

Five Guiding Principles for Planning Your Parental Leave

A resource for small business owners, entrepreneurs, and freelancers.

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BROUGHT TO YOU BY



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Arianna speaks and writes about parental leave and respectful maternity care as an issue of social justice, human rights, and economic equity. Her work has been published in peer-reviewed journals such as the International Journal of Health Equity, Advances in Social Work, and Ethnicity & Health. She is a co-author of Degrees of Difference: Reflections of Women of Color on Graduate School, published by The University of Illinois Press in 2020, and The Expecting Entrepreneur® is her first solo-authored book.

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FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PLANNING FOR LEAVE

Pregnancy and business involve inherent elements of uncertainty that can leave us feeling nervous, anxious, and ungrounded. In other words, it's hard to prepare for something that can so rapidly deviate from the plan. That's where guiding principles come in. They give us something to hold onto in the midst of so much change.

The principles below are the foundation on which you will build your plan. Entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds and business models have tried and tested these principles with success. Although it's likely that your plan will need to pivot, these principles will allow you to maintain some sense of control. So, let's go through them to see how they can guide you on your journey.

1. Plan to experiment

If you downloaded this resource, you are likely a planner. In my experience, pregnancy, postpartum, and parenting will challenge your type-A planner tendencies. Many expecting entrepreneurs find it frustrating to not have a crystal clear vision for the future. It's impossible to know ahead of time what your birth will be like, what your baby will be like, or how becoming a parent will feel. Therefore, I invite you to begin this phase of planning with a mindset of experimentation. You are making plans with the information you have available right now. As you learn more, these plans may need to adapt to your new reality.

2. Remember the fourth trimester

You've probably been thinking about setting things up so that your business is well taken care of and running smoothly while you are on leave. However, if there's only one thing you take from this resource, I want it to be this: You are the biggest asset in your business. Investing in your well-being during this time will yield long-term benefits for your individual health as well as the health of your business.

Let me explain. In the first few weeks after your child is born, having someone there to do the laundry, cooking, and grocery shopping is key. This might be a partner, a mix of friends and family, or professional support (i.e., assistant, trusted neighbor, postpartum doula). Whoever is in this role needs to take charge of the duties, so you don't have to.

3. Include transition time

The purpose of transition time is to break the mold of working 40 hours a week and then suddenly go to zero and vice versa. I recommend building in a gradual winding down of work prior to 40 weeks of pregnancy, as well as a gradual transition back to work over several weeks, or even months. Your leave can (and should) start before the day your baby is born, considering that full-term babies come anywhere between 37 and 42 weeks. I recommend wrapping up your full-time work at 35 weeks and making sure your team or other systems handle things from there. I have seen business owners scale down to 20, 10, or even just five hours a week in the final few weeks before giving birth, gradually transitioning into leave.

On the flip side, transitioning from being in full-time parenting mode back to your role in your business can be jarring. I recommend a two to six-week buffer as you get back into work mode to help you figure out the right mix of childcare, work hours, and types of tasks that make up the new rhythm of postpartum work and life. So, the first two weeks back to work, you may just be working eight hours a week, then the next two weeks 15 hours, and slowly working your way up. Personally, I view the first six months after the initial return to work as a time of transition. Your energy and capacity will expand and contract—be kind to yourself.

4. Prioritize your health

Building on the being-taken-care-of principle, I like to frame the long-term health of a business as parallel to one's individual health. During the perinatal period and extended postpartum period, your physical, mental, and emotional well-being require consistent attention in order for you to show up and function in the day-to-day operations of your business. However, this care is not only needed during pregnancy and the immediate postpartum phase (where you are likely to be interacting with health care providers on a regular basis). It is also important throughout the first year postpartum, including structuring your return to work with careful considerations of your well-being.

5. Seek out social support

The transition from being a full-time business owner to being both a parent and a business owner is challenging and often lonely. Having people around you who can empathize and provide guidance (when requested!) is important. What we have learned from the research on social support and perinatal health overall is that decreasing isolation is key. A social network of individuals in similar stages of pregnancy or postpartum can be a lifeline, especially in an era where many businesses run online, with a remote team, or with part-time contractors.

REACH OUT

If you have questions, comments, or other feedback, please email support@ariannataboada.com. I would love to hear from you and wish you the very best on this journey.

Additional resources for planning your parental leave are available at www.theexpectingentrepreneur.com