

Women Employee Welfare - The Transition

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Abstract

Companies are putting in a lot of effort to recruit and retain potential female employees. New strategies are being worked upon to make it sure that these potential employees do not leave the company midlife. The wage world was different for this gender and has dramatically changed in the last few decades. Two decades ago, a crèche facility or a flexible work time benefit was considered to be a big deal. But now with companies facing the crunch of skilled workforce, they are coming out with innovative and path breaking ideas. The biggest problem with the organizations like Apple and Facebook is the ever dwindling number of female workforce. One big reason behind this phenomenon has been the fact that the female workforce in their midlife prefer family above jobs. This is the age when the employee is challenged with different assignments so that the leadership abilities can be checked and groomed. But unfortunately this workforce prefers to move out of the working arena so that they can contribute to the future workforce.

This paper goes back into the working women's history pages and tries to unravel the stories which has led to the current situation.

This paper searches the American history and literature to understand the resolution of women to work and earn. It starts from the early 17th century when women wage earners were only used to be the domestic servants and it takes us through the centuries to the point where Apple and Facebook announce "egg freezing" as female employee benefit.

Objective

To understand the history of Working Women Welfare and understand the modern welfare moves by the different organizations.

Keywords: *Working women welfare, domestic servants, workforce, maternity leave, crèche , Egg freezing*

Introduction

A good HR policy tries to ensure that women employees should not give up their otherwise aspiring career to fulfil their role as a mother. A woman becoming the mother fulfils her duties just not for her family but for society as well. Corporate Sector is coming up with various beneficial schemes for the welfare of the Women Employees who are

now the driving force in the working community. Until modern times, legal and cultural practices, combined with the inertia of longstanding religious and educational conventions, restricted women's entry and participation in the workforce.

Let us rewind with the various policies benefiting to Women. Maternity Leave is one key area where Welfare of Women is considered, most of the

Companies grant leave ranging from minimum 6 weeks to maximum of 12 weeks this benefits the Women employees to take rest as well as their salary was not deducted.

Next came the phase of binding Working Women with their motherhood, this led to the emergence of Crèche, a child care centre where working women could leave their kids within the company premises. This facility was followed by an era where the Intranet sites in Corporate Organizations had matrimonial sites that assisted employees to find their Mr. Right person. Companies have stretched their boundaries to think on the Welfare of the Women employees. Several organization particularly in IT practice this strategy whereby women employees can concentrate more on their productive work and reducing their stress levels as whenever they want they can go visit their kids at the Child Care. This Policy reduced the attrition level in Women employees in major IT Organizations.

Face book is known for giving new parents USD 4,000 which is famously called "baby cash". The interesting part of this grant is that the parents can use this cash for whatever they'd like.

In spite of all these efforts, big companies like Apple and Face book are facing the problem of ever dwindling number of female workforce. After analysis it was found that in order to raise a family, women sometimes have to take time off. This may be a hassle to companies that have to find temporary replacements and guarantee the position once the woman is ready to return. This move by the women employees also affects their career prospects.

So to address this issue, the two giants of hardware and social media, Apple and Face book have announced that they will present elective freezing as a component of their employees' benefits package. This choice of freezing their eggs would give women employees the suppleness to put their motherhood worries on hold while they focus on moving up the ladder and leaving aside the worry

about the ever disturbing natural clock. The firms come into view to be the first major employers to provide this facility for non-medical reasons.

Even Indri Nooyi, CEO, PepsiCo underlines the that a working mom faces in her career. She pointed out in one of her interviews, where she says "you have to co-opt a lot of people to help you". When the company in which you are working is helping (co-opt) you to pursue your professional dreams and also spends money on you to keep alive your personal dreams which they believe can be achieved in course of time, then obviously the employer gets loyal to the company and that is what they want.

History of Working Women Welfare

In the early settlements of 17th century America, only one group of women- domestic servants- could properly be called wage earners. By the end of the colonial period, the stage had been set for women to take their places in the 19th century movement of people into the wage labour force. Women's transition from paid and unpaid family centred roles to wage labour began early in the American past.

From a community's viewpoint, marriage was the natural and desirable role for women and their economic subordination assured the colonists that most women would follow this part.

In the division of responsibility, women got the bulk of internal chores. Normally they took care of the house -including the preparation of food, cloth, candles and soaps - and supervised farm animals and kitchen garden. But wives routinely developed competency in their husband's businesses, they could and did inherit them when death demanded it.

For a brief period in the 1820's and 1830's, the Waltham style mills offered women a vision of economic independence. In opening up the possibility of decent and well paid wage work, they made plausible, even to large numbers who did not

work in them, life outside the confines of a restrictive home environment. They satisfied some of the need of those operatives who, as exclaimed in 1843, "do not believe in matrimony." But the 1837 depression ushered in a period that threatened to reduce even the most privileged female wage earners to the ranks of the oppressed. Thereafter, a woman who had "no one to depend upon" found making a living more difficult.

The benefits of education did not extend to greater job opportunity for women. Girls whose parents had no pressing need of income often stayed on. They were not, after all, expected to go out into the world to make their livings, and as long as the major function of schooling was seen as socialization, not vocational preparation, it posed no threat. Of course, colleges that offered community lectures remained adamantly closed to female until the 1860's when the pressure of feminism opened them. Yet the moral code that denied the legitimacy of wage work provided justification for opening up educational institutions on the grounds that educated woman made better mothers. And also it offered a rationale for women to become teachers, missionaries, and writers. Women had, of course, always taught children within the family and in small dame schools. That job remained compatible with subsequent marriage and promised to enhance the woman's moral responsibilities. For a salary of little more than a dollar week - she could work an annual term of twelve to sixteen weeks and face idleness for the rest of the year. If she took in sewing or eked out her salary with occasional piecework, she might survive quite nicely.

The teacher's plight became less desperate as the century wore on. In the early part of the 19th century, schools hired women only for summer terms, when girls were most likely to be in attendance. By the 1830's and 40's, however the spread of compulsory public education and lengthening school terms encouraged more and more

towns to employ women year-round to fill their expanding classrooms.

In the meantime sustained female activity to improve upon the wages, continued. The Knights, organized in 1869 as secret society, advocated equal pay for women in 1878, and a year later voted to open the doors to women.

Even in the late 19th century, hand cranked washing machine wringers and boilers were as close as the average household came to mechanical help with the laundry. Sending the family wash out to commercial laundries became a common practice for middle class urban household between 1870 and 1910. The number of woman employed in these establishments multiplied by 50 to 100percent in each decade of those 40 years, far outstripping population growth and providing a laundry worker for every 152 people in the population by 1910. Thereafter the growth of laundries was offset by the development of electrically powered automatic washing machines.

For every 16000 people in the population if 1870, only one woman was employed in commercial food production. By 1900, one woman for every 3,813 people earned a livelihood producing food- a proportional increase of 400 percent. And by the end of the First World War, the figure jumped to one out of every 1,116 persons, another jump of nearly equivalent dimension.

In entering new fields, women challenged the physiological and social assumptions that justified discrimination against them. Employers registered surprise at women's ability to do jobs previously denied them. From a structural prospective, job shifts during the immediate pre war and post years appear insignificant. The Federal Civil Service opened new categories of jobs to women, but continued to pay them less than men. Some women moved into men's jobs in chemicals, automobile manufacture, iron and steel. Others lower on the scale, moved into jobs vacated by women moving

up. Still others, who had never worked, entered wage work often as menial labourers. or on office jobs, vacated by men. The women's Bureau estimated that less than 5% of all women workers in these years were new in the labour force. Though women at first welcomed the income generated by these jobs, they soon found themselves caught in a collective nightmare. Wages, initially high enough to attract workers, were continually reduced as families became dependent on the extra income. Employers, who paid by the piece, rotated their workers so that a person who acquired skills at one job and could earn reasonable pay was transferred to another area where she had to learn a new process before her pay once again increased. To earn even a pittance required cruelly long hours of labour, and to support a family on factory or mill wages meant sending every child to work.

In the meantime the new summer schools offered training programs for women wage earners by removing them from their jobs for several weeks of serious education in areas such as economics, politics and trade union history. These colleges offered a residential programs lasting six to eight weeks each summer to sixty or more wage earning women selected for their already demonstrated commitment to trade union principles. A few students ended up losing their jobs as they moved out to study.

The women who went who went to work during the depression were more often married, they tended to be slightly older and they were probably better educated than wage earning women as a group in 1929. This statistical shift reflects the need to maintain family incomes during hard times by sending a second wage earner out to work. Changes such as having fewer children and doubling up of households provided opportunities for shared household and child care and sustained and child care and sustained the search for work.

Soon a debate cantered on whether the wage work of married women inevitably jeopardised the

family, an old issue that now prickled with new thorns. Wage work, argued some, denied women sufficient time to cultivate the womanly arts: leisure, gracious living, gardening, and social contracts. Children were all but abandoned; their anti-social behaviour was laid on the conscience of the working mother. And the very existence of job opportunities encouraged women to feel independent and therefore contributed to marital unhappiness. Women as well as men, it was said, would have to develop new personalities in families where wives held down jobs.

Interestingly, when the famous "Ladies Home Journal" Magazine asked its readers if a woman who held "an important position in business" would lose her feminine qualities, more than a third of those who responded feared that she would. According to another reputed magazine "Good Housekeeping", a brilliant career was obtained only by sacrificing husband and family. Ninety percent of the women scientists were single. Eight of twelve women "greatest living women" had never been married. Only two were mothers. The seven famous women interviewed during this period - which included an astronomer, an illustrator, a political activist, a college student- all noted that they lived happy, fulfilled lives. Yet each added a qualifier: "To marry and have children is the ideal life for a woman."

During this period also, not everyone thought work for women is bad for the family. There were those who believed that by forcing members to share tasks and thus contributing to less authoritarian child-rearing methods, women's wage would strengthen the democratic personality. Boys and men might benefit from study and practice in homemaking.

Women participation in workforce gradually increased. It was 29 percent in 1950, 35 percent in 1965 and 40 percent by 1975, a percentage increase equal to that of entire sixty years preceding 1950. And where earlier wage work had been merely a short phase in many women's lives, in the fifties it began to assume a more central position. Instead

of quitting work after marriage, even women with adequate incomes stayed on. And women who stopped working when they began having children tended to return to jobs after the youngest child began school. Instead of choosing part time jobs to fit family styles, more women worked full time. A third of all women who worked in 1950- only half of them worked full time. By 1975, nearly half worked, more than 70 percent at full time jobs.

The new climate of women independence encouraged women employees to raise again the question of equal pay. By 1960's , the median annual earnings of full time women workers had fallen to 60 percent of the rate of male workers- a figure that reflected their increasing occupation segregation.

By 1970, pushes by several unions and women's bureaus, produced statistically visible changes. The number of women in skilled, predominantly male, trades rose to almost half a million: an increase of nearly 80 percent over 1960, twice that for women in all occupations, and eight times that for men in the skilled trades.

During the last few decades there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women who have entered the workplace. One contributing factor is the increase in the amount of education women have pursued, coupled with increasing numbers of women undertaking professional studies. This resulted in greater number of women pursuing managerial and professional careers. The world has witnessed a revolution in women's role in society, particularly in the workplace, during this time. However, this revolution has not resulted in increases in women's participation at the top levels of the corporations. Few women are chief executives officers (CEO) of large organizations and few occupy seats on the board of directors of private sector organizations. The existence of "glass ceiling" artificially limiting women's advancement appears to be a worldwide phenomenon.

In 2012, there were almost 67 million working

women in the U.S. While women were close to half of the general workforce (47 percent), this counts for a majority of work population in professional and technical occupations (57 percent). The ratio of women to men in the labor force changed dramatically from only a generation ago. In 1972, women represented just 38 percent of the workforce. After years of stable growth, the number flattened off in the mid-1990s about these numbers and has remained near to the recent percentage for the last two decades.

In August 2014, of the Apple's 98,000 employees across the globe, counting those in non-technical positions and those employed at Apple Stores, 70 percent were male. Only 28 percent of Apple's global leadership team were female, and it is even worse in tech positions where only 20 percent of Apple's worldwide workers were female. Apple CEO has expressed his displeasure on these numbers and he also stated the numbers were not new to them and they have been working hard to improve them.

Apple's report tailed similar reports from other tech heavyweights including Face book, Google and Twitter. In all these four companies, the ratio between female and male workers is 10 to 7. Tech companies are progressively being pressured to the number of female employees in the workforce. Apple has been under fire for having little diversity on its board, and Twitter also faced blame for having no female board members right before it went public late last year.

While these tech firms have improved the number of female hires in the recent years but the roles are not usually at the executive level. A study last year revealed that women in tech generally were generally clerical workers, unskilled and skilled labourers that was mainly a part of the "Administrative" category but were significantly less in numbers as officers or managers.

A challenge that organisations face nowadays is to retain women employees at mid-and senior levels,

as these "ready to move to the next level" employees get tied down to domestic responsibilities. Companies are now rolling out several women-friendly initiatives - from the option of work-from-home to crèche to relaxation rooms - to stop this trend.

Companies are taking several measures to retain women workforce. Some interesting facilities like the adoption leave, which enables employees to avail of three months' paid leave when they adopt a child. Other options are telecommuting, which allows staffers to work for one or two days a week from home, baby feeding room and car parking for mothers-to-be.

According to the University of Denver, today women hold less than 20% of leadership positions in the corporate world of America. Only 5% of Fortune 500 companies have women as CEO. There is no other reason behind these numbers like the companies having less women workforce or less women graduate from colleges, but the fact that there is an inherent bias in corporate America that favours men.

According to several researches on similar topic revealed some of the reasons behind this phenomenon are male stereotyping, preconceptions of women's roles and abilities and exclusion of informal network as barriers

The biggest problem for women is that the age when they reach the peak of their career is almost the age when the biological clock demands motherhood and then she has to make a choice whether to go family way or pursue the "career" which she always wanted and probably deserves in the next couple of years. She very well knows that once she goes "Family ways" and then returns, the equations will change and then she has to start all over again. And so in corporate America, the working professional considers motherhood is still

regarded as a liability. This is probably the reason the tech giants Apple and Facebook have decided to offer "Egg Freezing" benefits to their female employees. The companies are set to spend \$20,000 per employee for this process.

Conclusion

Managers at all levels need to develop the attitude and experience to make full use of their female managers and professionals. Women at lower organization levels need to be developed or groomed as often or as well as the men peers. The moves like the one made by Apple and Facebook are path breaking but whether they will have an impact in increasing the participation of women in the top level management will be keenly awaited.

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