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Working Families Case Study - Enhanced Paternity Leave

“Fathers and non-birth parents are parents too and deserve to have enhanced rights when it comes to caring for their children. Introducing such a policy within an organisation will take some adjusting both practically and culturally, but I sincerely hope that many others will be able to benefit in the same way my family and I have.”

Our son Jack was born in June 2020. As you can imagine, this was an interesting time as it was at the height of the global Pandemic, with lockdown in full force and the vast majority of the population still adjusting to working from home. It was also fortunate timing for me, as Julius Baer had recently enhanced their Paternity Leave offering to 3 months fully paid.

I decided to take 2.5 months Paternity Leave in December that year, when Jack was 6 months old. I believe I was the second member of staff to do this, after one of our portfolio managers took the full offering, and I was the first fully client facing Private Banker to take it.

For me, the experience of having that solid amount of quality time with my son and wife, who was on Maternity Leave, was truly amazing and, on reflection, I cannot imagine only being able to take the statutory 2 weeks Paternity Leave previously offered (and often not taken). I feel grateful to my employer for recognising the importance this enhanced leave has for fathers and mothers, and for taking the lead and being an early adopter of such a policy. It really makes me feel that my employer cares about the family lives of their staff and about encouraging flexibility and balance in our working and home lives. In advance of my leave, I received excellent support from HR, which was impressive given this was only the second take up of their new policy. My line management were also superb, incredibly supportive of me taking the leave and very helpful in working with my team and I to figure out how my role would be covered during my absence. My team, as always, were amazing.

I certainly wasn't intending to become a role model by taking the leave, however in doing so I have had several other members of staff tell me that as a direct result of me taking the leave it made them feel more comfortable about taking it themselves. Upon reflection, I was fortunate to have an excellent client book and a fantastic team who work with my clients. As such, I felt comfortable and safe taking the time off, however I know others may not feel as comfortable. If I was only 5 years into my career, rather than my 25 years, I think I would have felt the same anxiety about the impact taking that amount of leave might have on my career, and likely would have taken only a few extra weeks or maybe an extra month.

Since learning that my leave has been an example to others, I have been conscious about using my relatively privileged position to be vocal about how much I enjoyed taking the leave, and also about how I put a very high priority on my son and spending time with him. I am deliberately open and vocal about it when I decide to start my day later or finish earlier for childcare reasons. My wife also works long hours and has a very demanding job and I know she really appreciates the flexibility I have, the emphasis Julius Baer has put on families and my desire to spend as much time with my son as possible and to share the parenting responsibilities.

In preparation for my time off, I did work long hours in the month prior to ensure I was ahead of everything administrative, as well as to spend time with my clients to make sure their needs were covered. I also made myself available for any major client conversations and decisions during my leave, to give clients comfort that I was still very much involved and taking the same care over what was important to them as I always have. Whilst this reduces one of the main benefits of being on leave, which is switching off, it was a new scenario for Julius Baer, my clients and my team, and a learning curve for all involved. It would have felt uncomfortable for me not staying involved given the role I carry out for clients and their families. Upon my return, I did come back to a busy period of client meetings and catching up, however given the contact I had maintained whilst on leave, I was back up to speed very quickly. I have also returned with a fresh perspective and renewed energy.

I am so pleased that I decided to take enhanced Paternity Leave, as that early involvement and bonding time with my son was priceless, not to mention being on hand to help my wife during this life transition for us both. Fathers and non-birth parents are parents too and deserve to have enhanced rights when it comes to caring for their children. Introducing such a policy within an organisation will take some adjusting both practically and culturally, but I sincerely hope that many others will be able to benefit in the same way my family and I have. And I also hope, and believe, that fathers taking longer paternity leave will go a long way to improving the culture around both parents caring more equally for their children and, ultimately, creating a better work/home balance across genders.