DMEC
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The 90-Day Retention Trap

Make Managers Your Leave Strategy

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CENTER FOR Parental Leave Leadership®

RETAIN COACHING™

What We're Covering Today

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The Problem

Why compliant leave still loses great people

02

The Research

Original 2025 data: what HR leaders told us

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The Framework

3 phases · 10 moments · what managers must do

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Practical moves you can make Monday morning



The paperwork was perfect.

The leave was compliant.

The employee returned on schedule.

Then, three months later —

they resigned.

This is the 90-Day Retention Trap.



About This Research

Conducted in 2025 by the Center for Parental Leave Leadership & The Standard Insurance Co.

85
HR Admins & Decision-Makers

52%
HR Administrators

61%
In PFML-Mandate States

62%
Small Companies: Service & Education

This is data from real HR leaders—people just like you.



Three Words. One Critical Distinction.

Most organizations have policy. Fewer have programming. Almost none nail practice.

Policy

The written rules. Who qualifies, for how long, under what conditions. Necessary. Not sufficient.

Programming

Structured support across all three phases: Preparing, During, Returning. Increasingly expected.

Practice

What actually happens. Real behaviors, norms, and culture, regardless of what's written. Critical.



The Numbers Behind the Trap

65%

of mothers leave within the first year after return

30%

of those, leave within the first 3 months back

68%

of returning parents said manager had the biggest impact

100% & 53%

Retention and increase in intention to stay with RETAIN Parental Leave Coaching

25%

of new parents actively thinking about quitting

2×

salary cost to replace one employee

Sources: Field research · CPLL PLTA™ data · 2025 CPLL + The Standard Research · SHRM



What HR Leaders Actually Said

Verbatim. 2025 CPLL + The Standard Research.

"The managers don't get much information about leaves and returns beyond a date. They should get more."

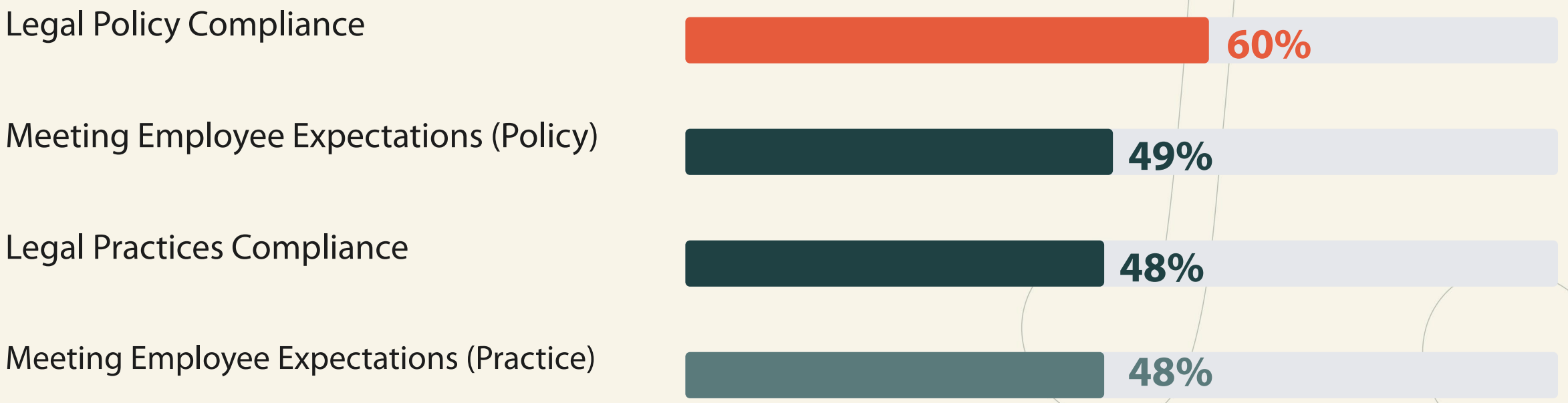
"Some managers still have the mindset that family-oriented employees are problematic and disruptive to the flow of business."

"I feel my company is falling short in returning parents back to work. They want additional resources and to be eased back in."



How Prepared Do Organizations Feel?

Percentage who feel "fully prepared" in each area



Key finding: Organizations in PFML-mandate states feel LESS prepared than those without mandates.

Managers Score Lowest. Every Time.

How does your org compare to industry standards? (1=Below Avg · 2=Average · 3=Above Avg)

Mothers	**2.39**	Maternity norms are more established (but more work to be done)
Fathers	**2.24**	Paternity leave normalization still needed
Managers	**2.21**	**LOWEST — despite being the #1 retention factor**

The group with the most impact on retention receives the least support.



The Boss Lottery

Right now, whether your employees have a good leave experience depends almost entirely on which manager they happen to have.

You either win it. Or you don't.

Our 2025 research confirms it. Managers aren't getting the information, training, or support they need.



The Fix Isn't Better Hiring.

It's a framework. And you can start building it today.

1. You already have the managers you have. Training changes what they do, not who they are.

2. A manager with training and a framework stops being a lottery ticket and starts being a system.

3. 68% of returning parents say their manager had the biggest impact. Too important to leave to chance.

The solution is structural. Let's look at the framework.

HR Cannot Be in the Room.

The policy is HR's. The paperwork is HR's. The hundreds of micro-moments across a year-long leave? Those belong to the manager.

What HR Owns

- Policy design and compliance
- Benefits admin and leave paperwork
- Legal and regulatory guidance
- Program-level communications

What Managers Own

- The announcement conversation
- Transition planning with the employee
- Coverage and team communication
- Keep-in-touch during leave
- Day one back + the first 90 days
- Every micro-moment in between



From Leave Concierge → Retention Partner

The Old Model

HR as 24/7 Leave Concierge

- HR fields every employee question about leave
- HR chases managers for return dates
- HR follows up when conversations don't happen
- HR absorbs every gap in manager awareness
- HR is backstop for a process no one else owns

→

The New Model

Manager as Proactive Retention Partner

- Manager initiates the transition conversation before leave
- Manager owns the keep-in-touch plan with the employee
- Manager schedules re-entry conversation before return
- Manager leads 30-60-90 day check-ins unprompted
- HR supports and advises — manager leads

This shift reduces HR admin burden while dramatically improving engagement and retention outcomes.



Parental Leave Isn't a Date. It's a Transition.

The RETAIN Coaching™ methodology maps the full year-long arc across three distinct phases.

PHASE 1
Preparing for Leave

- Announcement conversation
- Transition + coverage planning
- Keep-in-touch strategy
- Manager readiness

Most orgs skip pre-leave support entirely

PHASE 2
During Leave

- Honoring keep-in-touch plans
- Advocating for the employee
- Managing the coverage team
- Return planning at 4-6 weeks out

Most orgs go completely silent during leave

PHASE 3
Returning from Leave

- Day-one re-entry conversation
- Workload reintegration
- 30-60-90 day check-ins
- Identity + role recalibration

"Falling short in returning parents" -HR's own words



The 10A Transition Touchpoints™

10 moments a manager's behavior has an outsized impact on whether an employee stays/goes.

PHASE 1 · PREPARING

- 1A Announcement
- 2A Assess
- 3A Action Plan
- 4A Acknowledge Parenthood

PHASE 2 · DURING LEAVE

- 5A Appropriate Keep In Touch
- 6A Advocate
- 7A Arrangements for Return

PHASE 3 · RETURNING

- 8A Acknowledge Working Parenthood
- 9A Adjustment
- 10A Access to Career Development



What's Actually Happening to the Employee

Understanding this makes the training & framework make sense.

Identity Transition

Returning employees are not the same person who left. They're navigating a new identity as a parent while re-establishing their professional self. This is a documented psychological process — not a mood.

Perinatal Mental Health

55% of new parents in our data report perinatal mental health concerns. Symptoms often peak or first surface AFTER return — not during leave. The workplace is where they first become visible.

The Silence Problem

After months away, many return to find their team has moved on, their role has shifted, and no one checked in. The absence of acknowledgment is itself a message. Employees hear it clearly.

Managers are often the first, and sometimes only, person who can see this and respond.



Strategic vs. Reactive

What our 2025 data shows about where organizations sit. And what it costs.

Reactive Organizations

- Wait for legal mandates to dictate change
- Managers receive a date, not training
- Focus only on pay replacement & time
- 15% measure employee productivity post-leave

Strategic Organizations

- Integrate leave with DEIB, engagement, workforce planning, L&D, Comms
- Equip managers with training + tools across all 3 phases
- Fund coaching, training, and peer support
- 42% measure productivity — nearly 3× more than reactive orgs

Source: 2025 CPLL + The Standard Research



The Six Behaviors That Change Everything

NIH-funded research by Dr's Ellen Kossek & Leslie Hammer, et al.;
Six supervisor behaviors proven to predict whether employees stay.

L **Listen & Give Emotional Support**
Acknowledge the whole person, not just the work status.

A **Adapt Support**
Flex work arrangements, communication, and expectations.

E **Enable Work Flexibility**
Support the logistical reality of working parenthood.

E **Evaluate Current Needs**
Assess what the employee actually needs, not what's assumed.

D **Develop Awareness**
Know available leave policies, benefits, and resources.

R **Role Model Leave Use**
The #1 predictor: managers who take leave give others permission to.



The Science Is In.

The results are measurable. And they're remarkable.

RETAIN Coaching™ Results

100%	would recommend the program
100%	rated it effective
80%	more confident: work + home
67%	reported increased productivity
60%	returned with more confidence

Leave Leader™ RCT Results

293	trained managers
630	employees measured
6 months	longitudinal field study
NIH-funded	grant #2R42AG060347

Results: higher leave use · greater job satisfaction · stronger organizational commitment



Published Research. Not a Claim, a Finding.

"Offering paid sick and family leave is not enough: Leave supportive supervisor behavior training improves policy use, health, and work outcomes."

— Kossek, Hammer, Allen, Lawson, Bodner et al. · Journal of Applied Psychology, 2026

- ✓ Supervisor training increased family leave use at both 3 and 6 months post-training
- ✓ Training improved job satisfaction and organizational commitment vs. untrained control
- ✓ Strongest effects for those who need it most: women, parents with childcare demands, sandwiched caregivers
- ✓ Key mechanism: managers who role-model leave use change employee behavior, not just policy knowledge



The Leave Leader™ Training Trio

Three self-paced trainings. One hour each or less. Every manager equipped.

01
Making Leave Manageable®

- *Parental Leave specific*
- *Evidence-based & human-centric*

The only manager training built on the RETAIN Coaching™ methodology and 10A Transition Touchpoints™. Guides managers through all three phases step by step. Developed by CPLL.

02
Leaders and Leaves™

- *All leave types*
- *NIH-funded & Peer-reviewed*

Extends the framework to medical, bereavement, military, and family care leave. Broadens every manager's leave fluency. Developed by Kossek and Hammer.

03
Supportive Supervisory Behaviors™

- *Manager mindset*
- *NIH-funded & Peer-reviewed*

The behavioral foundation: how supervisors model a culture of support. The six LEADER behaviors in action. Developed by Kossek and Hammer.

Managers who complete all three earn the Leave Leader Certificate of Completion.



What a Difference a Trained Manager Makes

Same employee. Same week back. Two different managers. Two completely different outcomes.

Without Training

- Day 1: Manager says nothing specific. Treats it like any other week.
- Day 3: Employee quietly struggling. No check-in happens.
- Day 30: No check-in.
- Day 60: No check-in.
- Day 78: Employee starts updating their résumé.
- Day 90: They accept an offer elsewhere.

With Training

- Day 1: Manager schedules a dedicated re-entry conversation with an agenda.
- Day 3: Brief check-in — 'How's the workload? Anything to adjust?'
- Day 30: They revisit the transition plan together.
- Day 60: Manager raises a development conversation — 'What do you want next?'
- Day 90: Employee feels seen.
- Result: They stay. They re-engage.

Neither manager was a bad person. One had training and a framework. One didn't.



What Changes When Managers Are Equipped

Current State	With Trained Managers
Managers get a date, not training	**Managers arrive at every phase with a framework and tools**
<33% of employees understand their benefits	**Manager closes the communication gap before leave begins**
55% of parents face PMH with no workplace protocol	**Manager trained to recognize, respond, and refer**
25% actively thinking about quitting	**30-60-90 day check-ins catch the 90-day danger window**
15% of reactive orgs measure outcomes	**Strategic orgs are 2× more likely to measure and improve**

Data: 2025 CPLL & The Standard Research + CPLL PLTA™ Assessment Data



Three Entry Points. One Direction.

The research shows the problem. Where you start depends on where your organization is.

1

Start with a Diagnosis
Lead on Leave™
Policy & Practice Audit

Expert review of your current policy, practice, and culture. Answers: what's the gap between what you've written and what employees actually experience?

2

Start with Your Managers
Leave Leader™
Training Series

Three self-paced trainings. One hour each. Every manager equipped — not dependent on luck or personality. This is a fix that scales.

3

Start with the Full System
RETAIN Coaching Hub™

The only platform built for everyone touched by parental leave: parents, managers, and HR using one evidence-based method, creating a shared language.

There's no wrong starting point. The wrong thing is to keep waiting.



What You Can Do Monday Morning

You don't need a new policy to start. You need a different conversation.

Employee on leave right now?	• Have you honored whatever keep-in-touch agreement was made? • Is the return date on your calendar with a re-entry conversation blocked for day one? • Is the team prepared for their first week back?
Manager with someone going on leave?	• Has the manager had the pre-leave conversation covering transition, coverage, and keep-in-touch? • Does the manager know the 10A Touchpoints? • Have you shared the six LEADER behaviors with your management team?
For your organization	• Audit the gap: what does policy say vs. what actually happens? • Identify which phase — Preparing, During, or Returning — is your weakest link. Start there. • Make leave manager training a professional development expectation or requirement for all managers, not an afterthought.



Questions?

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Learn more about Leave Leader™ training, the RETAIN Coaching Hub™, and the Lead on Leave™ audit at CPLLeadership.com and retaincoaching.com

Turning Leave into Stay™ since 2014