

Leaders' Guide to Creating a Culture of Care

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CAREGIVING
WORKFORCE DURING CRISES AND BEYOND

Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction: Companies that Care Are Companies that Succeed**
 -
 - 3. Assess Your Caregiving Culture**
 -
 -
 -
 - 6. Build a Culture of Care**
 -
 -
 -
 -
 -
 - 12. Set a New Standard for All Workplaces**
 -
 - 13. Conclusion**
 -
 - 14. Our Gratitude to Our Collaborators**
-

INTRODUCTION

Companies that Care Are Companies that Succeed

It's harder to be a working caregiver in the U.S. than in almost any other developed country in the world—and the pandemic has only made it harder. COVID-19 exacerbated the challenges that working caregivers have faced for generations and forced employers across the country to confront the critical role that caregivers play within their own workplaces.

The pandemic has led millions of workers to reconfigure their responsibilities at work to accommodate the needs of those they care for at home. Since, [nearly 3 million women](#) were pushed out of the workforce entirely due to caregiving responsibilities, and millions more cut back their hours and pulled away from advancement opportunities. Women's [labor force participation](#) in the United States is as low today as it was in the 1980s. In one year, women lost [32 years of progress](#) in labor force participation and [22 years of progress](#) in pay equity.

Women of color, particularly those on the [lower end of the wage scale](#), have been impacted the most: they are more likely to [be front-line workers](#), more likely to be either [paid or unpaid caregivers](#) (or both), and [more likely](#) to have been affected by the COVID-19 virus (either by having caught it themselves, or by having dependents who become infected). Black and Latinx women, who make up the majority of our caregiving workforce, faced the greatest economic impact due to COVID-19 and were already likely to have [less financial stability](#) as a result of our nation's history of systemic racism and oppression.

Now it is clear: our workplaces are not built to support the care we need at each stage of life. Caregiving is not just a personal responsibility that employees must grapple with on their own; it is also critical infrastructure that is integral to our overall economic success. Caregivers make up the backbone of our economy—and no matter who you are, at some point in your life, you or someone you know will need care.

The caregiving crisis is affecting business operations and companies' bottom line. When employees don't get the support they need for their caregiving responsibilities, employers pay the hidden costs of increased turnover, rehiring, presenteeism, and absenteeism. **One third** of all U.S. employees have left a job during their career in order to manage an unmet caregiving responsibility. **Nearly 50% of companies** reported lack of child care as an impediment to hiring or calling back workers during the pandemic. And the costs associated with turnover alone can run as high as **213% of an employee's salary**.

Working caregivers need more support, but it is not enough to offer them a disparate set of solutions. They, and all of us, need a comprehensive care infrastructure that nurtures our infants and young children, tends to our elder relatives as they age, enables us to care for ourselves when we need time off or are sick, and grants our paid caregiving workforce fair wages and protections that reflect the vital role they play in our economy.

It's time for transformative change, and employers have a critical role to play in addressing our collective caregiving crisis in the short-term and building a more inclusive and equitable workforce over the long-term. Solving this crisis will also support TIME'S UP's mission to ensure workplaces are safe, fair, and dignified. Creating workplaces where sexual harassment does not happen in the first place requires upending the power imbalances that currently exist, and building truly inclusive workplaces, up and down the wage scale. That means addressing the structural barriers—including caregiving—that keep women and other workers from succeeding, and staying, in the workforce.

Supporting your employees who are caregivers takes continued effort. But now is the time to begin this journey, no matter where you are starting from. This Leaders' Guide offers some concrete, actionable steps you can take today to support your employees who are caregivers and build a more equitable workplace for all.

Assess Your Caregiving Culture

Historically, caregiving has been viewed as a private responsibility for individuals to manage on their own, rather than a universal need that should be accommodated at work.

Prior to the pandemic, the majority of employers did not even track the caregiver status of their employees because they thought that information was irrelevant or believed employees' caregiving responsibilities were private affairs. Most employers vastly underestimated how many of their employees had caregiving duties. They assumed that only 25% did when, in reality, close to 75%—or 3 in 4—of employees report having caregiving responsibilities. And while 80% of employees with caregiving responsibilities said that those duties affected their productivity, only a fraction of employers (24%) thought caregiving negatively influenced their workers' performance. It is time to close the gap between

THE VAST MAJORITY OF WORKERS ARE ALSO CAREGIVERS

Most employers vastly underestimate how many of their employees had caregiving duties. They assumed that only 25% did when, in reality, close to 75%—or 3 in 4—of employees report having caregiving responsibilities. And while 80% of employees with caregiving responsibilities said that those duties affected their productivity, only a fraction of employers (24%) thought caregiving negatively influenced their workers' performance.

The range of caregivers' responsibilities vary widely, and evolve over the course of one's personal and professional life.

Caregivers are those who care for:



Children

Those that they give birth to, foster, adopt, or who are their stepchildren



Elders

This could include their parents, in laws, older relatives, or other elder dependents



Family members, friends, or significant others

with chronic illnesses, who struggle with addiction, have a disability, or have special learning needs

employers' perception of how caregiving impacts their workplace and the reality.

Determine how many of your employees have caregiving responsibilities and assess their needs

The first step is to determine the caregiving status of your employees and develop a clear picture of who makes up your caregiving workforce. You can do this systematically by asking employees whether they identify as a “caregiver” through a short engagement survey, in one-on-one meetings, or through other feedback channels. Remember that it is critical to ask people about their caregiving status on a regular basis as there are many different types of caregiving responsibilities and they will evolve for each employee over time. Make it clear when you are asking that you support your workers as caregivers so that they do not feel inhibited answering honestly about their caregiving needs.

Gain a clearer picture of the makeup of your caregiving workforce

Once you have determined employees' caregiver status, segment your data, and examine who makes up your caregiving workforce. For example:

- What percentage of your leadership team identifies as a caregiver? Use an expansive definition like the one offered above.
- Is caregivers' pay equitable when you segment by gender, race, level, role, team, etc.?
- What is the average tenure for caregivers versus non-caregivers in your workplace? For caregivers in hourly roles versus salaried roles?

Answering these types of questions will help you develop a clear understanding of who the caregivers in your workplace are and identify areas where they may be underrepresented.

Evaluate whether your employees utilize the caregiving policies and benefits you offer

Take a look at the policies and benefits you offer that are designed to support caregivers. Are your employees using these benefits or are they underutilized? A [recent study](#) found that only 39% of employers think that the policies and benefits they have to support caregivers are effective. But just because utilization rates are low does not mean that these offerings are not needed. In too many workplaces, caregivers feel stigmatized or fear retaliation for taking advantage of these benefits. It is not enough to simply offer benefits and policies for caregivers; employers must encourage their employees to use them and foster a work environment that acknowledges and truly accommodates employees' caregiving responsibilities.

Communicate directly with your caregiving employees about their needs

It is important to create multiple channels through which you can communicate with your employees about their evolving caregiving needs. Here are some examples:

- Ask explicitly about caregiving needs in employee engagement surveys.
- Hold focus groups with both employees who identify as caregivers and those who don't about the type of support they need at work to manage their caregiving responsibilities.
- Include discussions about caregiving responsibilities in one-on-ones and team meetings.
- Allow employees to provide feedback anonymously via channels that grant them confidentiality.

By discussing caregiving in a variety of forums, you will destigmatize the topic and make it clear that the caregiving responsibilities of your employees are not for them to solve on their own but rather something for your workplace to address holistically.

Gather key information on an ongoing basis

Continue to ask, listen, and respond to the needs of your caregiving employees. Regularly acknowledge how caregiving responsibilities impact your employees and report out on how you are taking action to make your workplace more supportive. Set goals around how often you will survey employees formally about their caregiving responsibilities and how you will take action based on what you learn. Acknowledge that while caregiving responsibilities of your employees are not static and will evolve, you are committed to offering them continuous support.

Build a Culture of Care

After you have set up processes for gathering information about your caregiving workforce and their needs, you can update policies and practices that will support those individuals' needs over the long-term. You can also begin to establish systems of accountability that will help you cultivate a culture of care and center your employees' caregiving needs on an ongoing basis. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, here are some important caregiving policies to consider implementing in your workplace:

DEVELOP YOUR POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Expand your paid leave policies and make them comprehensive

Establish a comprehensive paid leave policy and make it as inclusive as possible. That means offering the policy to all caregivers, including new parents, those caring for elderly relatives, and those who need time to tend to their own wellbeing. Provide parental leave for all parents, regardless of their gender, birth status, type of employment, or role within your workplace. Offer bereavement leave and have it include paid time off for pregnancy loss and deaths outside of one's immediate family. Clearly communicate what your short- and long-term disability policies are, how they operate, and how they differ from other forms of paid time off.

Pair caregivers with one another in your mentorship and sponsorship programs

Try pairing caregivers with mentors who are also caregivers. This will illustrate how caregivers may succeed within your workplace and provide caregivers an opportunity to grow their careers with guidance from another caregiver who understands their challenges.

Connect employees with family planning and related supports

Set up a suite of services that support caregivers in your workplace. Provide pregnancy and postpartum benefits and resources, including lactation support, pumping rooms, and milk storage. Offer employees child care stipends or back-up care options and connect them to concierge services that will assist them in finding affordable, high-quality care providers. Offer fertility, surrogacy, and adoption benefits to your employees. Grant employees access to eldercare planning and advisory services that can help them manage the physical and emotional demands that accompany their caregiving responsibilities.

Support transitions around caregiver leave

You can more seamlessly integrate caregiving responsibilities into your workplaces by offering programs and supports that help caregivers who have taken leave transition back to work. This is especially important right now, as many caregivers have scaled back their hours or left the workforce entirely due to caregiving responsibilities.

- Establish [mentorship programs](#) for new parents returning to work after the birth of their child.
- Set up a [phased return-to-work program](#) that allows caregivers to come back to work gradually.
- Work with an outside agency to provide peer-based community support and resources for your employees who are caregivers.

Ensure non-caregivers are supported when their caregiving colleagues go on leave

When a caregiver goes on leave, it is important to support the rest of the team appropriately and not to presume that they can automatically take on that colleagues' workload on top of their own. If a team member does cover work for a caregiver while that person is on leave, make sure they are sufficiently compensated and supported with additional resources.

Recognizing the amount of work it takes to cover for a caregiver on leave is critical because it both acknowledges the contributions of the caregiving employee who is on leave and shows respect and appreciation for the team members who are taking on that individual's work on an interim basis. To make these transitions as smooth as possible for your team, consider working with an outside recruiting agency that specializes in backfilling short-term roles. They can help you fill any gaps that may arise on your team when a caregiver goes on leave, perhaps even with another caregiver looking for temporary work!

Recognize that the needs and preferences of your employees who are caregivers vary

It is important to recognize that needs will vary from caregiver to caregiver. For example, some caregivers returning to work may want to reduce their workload while others may not. Instead of making any assumptions about caregivers' career ambitions or preferences, have conversations with caregivers about their needs, career goals, and preferred work schedules. Do not assume that they want to do less because they are also managing caregiving responsibilities. And push back against harmful assumptions that may arise about caregivers' ability to carry their weight at work.

Offer flexible work arrangements – to both caregivers and non-caregivers

Most employees, regardless of their caregiver status, want access to flexible work arrangements. That includes the ability to work from home and set working hours that accommodate their range of responsibilities. Caregivers especially benefit from flexible work arrangements. But when companies create a policy that only caregivers can access, it can sometimes lead to the marginalization of caregivers and build resentment against caregivers among their teammates. Companies that allow all employees the flexibility they need to do their best work are not only the best workplaces for caregivers; they are the best for everyone. Both hourly and salaried employees can benefit from having more flexibility built into their work schedules. Get creative by encouraging flexible scheduling, part-time hours, job-sharing, and schedule-swapping. Let employees tend to their caregiving responsibilities by creating a shared leave bank or granting them the ability to transfer leave to a colleague.

Examine who returns to the office after COVID-19

When you are rolling out your “return to work” plans as we emerge from this pandemic, make sure that you are doing so in an equitable way. [Studies](#) show that in-person networking is one of the most powerful catalysts in advancing careers. Yet, if you find that more caregivers are opting to work remotely outside of the office, make sure you do not unintentionally penalize them for not having the same amount of “face time” around the office.

Given the disproportionate number of women who have left the workforce due to COVID, the country is at serious risk of seeing physical workplaces regress to male-dominated spaces. Don't let this happen within your workplace! Instead, use this moment of intense change and transition to build a work culture that is optimized for today's workforce, caregivers and non-caregivers alike.

Provide mental and physical health resources to your employees

Make it clear that you prioritize the wellbeing of your employees and recognize their need to care for their own health. Offer broad wellness stipends rather than specific gym memberships or discounts to particular wellness programs. Such flexibility will enable your employees to take care of themselves in ways that make sense for their unique needs.

Alleviate financial stress faced by caregivers

Provide resources like meal benefits, college financial, dependent care flexible spending accounts, or reimbursement subsidies for caregiving not covered by the [Dependent Care FSA \(DCFSA\)](#). Offerings like these will help alleviate employees' financial stress that may hinder their ability to focus while at work.

SET UP SYSTEMS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Extend benefits to all caregivers, up and down the wage scale

Offer these benefits to all employees, including your hourly workers. And incentivize people of all genders to use them. In particular, it is important to incentivize men to show up as caregivers to break down the gendered assumption that women are, by default, the primary caregivers within their families.

Setting up the right policies and practices is an important start, but they will only have a positive impact if you adhere to them. You must set up systems of accountability that keep these policies and practices on track. Here are some ways that you can hold your business accountable for creating a culture of care:

Model from the top

One of the most important ways to build a culture that supports caregivers is by encouraging leaders to be upfront with their own caregiving experiences and needs. This helps emphasize that caregivers at all levels of the organization can be transparent about their experiences and needs. Here are some ways that you can model a culture of care as a leader within your workplace:

- Set clear boundaries around your own time so that you can be present with your loved ones. For example, if you have young children, you may decide to be consistently offline from 6 to 8 p.m. to have dinner with your family and to put your kids to bed. Put an out-of-office response on your email during weekend hours, explaining when people can expect for you to come back online.
- Use an email scheduler to avoid sending work-related messages during evening hours or on weekends and holidays.
- If you are comfortable sharing, open up about your own caregiving responsibilities and share pictures and stories to introduce your colleagues to those you care for.
- Schedule work social events during work hours, (e.g. over lunch) rather than in the early evenings.
- Encourage your employees to bring family members and guests to work events that occur outside of work hours.

- Make events that happen outside of normal working hours optional and, under no circumstances, pressure people to attend.
- Take advantage of caregiver benefits yourself and take time off when you need it.

Train managers to support caregivers on their teams

Managers can be a huge asset in developing, supporting, and retaining your employees who are caregivers, but only if they are properly trained. Equip your managers to be an effective liaison between your senior leadership team and your employees by training them to foster caring cultures:

- Help them inquire into their direct reports caregiver status during regular check-ins. These casual touchpoints are excellent moments for managers to ask compassionate questions, such as:
 - What caregiving responsibilities are you managing right now?
 - Are you facing any obstacles accessing the existing policies and benefits the company offers caregivers? If so, what are those obstacles and how could we remove them?
- Teach them to empower their direct reports to be upfront about their needs and to take greater control over their schedules.
- Ensure that bias against caregivers is not impacting the performance evaluations of their employees who are caregivers.

Hold managers accountable to serving the wellbeing of caregivers and non-caregivers

Ensure that managers remain aware of caregivers' ongoing needs. Penalize managers for poor planning that pushes their direct reports to complete work outside of normal working hours, infringing on the time they may have reserved for their caregiving responsibilities.

Regularly ask employees how well their managers support them in fulfilling their work responsibilities alongside their caregiving responsibilities.

Track retention and promotion of employees who are caregivers by manager alongside other demographics that are tracked more often, like gender, race, age, etc. Make it clear that if managers routinely fail to support and retain caregivers, that will be reflected in their own performance evaluations.

Prioritize the recruitment, retention, and promotion of caregivers

To recruit caregivers, work with organizations that offer paid internships or "returnships" to caregivers coming back to work after a career break. List job openings on sites that target parents and other caregivers. Assess the language and visuals in your job postings and on your career page to ensure that you are highlighting the inclusive nature of your policies and benefits. Evaluate your interview processes to make sure you are not unintentionally putting caregivers at a disadvantage. Showcase how caregiving can unlock [critical career skills](#) that will be formally recognized in your hiring decisions and performance review and promotion processes.

Build support for caregivers into your DEI strategy

Consider the support you offer caregivers to be part of your overall diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategy. Women of color are also more likely to be caregivers, so support for caregivers will reinforce your DEI efforts and address specific challenges they face at work. On average, Latinx women spend **30 hours a week** on caregiving and **44% of their income** is spent on caregiving expenses. **Fifty percent of Black women** care for an aging family member and spend 34% of their income on caregiving. Forty-two percent of Asian American and Pacific Islander women care for an elderly family member. Twenty-five percent of LGBTQ men are caregivers and report poorer mental health as a result.

Create and support Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) for caregivers

Having a community of peer support, particularly for caregivers, has been **shown** to increase mental health, improve employee performance, and increase company loyalty. Support the creation and success of employee-led resource groups. Be aware that these groups require labor – and the caregivers leading them should be compensated and receive sufficient resources for their time and effort. **Research** has found that the main reason caregiving ERG leaders invest time and energy in their group's success is to gain access to career advancement opportunities for themselves and exposure to senior leaders within their company. Acknowledging the contributions of these ERG leaders is an excellent way to demonstrate that you value the efforts that caregiver employees put into your workplace. Make sure that this leadership is not just acknowledged verbally but also given tangible support. Give your caregiver ERG a budget. Ensure it has an executive sponsor. Compensate and offer bonuses to ERG leaders and recognize the work they are doing to

lead the ERG on their performance review. Then, incorporate the input and recommendations generated by this group into your company policies.

Continue to measure your progress and watch out for unintended consequences

Once you have set up systems of accountability, you must maintain them so that the support you offer caregivers is continuous. Measure your progress on a recurring basis and watch out for unintended consequences that may arise from your policies and practices. For example, you may find that your flexible work policy is encouraging more women to scale back their hours than men and interfering with their ability to take on new projects. When you encounter unintended consequences like this in your policies, step back and assess how you can adjust the policy to ensure that it applies equitably to all employees.

FROM IDEAL WORKER TO IDEAL WORKPLACE

A **paper** the TIME'S UP Foundation released with behavioral design firm ideas42 offers key behavioral strategies you can apply to your hiring and recruitment processes, scheduling and work hour expectations and promotions systems to better support caregivers in your workplace.



Check out our **[blog post](#)** on this topic



[Download](#) the complete report

Set a New Standard for All Workplaces

Promote your culture of care as a way to attract top talent

A [new study](#) revealed that more than half of employees nationally are planning to look for new employment in 2021, seeking companies with greater work/life balance, a focus on feedback, and more flexibility. Advertise the culture of care that you create to attract and retain top talent in your workplace. Demonstrate the ways that you are seeking out information from your working caregivers and using it to build a more sustainable work environment for all your employees.

Make a point of sharing the caregiving solutions you come up with: both internally to your employees so that they can access them and externally so that other employers can learn from and build on your example. This is a transformative moment for so many workplaces and it is important that those who are leading the way and introducing new innovations and ideas gain recognition for taking action.

Join the Care Economy Business Council

Become a member of the [Care Economy Business Council](#), an incredible coalition of hundreds of corporate leaders, small businesses, and entrepreneurs. The mission is simple: build a comprehensive caregiving infrastructure so we can all get people back to work and build a stronger, more resilient economy for everyone.

Organized by TIME'S UP, Council members are working to better understand the caregiving needs of our employees and explore ways we can support our workforce. Council members also recognize that this is an important moment to invest as a nation in our caregiving infrastructure just as much as we invest in surface infrastructure like roads and bridges.

The Care Economy Business Council is part of our work as a member of Care Can't Wait – the path-breaking coalition of advocates working together to build a comprehensive approach to caregiving.

Every step counts. It's time for all companies to care. [Join us.](#)

Conclusion

Caregivers make up the backbone of our economy, yet our workplaces are not built to support the care we need at each stage of life. It's time for leaders across government and business to come together to create workplaces that truly value and support caregivers of all kinds.

It's past time to shift the paradigm, invest in caregiving infrastructure, and use all proven tools that are available to create workplaces that are safe, fair, and dignified for all. Because care can't wait.

SHARE YOUR SOLUTIONS

This guide is a living and breathing document that will be shaped by your suggestions.



Please share what steps you are taking to support caregivers in your workplace by emailing them to hello@timesupnow.org.

Our Gratitude to Our Collaborators

Thank you to the incredible pioneers without whom this guide would not have been possible. We are grateful for your research, innovation, policies, and everyday actions that inspired and informed the recommendations in this guide. The Leaders' Guide to Creating a Culture of Care would not have been possible without the generous help and continued dedication of the following individuals and organizations:

Heather Ainsworth
WORKABLE CONCEPT

Suzy Clausen
BENEFIT BUMP

Elizabeth Clubb
CARESIX

Nick Dazé
POCKETLIST

MaryBeth Ferrante
WRK/360

Leslie Forde
MOM'S HIERARCHY
OF NEEDS

Carolyn Frey
PHILZ COFFEE

Joe Fuller
HARVARD BUSINESS
SCHOOL

Balen Gore
THE ATHLETIC

David Hanrahan
EVENTBRITE

Katelin Holloway
SEVEN SEVEN SIX

Nikkie Kent
MAMAVA

Jacqueline Kerr

Ciara Lakhani
DASHLANE

Jason Lehmbeck
SPECIAL X

Josh Levs

Jaime-Jin Lewis
WIGGLE ROOM

Scott Liebman
BENEFIT BUMP

Patrice Martin
THE HOLDING CO.

Sascha Mayer
MAMAVA

Debbie McDonald
WAYS AND WANE

Ellen Meza
DOCUSIGN

Lori Mihalich-Levin
MINDFUL RETURN

Sue Olsen

Emily Paisner and the
Care.com team

Lynn Perkins and the
UrbanSitter team

Darby Saxbe

Candice AD Smith
CAREGIVEN

Sheryl Shushan
PATAGONIA

Ben Veghte
CARING ACROSS
GENERATIONS

Michael Walsh
CARILOOP

Joan Williams

We owe tremendous gratitude to our communities, both PeopleTech Partners and The Fam Tech Collaborative, for your tireless dedication to collaboration and raising the bar for HR leadership and tech innovation in this space. We are stronger together, and it is a privilege to consider you partners in this work.

To the many practitioners, parents, activists, and advocates who shared their experiences, observations, and ideas with us: thank you. Though you are not all named here individually, your collective insights shaped this work. We look forward to future conversations and opportunities to learn from you.

We want to acknowledge the work of our own teams as well:

TIME'S UP: Tina Tchen, Monifa Bandele, Anwasha Majumder, Chelsea Fuller, Devan King, Emily Koh, Jae Aron, Jess Forden, Meghann Curtis, Stacey Ferguson, and Tony Hernandez

TendLab: Amy Henderson, Kim Rohrer, and Katrine Strickland

If you identify any inaccuracies in this guide or would like to share feedback for our future work in this area, please email hello@timesupnow.org.



Tend|Lab

©2021 TIME'S UP Foundation.
The TIME'S UP trademark is the protected property of TIME'S UP Now.

www.timesupfoundation.org