

Interview

“Eighteen weeks of parental leave for all also eliminates hiring inequalities”

The initiative of law firm Foley Hoag’s Paris office to grant all its attorneys parental leave of 18 weeks in the case of the birth or adoption of a child received the highest rating in an online survey regarding the best law firm initiatives. Its initiative received an average rating of 7.73 out of 10, and nearly half of the participants gave it a 10-star rating. Frédéric Scanvic, managing partner of this Parisian law firm, spoke with us about it.

How did this initiative come about?

It is firm policy. The firm’s US offices asked us about the possibility of implementing this practice in France, where we have a small practice. We have 18 attorneys, eight of whom are associates, and the majority of them are women. In the end, this doesn’t change things much for mothers, who in Paris already had a right to 16 weeks of maternity leave plus two additional weeks. By contrast, the change is significant for fathers, who previously had at most four weeks and now have 18. We replied that this initiative was both possible and desirable. Our practice in Paris now has one male counsel and two male associates.

Have you guaranteed this leave?

Things are simpler for the mothers since, with rare exceptions, they take their leave in one block of time, both before and after the birth, and it is neither possible nor appropriate to change this. With regards to fathers, we have decided to require them to take their leave during the year following a birth or adoption. How each can take his leave is determined in the course of a discussion with his supervising partner of the firm’s needs. The firm has undertaken this obligation and implemented a corresponding process, and we have therefore also subscribed to this procedure. The firm even provides for temporary substitution of an associate on leave if this is required.

Are associates on leave paid the same as when they work?

Of course, although, logically, since the firm continues to pay 100% of their compensation, the associates reimburse it for any payments they receive from social welfare organizations.

How do you respond to those who believe that mothers should be given more parental leave and that granting equal leave to fathers is unfair?

It is true that this initiative does not benefit French mothers as much as it does American mothers since, in France, or

at least within the Paris Bar Association, mothers already have significant benefits. In the United States, 18 weeks of leave is far above the norm. This might explain why French mothers are somewhat “disappointed” by this measure. However, implementing it is evidence of a real desire for equality. It goes well beyond merely allowing parents to spend time with a new child in that granting different leave to mothers than to fathers may create a hiring inequality.

This measure is designed to eliminate that inequality since, regardless of whether I hire a young man or a young woman, I know both have a right to 18 weeks of parental leave. The same holds true with regards to career development, since taking leave will have no effect on the progression of one’s career or compensation.



Frédéric Scanvic

Have you already granted parental leave since this policy was implemented?

One of our female associates gave birth before this new policy was implemented. We naturally granted her 18 weeks of leave. ■ Anne Portmann

“This policy is a strong message in support of gender equality”

Marion Couffignal and Alice de Larminat, respectively the President and the Advisor of the Equality Commission of the Paris UJA (Young Attorneys Union), welcome this measure, stating that it is “a strong message in support of gender equality and of a balance between private and professional life.” They note, however, that not all law firms have the financial means to implement such measures and call upon the Paris Bar Association to renegotiate collective insurance policies covering parenting that have larger daily payments and longer coverage periods, in particular for fathers and husbands.

This is a translation of an interview given to

