



FACTSHEET

Resources for employers

Getting the team on board

You can write policies about supporting fathers until you're blue in the face, but they won't make any difference unless the dads in question have line managers who value and understand the importance of 'seeing' and supporting men's involvement as hands-on fathers.

It's worth remembering that two-fifths (39%) of flexible working requests are approved by line managers; for many employees, their line manager is the face of the organisation.

Line managers who get it wrong can get it very wrong. If they take a traditional view of mothers' and fathers' roles, and how parenthood fits in with work, they are likely to make all sorts of decisions and comments that undermine your organisation's father-friendly mind-set. They may fail to understand the potential for new fatherhood to affect an employee's stress level and work-life balance; they may fail to communicate effectively about parenting leave or flexible working options to dads; or they may make biased decisions around flexible working requests, taking a dimmer view of a man's request than of a woman's.

All aboard

So it's vital to train everyone – not just the HR team, but everyone who has responsibility for management of staff in the organisation, in the 'why' and 'how' of supporting dads.

Make sure all managers understand the nuts and bolts – for example, employer and employee rights and obligations under paternity leave and shared parental leave, and the flexible working options available. But equally importantly – perhaps even more so - make sure they get the 'bigger picture', and understand the business benefits of engaging fathers and gender diversity in the workforce, and of providing holistic support to dads and mums as valued employees. Only when they get the bigger picture will managers be equipped to create a team culture that supports healthy work-life balance and flexibility for all.

To provide line managers with good quality support to help them 'think fathers', you may need to consider whether to adapt their formal and informal training. It might be helpful for a manager with recent experience of managing a new dad to mentor others who lack such experience, for example. You could ask an employee with recent experience of becoming a father, to support

managers faced with other new dads on their team. Perhaps you could produce your own 'new dad handbook', setting out clearly for managers and staff alike how things should operate.

Identify your dads

Key to providing useful support to new dads is identifying them in the first place. Thanks to the physical changes they undergo during pregnancy, expectant mums are easy to spot. Expectant or existing dads may only identify themselves if they feel comfortable doing so, which means feeling confident that 'coming out' as a dad is not going to damage their career. To achieve this welcoming spirit, your line managers need to create a work culture that places a high value on work-life balance, and makes this explicit.

It may be that in order to achieve this, your organisation needs to invest in a promotional campaign aimed at clarifying your commitment to supporting flexible working and encouraging working fathers to be actively involved in their children's lives. Appoint one or several senior men in the organisation – preferably at board level - to act as project sponsors or spokespeople; staff will respond to high-profile, senior men 'walking the walk' much more powerfully than a bunch of printed policies.

Aiming high

Your campaign might take various forms, but it could include roadshows with presentations by the project sponsors or spokespeople; webinars and seminars by fatherhood 'experts' from within and/or outside the organisation; guides on father-friendly working and its benefits, including case studies of dads who are working flexibly and/or have taken significant chunks of leave to be around in their babies' first years. You could establish a dads' employee network, or encourage an existing parents' network to explicitly target dads in its recruitment and focus.

Once you've made a big enough 'splash' about 'seeing' and supporting men's fatherhood, make it easy for expectant and new dads to self-identify. One approach could be to introduce a 'daddy passport', whereby expectant dads provide relevant information, including due date/birth date, to their line manager and/or HR department. This can then be used to prompt relevant interventions, eg reminders about deadlines for applying for shared parental leave; provision of information about flexible working options; invitations to webinars, employee networks etc.

Prepared by Jeremy Davies of the Fatherhood Institute

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