

Op-ed published in *New York Daily News* on 06/19/2016

<https://www.nydailynews.com/2016/06/19/urging-more-dads-to-bond-with-baby-a-fathers-day-wish/>

Urging more dads to bond with baby

By Daniel Garodnick

As we celebrate Father's Day, we should turn our attention to an often-overlooked problem: How to make it not only legally permissible for fathers to take time off when their children are born, but to actively encourage more new fathers to do so.

I will never regret taking parental leave when my boys were born in 2011 and 2013. But it wasn't a simple choice or one made without reservations.

While on leave, my wife and I together learned to feed a baby, to change diapers and to survive our sleep-deprived state. It was a critical time for our relationship and for our family.

But at the very same time, I felt that I had to prove to everyone — to constituents, to Council colleagues, to journalists — that I wouldn't miss a beat at work. I wanted people to feel like I was still in the office, seamlessly tending to all my obligations.

I know that, even in a city with many generous employers and a state with a new, expansive family leave law, men across the city and the country often feel the same way.

It's a serious shame. There is a wealth of data demonstrating the benefits of paternity leave. Fathers who actively engage with their newborns tend to stay engaged as the child grows. One study found that dads who took time off at birth were almost a third more likely to read books with their toddlers.

In addition, paternity leave allows mothers to better stay connected to paid work. A study of Swedish families found that each additional month that the father stayed on parental leave increased the mother's earnings by 6.7%.

Yet many men still feel reluctant to do anything that would suggest that we have any commitment that might call into doubt our devotion to our jobs.

So how can we get more fathers to take leave, and to do it well?

With the recent passage of family leave legislation in New York, this question becomes even more important. We now have the country's strongest family leave law, which will eventually allow workers to take up to 12 weeks of leave, at up to two-thirds of their average weekly wage, to bond with a new child or take care of an ill family member.

That leave is only going to be used if men feel culturally and psychologically prepared to take advantage of it.

So first, we need to change the way we talk about family leave. Many companies offer both maternity leave and paternity leave, with much less time available for the latter. This reflects the assumption that a mother is inherently more committed to child care.

In most couples, that is no longer true. In well over half of two-parent households, both parents work full-time and therefore both need to contribute to child care. Leave policies need to recognize this reality.

Second, public figures need to set the right tone. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg took two months of leave when his daughter was born. When employees see their bosses taking family leave — and taking it seriously — everyone understands the importance and appropriateness of family commitments.

That's where I could have done better. I should have taken leave openly and proudly. Finally, we need to make clear to workers without kids, who sometimes resist family leave policies because they resent taking on extra burdens when their colleagues take time off, that family leave benefits everyone.

While many people need to take leave for the birth of a child, others need it to take care of an ailing parent or sibling or a dying grandparent. We should support each other through these times.

If I could do it again, I would shout my family leave from the rooftops, and help change the culture around men and parenting, a small step to help all of us live fuller, more well-rounded lives.

Garodnick represents the East Side of Manhattan in the City Council.