

Innovating the Working Mom

THE TRUE COST OF CHILDCARE

WITH THE COST OF CHILDCARE SOARING, WORKING
MOMS ARE OPTING OUT IN ORDER TO MAKE ENDS MEET

By Jacqueline Guill, Senior Lead Technologist, Strategic Innovation Group

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of small white dots on a dark blue background, arranged in a pattern that tapers to the right.

\$18,000

the average annual cost of center-based daycare in the U.S.

67%

of working parents say that childcare costs have influenced their career decisions

Rent < Childcare

In most parts of the country, Americans spend more on childcare monthly than they do on rent

AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE AND THE CORPORATE FAMILY

I AM A MOTHER OF TWO DAUGHTERS

under the age of three. During my nine years at Booz Allen, I've managed to progress professionally while also creating a family, my most proud accomplishment. It is empowering to work at a firm that not only sees the value in encouraging a discourse on working moms, but is committed to innovating the working parent experience. Booz Allen is dedicated to exploring new ways to recruit, retain and empower working moms—and I believe one way to do so is by addressing childcare.

The Pew Research Center reported that after three decades of decline, the percentage of stay-at-home mothers is rising. According to the World Bank, the female labor participation rate dropped from 59 percent in 2000 to 56.3 percent in 2014. Bloomberg reported that childcare costs have risen at twice the pace of inflation since 1990—a recipe for working moms opting out of the traditional workforce. What's the remedy? Affordable childcare.

My Childcare Experience

I chose to be a working mom, and I have found that if you want the best childcare you have to pay for it. The daycare center my family uses now charges \$2,000 a month for an infant. Like any parent, I want a warm, happy, clean environment for my kids to spend eight hours a day in. But for many parents, \$2,000 a month is simply unaffordable, forcing them to turn to cheaper options in an industry that has no national health or safety standards.

The Department of Health and Human Services rates affordable childcare at no more than 10 percent of a household's budget. In reality, it's closer to 30 percent, especially where I live in the D.C. area, where childcare costs are among the highest in the country.

A friend recently confided that she wished someone had told her to start saving for childcare in her twenties. She wasn't joking. While that kind of foresight would have been nice, it shouldn't be necessary. Childcare has become too much of a financial and

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emotional burden and we have got to level the playing field if we're going to retain moms in the workforce.

Some will say—so what if women pause their careers for children? That's their choice—and that is true. But companies are losing out on their diversity of thought and our economy is losing out, too. If the U.S. women's labor participation rate matched those of other developed countries, the Department of Labor says our GDP could increase by \$600 billion a year (with a current GDP of \$16.77 trillion, that's a 3.5 percent rate of growth).

So what can be done? Below are five options for employers, including Booz Allen, to better recruit, retain, and empower working parents.

Build Trust

Something Booz Allen does really well is cultivate trust. Employers like Booz Allen who help you prioritize your family will often benefit from a more engaged, loyal employee. Employers who trust that you will get the work done likely won't bat an eye when you leave early to do the daycare pickup. Employers who know that work should fit into your life, and not the other way around, will reap of the benefits of having a fully present employee. And employers who recognize the value of the familial bonds you have with other parents at work, will care for you like family, too. In my experience, Booz Allen builds this trust through its Parent Forums, the Women's Agenda, and flexible schedules.

Bring It In-House

An increasing number of companies (like Booz Allen, Patagonia, Clif Bar, and IBM) are offering on-site daycare. I know my colleagues who use our firm's on-site daycare love being able to go downstairs at the end of the day, pick up their children, and head home. The peace of mind this gives them is huge. But like any benefit, it may not suit everyone's needs or in some cases be

viable. In the age of teleworking, for example, on-site daycare may only help a small handful of employees.

Facilitate It

If companies are unable to provide on-site childcare options, another way to support employees with children would be to connect them to quality care providers. Many businesses are benefiting from creating internal working mom/parents support groups where recommendations can be shared. Companies that can connect parents to referrals (with reviews from your colleagues!) to local childcare providers, nannies, or au pairs in your area is another helpful way to get on those competitive waitlists.

Change the Culture

Perhaps most importantly, companies should facilitate a culture shift that acknowledges that the male professional experience shouldn't be the default. I will need male allies throughout my career, and companies like Booz Allen that bring them into the fold early and often to normalize the working mom experience will create enhanced working parent cultures.

Subsidize It

Many leading businesses, for the purposes of recruiting and retaining working moms, have opted to help make childcare more affordable through subsidies. For example, companies like Yahoo!, Google, and Publix are partially funding their employees' childcare and according to *Bloomberg*, those employers see increased employee productivity and happiness. Not just because it's a financial burden, but also because childcare is a huge source of stress. By providing subsidies, employers are showing that they have a stake in employee well-being, too. Companies like those mentioned prove that the investment in their employees' childcare is good business, as it leads to higher retention rates among moms.

Continue the conversation by contacting our author using her email below. Or, follow @LifeatBooz on Twitter.



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About Booz Allen

Booz Allen Hamilton is committed to exploring new and innovative ways to enhance the work experience for working moms and all of its employees. As one of Working Mother's 100 Best Companies for 18 years running, the firm is dedicated to providing the family support, flexibility, and advancement that the modern workplace demands.

Booz Allen Hamilton has been at the forefront of strategy and technology for more than 100 years. Today, the firm provides management and technology consulting and engineering services to leading Fortune 500 corporations, governments, and not-for-profits across the globe. Booz Allen partners with public and private sector clients to solve their most difficult challenges through a combination of consulting, analytics, mission operations, technology, systems delivery, cybersecurity, engineering, and innovation expertise.

With international headquarters in McLean, Virginia, the firm employs more than 22,600 people globally and had revenue of \$5.41 billion for the 12 months ended March 31, 2016. To learn more, visit BoozAllen.com. (NYSE: BAH)