

# family matters

What do you do when your plans to breastfeed or bond with your baby conflict with your employer's plans for your workweek? If you're one of these four moms, you don't give up your goals—you change your boss's mind.

By **Amy Levin-Epstein**

In this down economy, it's common to hear (from the lucky ones), "Well, at least I have a job." It's what keeps a lot of moms and dads quiet when it comes to less-than-ideal workplace policies, which can make it hard for them to be the kind of parents they want to be.

But family-friendly policies are still important, even in a world where no job is fully secure. There are more women in the workforce than ever before, and men are more likely to be hands-on fathers than they were 30 years ago. Should parents really have to put time with their kids on hold until the economy improves?

The problem is simple: Flexible policies are perks, and perks cost money—or so many employers think. "Companies are cutting back on paid leave because they just don't have the money for it," says Carla Moquin, founder of the nonprofit Parenting in the Workplace Institute. And while most worker bees aren't in a position to create a huge influx of cash, there *are* ways to work around the money issue. "Companies have already laid people off, so they need the employees who are left to stay," Moquin says. Because of staff slimming, moms-to-be may be able to ask for concessions that don't bruise their companies' budgets but are priceless in terms of making work possible for busy parents.

KIWI applauds the moms on these pages who found creative ways to make their workplaces more family friendly. We hope you'll be inspired, too.

## Melinda Garland

Cheshire County, New Hampshire



**WHAT SHE DID** Persuaded her bosses to let babies come to work twice

**HOW SHE MADE IT HAPPEN** When Garland became a mom in 2002, she was surprised

by her reluctance to return to work at the end of her maternity leave. She loved her job at a small, family-run newspaper, but she wanted to be with her baby even more. Because her boss was eager to keep her on staff, and the office already had a fairly casual atmosphere, they were able to come up with a plan: Rather than leave baby Sophia behind, Garland brought her along to the office until she was 8 months old. The arrangement worked well for everyone, but by the time Garland got pregnant again, she was working for a larger company. Badger Balm, an organic skincare company, was also family-run, so Garland hoped her new bosses would be open to the idea of bringing a baby to work. "I was realistic that this would be on a trial basis,"

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says Garland, but she did her homework: She downloaded information from *babiesatwork.org* (a site started by Moquin), and offered her former employer's contact information—reference of sorts for her baby. The CEO, Bill Whyte, agreed to give it a try, and the Badger office soon fell in love with little Audrey. Garland designated “baby holders”—literally, office pals who'd watch Audrey when she couldn't. This was important for meetings or bathroom trips, but Garland rarely had to actually *ask* anyone to hold Audrey. “There were some days when I had to look for her,” she says.

Since Audrey's tenure as Badger's mini mascot, five other babies have joined their parents at work. “We've had a baby boom!” says Whyte. “It's never been a problem. I joke that we'll have to rent babies to fill the void when we don't have a regular one here,” he says. One reason the program works so well at Badger is that there are guidelines in place: Babies are shown the door when they're 6 months old (too much crawling!), and if parents need time off during those first 6 months, they simply make up the extra hours when they're able. This can minimize resentment from co-workers and help you do both “jobs”—parent and employee—well, says Garland. The ultimate endorsement comes from the boss himself: “I say, ‘How can you afford to have people who aren't happy in their jobs?’” says Whyte. “You have a short

period of time where moms are potentially less efficient, but their gratefulness extends past that period of time, which has a great impact on the workplace.”

**HER ADVICE TO NEW MOMS** Make your suggestions early—as soon as possible after you've told your employer you're expecting. “Bringing up ideas this big can't be done in the ninth month of pregnancy,” says Garland. You'll have more time to convince your boss or find solutions that work for both of you.

### Sarah Walton Tenafly, New Jersey



**WHAT SHE DID** Staggered her work return

**HOW SHE MADE IT HAPPEN** Walton was working at a small start-up—there was only one other parent in the company—when she got pregnant. There was no maternity policy in place, and certainly no

company history of flexible schedules.

The federal 1993 Family and Marital Leave Act set in place maternity leave policy regulations (twelve weeks of unpaid leave), but companies with fewer than 50 employees aren't required to offer any leave, and employees who have been with a company less than a year aren't covered. The Act also doesn't address the emotional and practical difficulties of going straight from maternity leave to full-time worker.

So Walton had to come up with a solution that worked for everyone—her CEO, the rest of the small staff, her husband, and herself. They settled on full pay for a maternity leave of six weeks, followed by working from home until the baby was 4 months old. “This was very important to me as it allowed me to establish a breastfeeding pattern and spend time with the baby,” says Walton. Once the four months were up, she arranged to come back to the office slowly. For three months, she worked at home three days each week; for the next three, she worked at home two days. After that, she went back to work full time. Since then, Walton co-founded Better Way Moms (*betterwaymoms.com*), a site about motherhood issues like working-mom guilt, co-parenting, and more. “No one ever tells you how hard it is to be a parent. I'm proud of what I managed to do with my leave, but there are so many things that make you think, ‘There has to

be a better way!’ I'm hoping to help other moms out,” she says.

**HER ADVICE TO NEW MOMS** Be the person your colleagues can count on, no matter where you're working. Walton told her company she'd be available on her days at home, and she was. “They were always able to get me and I kept things on track,” she says.

### Jodie Lucci Merrimack, New Hampshire



**WHAT SHE DID** Created a pumping room

**HOW SHE MADE IT HAPPEN** Even if there's a law that backs you up, sometimes you have to take matters into your own hands. The recent health care bill guarantees that employees be given break time to express breast milk in a private place other than a bathroom. However, companies with fewer than 50 employees may be exempt if the employer can show that this would impose a hardship. And there's no guarantee that companies will exactly jump to build pumping rooms.

If you think your company might need a little push to embrace the law, take a cue from Jodie Lucci. When her son Nathan was born 15 years ago, there were even fewer pumping rooms than there are today. (Since that time, 24 states have passed laws protecting breastfeeding in the workplace.) So she went looking for a spot for one at the biopharmaceutical company where she worked and found a shower room in the building that had potential. “I sent an e-mail to everyone who had babies or were pregnant (there

were about seven of us at the time) and to the women who were using the shower after exercising. I got everyone interested, and then two of us went down and talked to the facilities person and asked for a curtain and an outlet in the shower area,” says Lucci, who says she's glad she spoke up. In the past, other women had gone individually to human resources without any luck, and Lucci suspects one of the reasons she was successful was that she skipped the bureaucracy by going straight to the head of facilities. Breastfeeding was important to her, not just for the health benefits. “I wanted to pump because providing milk for my baby was the only thing I could do that the caregiver, my mother, couldn't do. I was quite jealous of her getting to be there for all of his waking moments, whereas I'd only seem to get him when he was cranky or asleep. When I got home and we nursed, he was happy to see me,” says Lucci.

**HER ADVICE TO NEW MOMS** Stick to the facts. She acknowledges that talking about anything breast-related with a boss can be uncomfortable, but says you have to bite the bullet. “I also reassured him that I would work the pumping around whatever experiments I was running, and if that meant I would have to stay later, I would,” she says.

### Rachel Aydt New York City



**WHAT SHE DID** Changed her work schedule

**HOW SHE MADE IT HAPPEN** Aydt was working as the research director for a

magazine during her first pregnancy and leave, and was able to arrange to take one afternoon each week off to be with her son Jamie—simply by asking for it. But once he was in kindergarten, she took the opportunity at her annual review to ask for something more valuable to her than a raise: more time with her son. Her boss was receptive to the idea. “I switched to leaving at 2:30 two days a week, and I came in earlier on those days. If I'd only come in four days a week, as opposed to working the five days with two afternoons off, I would have been far more under the microscope because the workflow would have been interrupted. If you leave early, nobody notices,” says Aydt. She used the time for adventures that couldn't get squeezed into the bath and bedtime routines of workdays. “We went on outings to the zoo, or I would take him swimming or to the playground,” she says.

**HER ADVICE TO NEW MOMS** Consider how your workplace is run. For Aydt to lead the research department, she needed to be available on her cell phone; plus, she asked for her afternoons off to be in the middle of the week to avoid resentment and lessen disruption. She believes that women will get what they want if they have a detailed plan for how to make it work. “A boss once said to me, ‘Don't come to me with problems—come to me with solutions,’” says Aydt. “So I did.” ●

*Amy Levin-Epstein is a freelance writer who has been published in a variety of magazines, including Glamour, Self, and Prevention, and on websites like Babble.com.*

## how to ask for a more family-friendly workplace

- **DO YOUR HOMEWORK** Look at the latest policies on maternity leave online at the Department of Labor (*dol.gov*) and find out what others in your company did after having a baby.
- **TALK TO YOUR BOSSES EARLY—AND OFTEN** “Never think of it as the last meeting. Take notes of your boss's concerns and then set another meeting to address them,” says Moquin. Bring resources (like the 10-page policy template for bringing babies to work, available at *babiesatwork.org*) and a plan.
- **KEEP YOUR REQUEST PROFESSIONAL** Fighting phrases—like “This is my right” or “You should give me X”—generally won't help your cause, says Cathy Greenberg, Ph.D., author of *What Happy Working Mothers Know*. Instead, focus on how you'll be able to do your job. Keep the personal side simple: “I'm asking for this for my child's health and well-being, and I'm hoping to get your support.”
- **JUST ASK** Being afraid to even make the request can hurt you and your company. “Companies benefit from the well-being of women who come back to the workplace and live a balanced life. I think what surprises employers is that women are afraid to speak up and then the company loses great talent,” says Greenberg.

### your turn

Tell us about your experience going back to work, and share your advice with other moms. Visit [kiwimagonline.com/familymatters](http://kiwimagonline.com/familymatters) to join the discussion.