

A LEADING WITH COURAGE TOOL

The Workplace Inventory

A Five-Shift Assessment for Supporting Mothers & Other Caregivers at Work

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The Stakes: Penalty and Advantage

Whether someone is caregiving for a child, an aging parent, a spouse, or oneself through a health challenge, this work carries a real career cost when workplaces get it wrong, and a real advantage when they get it right. Both are worth naming before you start.

The Caregiver Penalty

- **73% / 24%** 73% of employees have caregiving responsibilities. Yet only 24% of employers recognize how caregiving affects employees. (AARP)
- **10% / 12%** : lower ratings on competence and commitment for mothers vs. equally qualified non-mothers, in matched hiring audits. (Correll, Benard & Paik, 2007)
- **35%** less: the aggregate wage gap between what mothers and fathers earn today, roughly \$591K over a 30-year career.

The Caregiver Advantage

Have you ever met a mother or caregiver with strong emotional intelligence, adaptive communication, and the ability to manage competing demands under pressure? *Harvard Business Review's* 2024 research names these among the core skills of effective leaders. These are the very skills that mothers and other caregivers build every day, often without anyone naming them as leadership capability.

How to Use This Inventory

This tool walks through five shifts: five ways the research suggests family-friendly policy moves from a list on paper to a lived experience. For each shift, answer five questions, then total your score.

- **Who should complete it:** ideally 3–5 people across different levels of your organization: HR leadership, a frontline manager, and someone who has personally taken a leave or managed caregiving responsibilities. Comparing notes surfaces blind spots a single perspective misses.
- **How to score:** Mostly Yes = 3 points, Somewhat = 2, Mostly No = 1. Not Sure = 0 points, but treat it as a flag rather than a failure. It usually means you've found exactly where to go looking next.

- **How often:** Revisit this quarterly if you can. Culture shifts slowly enough that a single snapshot rarely tells the full story. The movement between snapshots is often the most useful data of all.
- **If you're not sure:** Some questions ask about things you may not have full visibility into, like whether a policy is applied consistently across the whole organization. Answer based on your own experience, or mark Not Sure. That's real data too; it often points to exactly what's worth asking about next.

SHIFT 1: Policy Access → Manager Behavior

Having a policy on the books doesn't guarantee it works. *Manager behavior is often the deciding factor in whether an employee actually uses the support available to them.*

Question	Yes (3)	Some (2)	No (1)	Unsure (0)
Are managers checking in regularly with employees during and after a caregiving transition, not just at the start?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Has your manager (or one you know of) had open-ended conversations about support needs, not just logistics?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Do managers build a clear communication and workload plan before, during, and after a leave?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Are caregiver support policies communicated clearly enough that both managers and employees understand them?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Do managers know what they are and are not allowed to ask, and where to direct employees for further support?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Shift Score: _____ / 15

Strong: 12–15 · Building: 6–11 · Early-Stage: 0–5

REFLECTION

What do you know? _____

How can you find out? _____

With whom might you collaborate? _____

SHIFT 2: Gender-Neutral → Gender-Aware

Policies written as gender-neutral can still land unevenly. This shift asks who a policy actually benefits in practice, not just on paper.

Question	Yes (3)	Some (2)	No (1)	Unsure (0)
As far as you can tell, does leadership development address the caregiver penalties that disproportionately affect women?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Is there a culture of trust and flexibility, or does using flexibility carry a penalty or a sense of fear?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Does leadership visibly model life-work balance themselves?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Is there wide latitude for creating a flexible schedule?	☐	☐	☐	☐
As far as you can tell, is parental and family leave used equally across genders, or does it feel like an unequal option?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Shift Score: _____ / 15

Strong: 12–15 · Building: 6–11 · Early-Stage: 0–5

REFLECTION

What do you know? _____

How can you find out? _____

With whom might you collaborate? _____

SHIFT 3: Early Childhood → Full Caregiver Continuum

Caregiving doesn't end at a child's first birthday. This shift checks whether support extends across the full range of caregiving: children, elders, spouses, and chosen family.

Question	Yes (3)	Some (2)	No (1)	Unsure (0)
Do leave and flexibility policies account for sibling care, elder care, and multigenerational households, not just new babies?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Is meaningful support available beyond a child's first year (school-age transitions, teen years, ongoing needs such as chronic illness support, including for mothers)?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Do policies reflect religious and cultural diversity in how time off and holidays are handled?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Are both child care and elder care needs explicitly addressed, rather than “caregiver” implicitly meaning “new parent”?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Question	Yes (3)	Some (2)	No (1)	Unsure (0)
Is there support for community-care needs, such as chosen family, mutual aid, cultural obligations, beyond the nuclear family?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Shift Score: _____ / 15

Strong: 12–15 · Building: 6–11 · Early-Stage: 0–5

REFLECTION

What do you know? _____

How can you find out? _____

With whom might you collaborate? _____

SHIFT 4: Supporting Absence → Supporting Careers

Getting someone through a leave is only half the job. This shift asks whether your organization also protects their career on the other side of it.

Question	Yes (3)	Some (2)	No (1)	Unsure (0)
As far as you know, does your organization track whether mothers & other caregivers face setbacks in pay or advancement?	☐	☐	☐	☐
As far as you know, are working mothers and caregivers, the people most affected, involved in designing or reviewing policy?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Are policies regularly assessed for whether they actually work, not just whether they exist?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Are pathways to and from part-time or reduced schedules clear, known, and free of a “mommy-track” penalty?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Do performance and promotion processes account for career interruptions without penalizing them?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Shift Score: _____ / 15

Strong: 12–15 · Building: 6–11 · Early-Stage: 0–5

REFLECTION

What do you know? _____

How can you find out? _____

With whom might you collaborate? _____

SHIFT 5: Assumed Family → Actual Families

“Family-friendly” policies are sometimes built around one default household. This shift checks whether policy and culture reflect the families your people actually have.

Question	Yes (3)	Some (2)	No (1)	Unsure (0)
Are LGBTQ+ family structures and chosen family explicitly reflected in policy language and application?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Is there room for employees who’d rather not discuss their family situation at all?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Do employees feel safe being openly themselves at work, including about their family life?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Do benefit and leave definitions reflect real family diversity, not a single default model?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Does your organization actively invite feedback from employees with non-traditional family structures when designing policy?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Shift Score: _____ / 15

Strong: 12–15 · Building: 6–11 · Early-Stage: 0–5

REFLECTION

What do you know? _____

How can you find out? _____

With whom might you collaborate? _____

The Caregiver Advantage Check

The questions above look for gaps. This one looks for an opportunity most organizations miss entirely: is your organization actually recognizing the leadership skills that mothers and other caregivers are already building?

Skill	Actively Developed	Not Yet
Resilience & Adaptability	☐	☐
Emotional Intelligence & Empathy	☐	☐
Enhanced Communication Skills	☐	☐
Flexibility & Innovation	☐	☐
Negotiation and Resetting	☐	☐
Goal Orientation	☐	☐
Advanced Time Management	☐	☐
Investment in Self and Family	☐	☐
Strategic Boundary Setting	☐	☐
Inclusion and Advocacy	☐	☐

REFLECTION

What do you know? _____

How can you find out? _____

With whom might you collaborate? _____

Your Overall Profile

Transfer your five shift scores here to see your profile at a glance.

Shift	Score (of 15)	Band
Policy Access → Manager Behavior	_____	_____
Gender-Neutral → Gender-Aware	_____	_____
Early Childhood → Full Caregiver Continuum	_____	_____
Supporting Absence → Supporting Careers	_____	_____
Assumed Family → Actual Families	_____	_____

Band definitions: Strong = 12–15 (this shift is working) · Building = 6–11 (real starting points) · Early-Stage = 0–5 (biggest opportunity for fast gains)

Where This Goes Next

Wherever your scores landed, that's useful information. Low scores mark where the fastest gains are usually available, and a page full of “Not Sure” answers is often the most valuable result of all: it tells you what to go find out next.

This inventory represents a starting point rather than a complete picture. The Caregiver Retention Lab, through JVD Consulting, goes deeper: a Pulse Snapshot survey and findings conversation for a focused read on where you stand; a Full Diagnostic & Roadmap that adds structured interviews and a prioritized action plan built on these five shifts; and an Embedded Partnership for organizations ready to track progress over time.

If this inventory surprised you, or simply confirmed what you already suspected, that's exactly where deeper work begins. If you'd like to talk about what a reasonable next step could look like for you, I'd love to connect for a brief call. [Book a time](https://calendly.com/jodivandenbergdaves): <https://calendly.com/jodivandenbergdaves>.

If you need to spend your energy more on your own growth as a mother/caregiver and a professional, I provide career and leadership development coaching that recognizes your whole self and where you are on your work, family, and life journey.

[Book a time](https://calendly.com/jodivandenbergdaves): <https://calendly.com/jodivandenbergdaves>.

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