

Hands-on fathers make better employees

A Hug from Daddy (Fars Kram)

In brief

The company TDC, which is the largest telephone, broadband, and television company in Denmark, has since 2002 had a generous leave policy for parents – but few fathers took up the leave. The company campaign “A hug from Daddy” aimed to raise awareness amongst fathers and has led to a large increase in fathers taking leave. Fathers get up to ten weeks of paid parental leave, in addition to two weeks leave after a child is born, brought home from hospital, or adopted. One of the aims when the campaign was launched was to show that taking leave would not interrupt career progression. Information was provided on a website and leaflets, new fathers received a package containing a bib, rucksack etc. and letter with information about the parental leave policy. In 2009 the company was awarded the *Female Leader Focus* equality award. Due to their reconciliation measures the company has received a great deal of media and public interest. Campaign activities were discontinued after a few years, as the idea of fathers taking parental leave has now become ingrained in company culture.

Few fathers take paternity leave

In Denmark there is in general a strong focus on balancing work, family and private lives. The policy context regarding parental leave (the act of 2002, amended in 2009) is that all parents enjoy leave rights in relation to pregnancy, birth and adoption. Yet, even in Denmark the take-up of leave is distributed unequally. According to statistics based on figures from 2010, mothers take on average 92.3% of the total leave and fathers only 7.7% (Nordic Statistical Yearbook, 2012).

TDC is Denmark’s largest company in the telephone, broadband, and television sector, and employs around 9,000 people in Denmark. Since 2002 TDC has had generous leave policies making it possible for both female and male employees to take up to 12 weeks of leave with full pay following the birth or adoption of a child. “We believe that an employee who has taken up the challenge and cared for infants will become a better employee. He will certainly feel the value of balance,” said Henning Dyremose, TDC’s CEO at the time.

However, only a few fathers have made use of this possibility, which led the company to discuss whether male employees were just not interested in taking leave or whether they were unaware of their rights. Thus, in 2004 the company launched the campaign 'A Hug from Daddy' (*Fars Kram*) with the purpose of raising awareness. Since the launch of the campaign the number of men working for TDC taking parental leave has increased significantly. Throughout the years the campaign has caused a good deal of public interest and in 2009 TDC was awarded the *Female Leader Focus* equality award for its initiative.

TDC formulated its policy on parental leave in order to promote a balance between work, family and private life for its employees. In particular the company wanted its male staff to take advantage of the company's policy on parental leave, which is more generous than Danish legislation prescribes. The *Fars Kram* campaign was meant to signal that taking parental leave does not have to conflict with one's career, and that men may even become better employees by taking their share of the parental leave.

Employees receive information about the possibility to take leave at their workplace. They have direct access to a website with detailed and clear information and the official rules on parental leave.

Since the launch of the campaign the number of men within TDC taking parental leave has increased significantly. In 2002, 13% of men took leave, while following the introduction of the campaign close to 100% took leave in 2013 (138 men by November 2013), with more than 80% (108 men) taking longer than two weeks in connection with a child being born or brought into the home (up to nine weeks is allowed). Also, men working in TDC not only take leave more often, they also take longer periods of leave. In 2013 the male employees in TDC took nine weeks of leave, which is considerably higher than the national average among Danish men.

Raising awareness is vital

One important lesson from the initiative is that raising awareness is vital. Although the company had already implemented a generous policy on parental leave, few men made use of it before the campaign. "When we became aware of the fact that most fathers actually did not make use of the leave they had a right to, we formulated two hypotheses. Either the fathers are not interested in taking leave, or they were not aware of their rights at TDC. We chose to believe the latter option, which has proven to be the right one," said Alexander Jaffe, legal adviser to TDC.

Another lesson learned was that it is important to signal to the male employees that taking up to ten weeks of leave would not affect their career within the company.

TDC's campaign and the changes that it has facilitated show that in order to increase the use of paternal leave it is efficient to provide full pay during leave and it is important, within the firm, to make it acceptable and praiseworthy.

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Further information

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