in with the family or if an employee should become an elder parent's care provider, for example. Sometimes, the solution is as simple as referring a family caregiver to resources in the area.

One faculty couple contacted the center after an elderly parent with Alzheimer's disease developed behavioral problems. And a housekeeper at the Durham, N.C., university inquired about which steps to take when she realized her mother could no longer safely live alone.

They're common problems and common questions, Gwyther says, and anxious employees often

need quick answers.

The counseling, she says, "could help an employee reconsider the implications of dropping out of the work force. The consequences of elder care decisions affect work/life."

The center began offering the free service to employees three years ago after employee surveys indicated Duke's workers were aging. Staff and faculty also ranked elder care as a higher priority than child care and other work/life issues, which Gwyther says indicated it was time to apply the nationally known center's benefits to its own community.

Prior to offering the work/life benefit, consultation services were geared directly to the elderly adult and professional caregivers and also required billing insurance groups and making medical diagnoses. Now, employees have their own, free staff for help.

About 80 employees have used the consulting services in 2003.

Gwyther's greatest challenge, she says, is making workers aware the program exists. "People don't pay attention to announcements until [a program] affects them," she says.

**Contact:** Lisa Gwyther at [lpg@geri.duke.edu](mailto:lpg@geri.duke.edu) or (800) 646-2028.



## WHAT'S GOING ON IN GOVERNMENT: FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL WORK/LIFE ISSUES

### OPM kit helps sell telework

Federal managers can find answers to their questions about telework, along with material for promoting telework among employees, in a new telework toolkit from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

The kit contains a videotape of successful telecommuters and their supervisors that agencies can run on TV screens in their lobbies. It also includes brochures, tent cards for placing on desks and tables, newsletter articles that agen-

cies can run in their employee publications and a telework quiz that they can post on their intranets.

OPM handed kits to the government's 150 telework coordinators, but is offering them for free to other federal managers and supervisors.

Contact [jhcoh@opm.gov](mailto:jhcoh@opm.gov) for a copy.

Private-sector employers will be able to buy the kit from the General Printing Office early next year.

# RESEARCH ROUNDUP

## Unscheduled absences at all-time low

The rate of unscheduled absenteeism fell to an all-time low of 1.9 percent from 2.1 percent last year, according to the 13th annual CCH Unscheduled Absence Survey.

The average annual cost to employers of last-minute no-shows dropped to \$645 per employee from an all-time high of \$789 in 2002.

Even so, the cost of employee no-shows can be more than \$1 million annually for large companies, the report says.

The most common reason workers take unscheduled leave is personal illness (36 percent). But nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of the absences are for:

- Family issues (22 percent).
- Personal needs (18 percent).
- Entitlement mentality (13 percent).
- Stress (11 percent).

Companies with low employee morale see 17 percent more absences than those with good morale, the survey reveals.

The poll also shows that employee assistance plans are the most-used among work/life benefits, followed by alternative work arrangements and leave for school functions.

To order the survey for \$34.95 plus tax, call (800) 449-9525 and ask for offer 06280001.

## Workers log more overtime

Overtime among workers in extended-hours operations rose to an average of 12.6 percent above the standard 40-hour workweek in 2003, up from 11.9 percent last year, reports Circadian Technologies.

And 20 percent of workers are putting in 60 percent of the overtime hours worked.

“Rather than hiring people back as the economy improves and demand picks up, employers are relying on fewer people to put in more time to get the job done,” says Alex Kerin, the report’s author.

Kerin says overtime in the 10 percent to 12 percent range gives employers flexibility to meet fluctuating demand while offering workers an opportunity to earn extra pay.

But he says many employers—notably utility, processing, services and manufacturing firms—exceeded those limits.

For more, visit [www.circadian.com](http://www.circadian.com).

## More women seek self-employment

More women are choosing self employment to better balance their job and family responsibilities, says a poll by the National Association for the Self-Employed.

Start-ups of women-owned businesses grew by double digits annually between 2000 and 2003, significantly outpacing growth in the 1990s and outnumbering male start-ups by nearly two to one in 2003.

Six in 10 self-employed women in the poll say they are working harder today than they were five years ago, but say self-employment allows them to better accommodate their families.

Find more information at [www.nase.org](http://www.nase.org).

## Men hit snag with family leave

Men who take time off for family generally are viewed more negatively in the workplace than women who take family leave, according to a study by a Wake Forest University business professor.

In the academic journal *Sex Roles*, Professor Julie Holliday Wayne reports students reviewing personnel files rated men who took leave to care for a newborn or ailing parent less favorably than women who did the same.

They deemed it acceptable, however, for men to take time off to care for a sick child.

Male evaluators were the toughest on male employees, Wayne discovered.

Find the article at [http://www.findarticles.com/cf\\_dls/m2294/5-6\\_49/107203501/p1/article.jhtml](http://www.findarticles.com/cf_dls/m2294/5-6_49/107203501/p1/article.jhtml).

## Employees returning to school

Forty-four percent of 500 employees in a TrueCareers poll are taking classes, and 51 percent say they are thinking about enrolling.

Nearly 60 percent say the poor economy is not the reason. Instead, they say they want to become more marketable or improve their job performance. More than half report they hope to get the skills they need to change jobs.

Half are seeking advanced degrees, and 30 percent are working toward bachelor’s degrees. Another 15 percent are taking technical or continuing education courses.

And 31 percent say they worry about juggling the demands of work, school and family.

Visit [www.truecareers.com](http://www.truecareers.com).



# BALANCE BRIEFS

## LifeCare sets forums on ROI

Resource and referral provider LifeCare will conduct a series of employer forums in 2004 that focus on accurately calculating the return on investment of work/life programs. Forums are scheduled for New York, Georgia, Texas and California. **Contact:** *Thomas Carey at (203) 291-3502 or tcarey@lifecare.com.*

## Cigna employees quit smoking

Cigna's workplace smoking cessation program helped 67 percent of its participants kick the habit after 12 months, about three times better than most similar programs, the firm says. Cigna reports it saves \$949 in healthcare costs for each successful participant, a return on investment of 9.5 to one. **Contact:** *Chris Collom at (215) 761-8421.*

## Canadians to review labor law

The Canadian government aims to reduce work-related stress by updating 40-year-old federal employment standards. Officials say they will review the 40-hour workweek, common work/life conflicts and the causes of absenteeism before deciding on changes in the code.

## Employee finances looking up

For the first time in two years, employee finances are looking up, notes a trend analysis from Financial Finesse. The firm's help line took 10 percent fewer calls about debt in 2003 than the year before, and heard fewer stories about financial crises. For more information, visit [www.financialfinesse.com](http://www.financialfinesse.com).

## Holiday could pay for elder care

France may abolish one of its 11 national holidays and use workers' taxes from that day to pay for better care for the elderly. The government floated the controversial proposal after an estimated 10,000 elderly people died during a summer heat wave. French businesses welcome the proposal, but labor leaders oppose it.

## Executive perks fall

A Robert Half Management Resources survey reveals that 29 percent of 1,400 financial officers plan to cut executive perks like country club and gym memberships. Visit [roberthalfmr.com](http://roberthalfmr.com).

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