



USDA Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management Best Practice



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Best Practice: Parents in the Fire Management Workforce – Retaining Parents through Pregnancy and early childhood years

Workforce Management Element: Retention

Process: In order to retain experienced employees, Forest Leadership, Fire Managers and Supervisors need to be willing to facilitate opportunities for dual career women and men to find alternative work schedules and work expectations during pregnancy and early childhood.

- Develop and implement new business practices to allow two parents in high impact initial attack positions (smokejumper and Dispatch Center Manager) to alternate the responsibility for care of a young infant (0-6 months). This may include changing the smokejumper jump list to allow for a smokejumper parent to provide primary support to the child, while allowing the other parent to meet initial attack commitments or accept fire assignments.
- Provide for accommodation of the infant within the workplace. This may simply be allowing for care of the infant in the work environment restricted to weekends only, while accomplishing dispatch, or in-office, work.
- Assure management involves co-workers in any accommodation decision and gains acceptance by delivering leadership expectations of a “family friendly” work environment for all.
- Receptiveness of detailed worksites towards a mother with child contributes to a desire to stay in the fire management job. The Southern Area Coordination Center has a history of accommodating detailers who bring their children and a care-giver with them on assignment. At one time, the Detailer’s Guide included information on where a small child could best be treated for earaches, etc.
- Encouraging support systems amongst parents in the workplace contributed to retention, before we lost the funding to establish daycare centers that were Forest Service sponsored. Two websites of value are:

www.babiesatwork.com

www.parentingatwork.org

Key Points:

- Forest Leadership must be involved and supportive to provide their expectations of all employees towards Forest Service families. Region 6, Deschutes Forest Supervisor Jose Cruz (1990-1993) provided clear direction to Deschutes National Forest fire management personnel of his support of dual career couples who desired to raise happy, healthy families, while retaining valued employees in fire management. That policy, written and verbally delivered on various occasions, set the tone for the Forest Supervisor’s expectations of all Forest employees.
- Support from fire managers at all levels must be “clear text” and delivered to all employees. It must be clear to all that “business as usual” is not the only way to get the job accomplished.
- Commitment and time of fire supervisors to working with the employees (parents) to strategize ideas and alternatives on what can be done to retain the employees is critical.
- Dispelling the old belief that we lose women in fire due to the “baby issue” is going to take collaboration of innovative, new managers in fire and Forest leadership, who acknowledge and recognize that human beings do reproduce. Some of our career employees are children of Forest Service employees.

Conclusion:

To retain “Generation X” employees and to recruit and retain the “Millennials”, placing more emphasis on managers/leadership at all levels acquiring a knowledge base and an awareness of existing research in what motivates those generations and how to adjust the workplace to meet those values is critical. It will take more emphasis on families and exploration of alternative work expectations to retain the new employee.

Generation X	Millennials
Born 1965-1976 51 million	Born 1977 – 1998 75 million
Accept diversity Pragmatic/practical Self-reliant/individualistic Reject rules Killer life Mistrust institutions PC Use technology Multitask Latch-key kids Friend-not family	Celebrate diversity Optimistic/realistic Self-inventive/individualistic Rewrite the rules Killer lifestyle Irrelevance of institutions Internet Assume technology Multitask fast Nurtured Friends = family
Mentoring Do's · Casual, friendly work environment · Involvement · Flexibility and freedom · A place to learn	Mentoring Do's · Structured, supportive work environment · Personalized work · Interactive relationship · Be prepared for demands, high expectations

<http://www.generationsatwork.com/articles/millennials.htm>

<http://www.abanet.org/lpm/lpt/articles/mgt08044.html>

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