

Time Out

Dear Reader,

I don't usually use this prominent position in ATZ to make personal announcements. But this time, I'd like to make an exception, because my announcement is also accompanied by a political statement. From the middle of June, I plan to take two months' parental leave to look after my youngest daughter, who was born last summer. Is that feasible for someone in a position with responsibility for budgets and human resources? I first asked myself this question and then went to discuss it with the head of our publishing house. Ultimately, one can only really answer this question in all honesty after the event, but I am certain that, with the right preparation and with confidence in one's own team, such a 'time out' can be taken without negative effects on one's employers.

Personally, I had a lot of support in this matter, especially from our customers. But nevertheless – and here is the political dimension – only one in eight men in Germany takes parental leave, in spite of the availability of parenting benefit. Apart from a lack of willingness to take time off, I can only assume that most men are afraid that it might have negative repercussions for their jobs.

If one considers that the greatest threat for Germany as an industrial location is not the higher wage costs compared to emerging economies but the foreseeable shortage of skilled workers and managers, a huge field of activity opens up for companies. An employer that is family-friendly will gain enormous advantages in the "war of talents". I don't have any simple solutions to offer. But it can be proven empirically (for example by taking a look at France or Scandinavia) that good child care and a family-friendly corporate culture can make a major contribution. When, in the academic world, more and more partners with children are in employment, we have to take this into consideration when it comes to working time, job relocations or periods of leave. Single employees who are always available are a much more comfortable option. But they are becoming increasingly scarce.

I wish you all the best – and I'll be back later.



Johannes Winterhagen
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