

2,274 views | Jan 24, 2019, 11:05am

# Workplaces Aren't Paying Attention To The Growing Caretaking Crisis, And It's Costing Them Talent





**Sarah Kathleen Peck** Contributor 

ForbesWomen

*I am the founder of Startup Pregnant.*

---

## TWEET THIS

-  One third of all employees (32%) reported voluntarily leaving a job during their careers because of their caregiving responsibilities
-  Senior-level leaders, product managers, and tech employees leaving prestigious jobs because of caretaking demands






Caretaking affects everyone, and influences worker productivity. TONL

It's 4:52am in the morning on a drizzly morning in New York City, and I've gotten up early to write this before my children wake up. My partner and I both work full-time—I'm part of a two-adult, two-income household with a toddler and a newborn. At night, I'm spending my time arranging help for a friend who is struggling, and in the new few weeks, my stepmom and father will have hip and knee surgeries, respectively. And these parents? They're arranging care for my step-grandmother, who lives with them, making sure she will be adequately taken care of while they recover from surgeries. Oh, and I'm technically writing this on my "maternity leave" (which I don't really have, as an early-stage entrepreneur). I had a baby 14 weeks ago. But taking care of a newborn is only one small fraction of the puzzle.

**The caretaking crisis that's coming in America is not just about women and children: it's also about millennials, men, executive leaders, and seniors.**

We have a caretaking crisis in America, and it's not just a crisis hitting women or new parents. We have a broad-sweeping, all-ages caretaking crisis looming and it's going to affect American workplaces in far deeper ways than most employers are currently aware of, according to a new [Harvard Business School report](#) on the future of work. The study looked at 1,500 employees and 300 employers across an array of industries on how caretaking affects employee productivity, work prospects, and career trajectory. One third of all employees (32%) reported voluntarily leaving a job during their careers because of their

caregiving responsibilities  , and three out of four employees (73%) reported having some kind of current caregiving responsibility.

“Employers grossly underestimate the direct and indirect costs of caregiving,” the report says, and caregiving needs have a significant effect on the churn of younger employees: 50% of employees aged 26-35 years reported that they have *already* left a job due to caregiving responsibilities. But it’s not just young employees that are leaving: what’s surprising is that upper-level managers, senior leaders, and highly paid men were the most likely to report that their jobs and productivity were affected due to caretaking responsibilities.

We already know that turnover is high for women who decide to have children, often because of the lacking maternity and parental leave policies. But this isn’t a problem about parental leave (which is a separate caretaking problem we can and should solve). This is a problem of worker productivity, attrition, and talent. It’s a problem that will affect all workplaces, all genders, and all ages as the demand for talent increases, and the costs and time required for caretaking increases, hitting the workplace population at the same time. This report—the first of its kind—goes into why it’s such a problem we need to be aware of.

Senior-level leaders, product managers, and tech employees leaving prestigious jobs because of caretaking demands 

### **Senior-level leaders, managers, tech employees leaving prestigious jobs**

Sara Mauskopf, the CEO and co-founder of Winnie, says that the caretaking crisis is not something that’s coming—it’s here already. Winnie is an app to help make parent’s lives easier, and one of the

biggest puzzles they are currently trying to address is building a robust database of available childcare options so parents can search easily to find care.

But that's not why I called her for this story: she told me her husband, Eric Mauskopf, who previously held product and management jobs at YouTube and Google, left his high-powered career to stay at home to care for their two children. "My company is working on solving the childcare crisis, because we couldn't find childcare," Sara said. Based in San Francisco, the two parents and tech leaders acknowledge that it is more challenging to raise kids on a single income, especially in such an expensive city. They have a 3.5 year old and an 8-month old.

Eric shares openly on social media why he left his job: his LinkedIn profile now reads "Sabbatical at Mauskopf, Inc" where his job description is "taking time off to be a stay at home dad to my two young girls."

"This isn't just a San Francisco problem," Sara shared. "It's an everywhere problem."

### **The caretaking crisis will hit American companies in a war for talent and billions lost in productivity.**

The storm that's coming—the authors call it a crisis—is a result of significant shifts in population demographics, in the way that we work today, and in what we believe work promises us (in pensions, benefits, and more). In terms of demographic shifts, two-parent "traditional" households where one partner works and one manages the home are no longer the norm: we're seeing a significant rise in single parent families, a rise in families with two working parents, and an increase in other non-traditional families. Put another way, in 1947, almost 80% of

families looked like a traditional nuclear family with one breadwinner and one homemaker, but in 2017, less than 50% of families look like this.

Second, what work looks like has changed, tremendously. In a past world, an age of work that was brief and no longer exists, workers were guaranteed jobs that were secure, life-long, and had benefits that provided care in many ways: pensions, retirement plans, and salaries commensurate with being able to take care of a family were part of the promise of being an employee. Today, however, none of these things are true: decades-long work is no longer guaranteed, millennials are quickly becoming a freelancing generation, wage stagnation is real, the costs of living have increased, and employers aren't offering benefits packages that align with what employees actually want.

This creates a problem for employees, but it also creates a huge problem for employers that don't recognize how their workers--their people--have changed as well. "Companies that do not acknowledge the near-universality of care concerns in their workforce create a culture in which employees are reluctant to make their caregiving obligations too apparent lest they pay a price for the disclosure," the authors write. As a result, they "incur substantial and recurring costs due to a failure to account for their employees' caregiving obligations." These costs include lost institutional knowledge, continuity gaps, training and retention costs due to higher turnover, and reduced productivity overall as people continue to leave.

Anyone who has hired and trained new employees knows how hard it can be to get someone up to speed. If you have a small child at home, or anyone that needs your attention, you also know how much it can affect your work and productivity. Caretaking needs are real, and they are

everywhere, affecting multiple age groups and all genders. Yet employers aren't paying attention, and this gap between the benefits and support that workers need to balance caretaking and work in today's economy—and the acknowledgement and very real help that employers can provide to them—will increasingly cost workplaces in productivity and talent. Rather than viewing this problem as another set of expensive benefits, however, employers should reframe their understanding of this as a talent management issue: higher-titled, more responsible employees are the most likely to be affected.

**Companies that provide tangible, real care-taking benefits win in retention, talent, and longevity.**

What's fascinating about this report is that it puts the burden back on employers. We are, in part, witnessing a breakdown of our social infrastructure and our social safety net, and instead pointing the finger at companies and saying they must shoulder the burden of providing caretaking solutions as well as healthcare coverage. I'm not sure that the answer is as simple as creating "Caring Companies," (the title of the report). That said, the pace of social and institutional and government change is slow, and a faster, more adaptable approach to change is for workers to put pressure on employers, and for employers to better design benefits that match the needs of the coming generations. Not out of place of goodwill, but out of competition for talent.

But helping employees address their personal lives and caregiving obligations is "an approach employers almost entirely overlook" as a strategy for increasing employee productivity and minimizing turnover. Employers are sharing how difficult it is to find and retain top talent, but the fact that workplaces have not yet connected the dots between caretaking and increased productivity is disappointing. I've written

before [about companies that are getting it right](#) and provide benefits that match the needs of our very real, and very diverse, populations. But it's not just mothers and children anymore. It's everyone.

**Workplaces have a real opportunity to create benefits that work—that also increase their talent pipeline and overall productivity.**

American employers will need to work hard to reduce employee churn and stay competitive to attract top talent. Employees are leaving companies in droves when they have caretaking obligations, and it's affecting all levels and all genders within organizations. Further, employers will need to support people looking to re-enter the work place after a period of leave. “Currently, the choice to leave or remain out of the workforce often hinges on the ability of employees to balance their roles at work and responsibilities as caregivers,” the authors of the report write. When it's too hard to provide care and work at the same time, people end up leaving the workforce.

But the flip side is a very real incentive: if you, as an employer, provide benefits that allow people to live full lives and take care of their families and fellow humans—benefits like on-site childcare, sick-leave options, lactation rooms, re-entry programs for people to return to work, or flex work schedules—your talent pool opens up tremendously, because there are millions of people who want to work, while providing for their families at the same time.



**Sarah Kathleen Peck** Contributor

I am the founder of Startup Pregnant, a company that supports parents in rethinking what work, business, and leadership look like. We host a weekly podcast that digs dee... [Read More](#)

