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Firms want their moms back

By JENNIFER GOULD KEIL

Executive moms have new suitors — former employers, who are wooing them back to work in unique ways.

Deloitte & Touche is leading the pack with Personal Pursuits, a pilot program that promises to give qualified employees their jobs back up to five years after they quit.

Designed for women, the program now includes one man, and has attracted 20 participants in just six months.

“A lot of programs we implement in our women’s initiative affect our entire culture,” added Shaun Budnik, a Deloitte auditing partner and head of the firm’s Initiative for the Retention and Advancement of Women.

Deloitte pays for the ex-employees to update their skills and keep in touch with the firm through a mentoring system, online uplink and short-term work assignments.

While there is no contractual obligation to rehire the employees, the intention is genuine, company spokeswoman Mai Browne said.

“Legally, there’s no guarantee. But these people are among our top performers. We want them back,” she said. “We will do everything possible to find them a great opportunity to come back, likely at a simi-

lar or higher pay level, depending on what they have done during their time away to build their skills and networks.”

The program was designed with Catalyst, a research group focusing on women, which found that new moms returning to work are often too out of touch with their networks to succeed.

Personal Pursuits is just one of many innovative new programs out there for women, said Susan Lapinski, editor-in-chief of Working Mother. She cited a recent study by CPRI, of Chicago, that found that 94 percent of all Fortune 500 companies would be likely or somewhat likely to hire moms returning to work.

“There’s a real hunger for women to come back because they bring so many management skills that fit our time — like building teamwork instead of hierarchies,” Lapinski said.

For example, Ernst & Young’s alumni outreach program has benefited both employees and the company, said Deborah Holmes, director of Ernst & Young’s Center of the New Work Force.

“Women are often forced to choose between flexibility and career success. But they’re profes-



MARY LOU QUINLAN
Advocates time off.

sionals, too, and they want a life outside work and career success,” Holmes said. “If you don’t force them to choose, they’ll stay with you and excel at their careers and everybody wins.”

The time-off philosophy is now so popular that one ex-advertising agency’s CEO, Mary Lou Quinlan, wrote a book about it: “Time off for Good Behavior: How Hardworking Women Can Take a Break and Change Their Lives.”

Still, only 18 percent of 450 companies surveyed by the Society of Human Resource Management offer unpaid sabbaticals, and only 4 percent offer paid time off.