Expert Advice on Paid Parental Leave

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Adedayo: Welcome to Leading Edge on Line. My name is Adedayo Adeniyi, I am the director for Leadership and Organization Development in the Office of the Vice President For Human Resources. Joining me today is Sharon Williams. Sharon is a senior employee relations specialist. Welcome, Sharon.

Sharon: Thanks, Adedayo

Adedayo: Today's focus is the paid parental leave policy. Sharon, can you please share with us the principle purpose of the policy and give us a little bit of background concerning why this policy was established?

Sharon: Purdue's paid parental leave policy was established to compliment Purdue's sick leave and FMLA policies. It helps moms have more time at a paid status without exhausting all their sick leave. It provides dads and partners paid time to bond with the infant. And also allows individuals who are choosing to adopt have paid time to spend with that child. In addition, it also allows Purdue to remain competitive with other big ten and universities that we are peer institutions with.

Adedayo: Sounds as though the policy is pretty robust. What does it take for a person to qualify for paid parental leave?

Sharon: Someone needs to be at Purdue University for one consecutive year, and they need to be benefits eligible, which means they need to work either full time
or at least part-time, clerical, service staff, faculty, administrative and professional staff all qualify, as well as graduate student employees.

**Adedayo:** So paid parental leave, is that something that an employee is entitled to or is that something that the supervisor can actually choose to give the employee or not give the employee.

**Sharon:** Paid parental leave is an entitlement in that if you use it as a continuous leave it is something that the supervisor doesn't have the right to make a choice on. However, once someone has used it for a continuous period of time, then chooses to return to work and wants to use part of it intermittently, then the employee and the supervisor need to work together to come up with a decision as to when that person can use that intermittent leave.

**Adedayo:** So it sounds like it's important that supervisors understand that if a person qualifies for paid parental leave they need to work with the individual to ensure that they get to use that time.

**Sharon:** Certainly. Hopefully, employees and supervisors have already a good working relationship so that they can have that conversation well ahead of the time that the child arrives.

**Adedayo:** Sharon, what are the common errors that supervisors and employees make when implementing the paid parental leave policy?
Sharon: I think one of the initial errors that's made is supervisors just assume they can dictate how the employee uses the leave. When someone asks for paid parental leave the supervisor needs to wait for the employee to determine how they want to use the leave in conjunction with other leaves. And then there may be an opportunity for them to work with the employee on how they're going to use that leave. But initially, they can't dictate. Also, there's a lot of paperwork that needs to be filed out, since it runs in conjunction with the FMLA and other university sick leave policies. And so filling out the paperwork is really important. Sometimes supervisors and employees don't plan soon enough, and so I would encourage supervisors to have an open and honest discussion with all their employees so that when the time comes when they need to have a discussion about leave that employees feel comfortable coming and talking with them. Once someone tells you that they have a need for paid parental leave, it's not the supervisor's responsibility to inquire as to what further medical details there are involved with the situation. They just need to know that the employee needs paid parental leave and where to send the employee for assistance. The other error, I guess, or common mistake that people make is that supervisors and employees don't always seek assistance when they know that they have a need for paid parental leave, because the paid parental leave works in conjunction with sick leave and with FMLA and potentially other leaves, it's very important that you seek assistance and make sure that you're using the leave properly.

Adedayo: Sharon, what tips would you provide to the supervisor to ensure that they're in compliance with the paid parental leave policy?

Sharon: I think it's important that once the employee comes to the supervisor and shares the need for paid parental leave that the supervisor refer the employee to the business office or the human resources service center so that employee can plan how they choose to use their paid parental leave in conjunction with other leaves. Each employee's needs and leaves are different, and so each employee needs to figure out what -- how the leave works best for them. Once they've
figured that out then the employee needs to complete the paperwork and the supervisors need to ensure that that paperwork's complete so that they can then plan for the employee's time away from work and schedule activities with other employees. If the employees have issues or the supervisor's concerned about someone taking paid parental leave, they should contact their human resources or employee relationships area for assistance.

**Adedayo:** Sharon, as we prepare to wrap up, are there any parting thoughts that you'd like to share with the supervisors?

**Sharon:** Paid parental leave is a leave that's available to employees and as such, it's part of Purdue's family friendly policy. We want a family friendly work environment, and when used properly and implemented properly it's a win-win for both the university and the employee.

**Adedayo:** Sharon, thank you so much for lending us your expert advice and thoughts. And we thank you so much for joining us today.

**Sharon:** Thank you.