

My husband and I wanted to start a family at a time when I was also offered an opportunity to start a new career. Because of this, we put off trying to get pregnant while I established myself in the new job but by the time I had been in the job for 7 months, I was pregnant. As I had been undertaking a traineeship with this new employer, and I was on a contract of 9 months duration, I was worried that I would not be offered a permanent role at the end of the traineeship.

I began to look very pregnant just as the traineeship was drawing to a close. I did not disclose that I was pregnant, but it was very difficult to disguise my growing belly. The boss told me, two weeks before the end of the traineeship contract, that they could not guarantee me a permanent position once the traineeship was finished. So I then had to face the possibility of being out of a job and pregnant. I didn't think I would stand a chance of getting another job as my expanding tummy became more and more obvious. I was pretty upset about everything, as this employer had offered me the job and I had eagerly signed on with them, leaving behind a permanent job which I'd been in for over 2 years.

There are just some things a woman cannot avoid, regardless of which century we are living in, and how good the anti-discrimination laws are. If you are pregnant, the job will go to someone else; it's that simple. I managed to negotiate an extension of the contract for another 3 months, which then took me up to 12 months of service. Then, my tenure was extended again for a further 3 months, to about the time the baby was due. Two weeks before I was due to leave, I was finally granted a full time permanent position. It was a great relief and I was able to then go on maternity leave for the full 52 weeks and relax, knowing that I would have a job to return to a year later. I was paid 12 weeks Maternity Leave and my husband and I were able to pay off the remainder of our car loan with that money as we did not want to go down to one wage and still be paying off this debt. That helped us enormously. My husband had a week off work at the time of our son's birth, taken as parental leave, but it would have been nice for him to have a bit more time at home.

About two months before I was due to return to work I was called at home by the boss asking if I could return to work early. I said I couldn't come back straight away but I could perhaps start back in about another month and since I was still breastfeeding my baby boy and also suffering post-natal depression, I wanted to know if I could work part time for a while. The boss said that they could accommodate my needs so about a month later, I went back to work, two days per week, with a view to increasing this to three days per week in another few months. However I stayed at two days per week as it suited me at that stage. It was a great help, going back to work, in terms of our increased financial needs and also being in the paid workforce again assisted me with my post-natal depression. I began to feel 'normal' again and more myself. However, the change to part time hours was never intended to be a permanent change and I did not sign anything or agree that the change from full time to part time was ever anything but a temporary arrangement while I had a young baby and recovering from PND. I had always intended to return to my full time position at some point. After working part time for 15 months I asked about returning to my full time

position and was told that I was now a permanent part time employee and 'that was that'. I asked why and was told that it was a budgetary thing. I had lost my permanent full time position because I had taken Maternity Leave, had my baby and then needed to work part time for a while (as so many new mums do).

Meanwhile, younger, childless women were taking on permanent full time positions within the organisation and forging ahead with their careers. I was not happy about the situation and voiced my opposition to the boss' decision. About two months later, I found I was pregnant for a second time. I thought that if I fought his decision the boss would argue that I only wanted to return to full time hours so that I could then 'cash in' on the Maternity Leave pay at full time rates instead of part time rates. By this time the entitlement in our EBA had increased from 12 to 14 weeks. I didn't fight it and went on Maternity Leave again, and was paid 14 weeks pay, pro rata based on 2 days per week. This was still a great deal of help to us financially but I still felt ripped off as I believe I should have been able to return to my previous full time position when I asked to do so. I wasn't expecting the second pregnancy as I believed I was infertile at that time. I wanted to return to full time work again as our financial needs had increased enormously since having our first baby, and my husband and I wanted to get ahead a bit, after having to live on his wage plus my part time wage for 3 years. I also wanted to take up where I'd left off with my newfound career and make some inroads. However, once I learned I was pregnant again, I knew that it was a guarantee that my employer would never agree to my returning to full time hours. I knew that his refusal to allow me back on full time hours had more to do with me having a 2 year old, and being in the childbearing age bracket than anything else. I would have been considered too 'high risk' for them financially.

They were better off keeping me on part time hours so they didn't have to pay me Maternity Leave at full time rates. But how does one go about proving that?

It's virtually impossible. I didn't have the energy to fight them on it. I reluctantly stayed on part time hours, not that I had any choice in the matter anyway. The boss' decision was final.

These are all the things a woman has to go through if she wants to have a job and have a family. They are not things that men have to worry about an awful lot. On the whole, a man never has to worry about what impact his decision to have kids will have on his career and job prospects, unless he is planning on being the primary caregiver. This is not meant to sound like I'm having a whinge - it's just the absolute, honest to god truth of the matter. For a woman, the decision to have kids impacts enormously on her career and job prospects.

There is just no way around it.

After the birth of my second baby, a girl, I took the full 12 months entitlement and enjoyed the time at home with my new baby and my 3 year old boy. It was good to know I had a job to go back to after the leave was up, and I was hoping I could try again to get my full time position back and give this stop-start career a proper go. I returned to work on a part time basis at the end of the 12 months and as it suited me at the time, I wasn't pursuing full time hours at that stage. I was still

breastfeeding my baby and wanted to keep up a good milk supply. However after 6 months of working part time I put in a formal request to return to full time hours. At that time, the organisation was expanding and there had been decisions made to employ additional full time staff in the same role I was doing. I thought it could not be a better time for them to put me back to full time hours and surely they would grant my request this time. I was wrong. I was told by the boss once more that the organisation could not grant me a full time position because of the budget. I made it clear to him that I didn't want to have any more kids. I argued that we were increasing fees to fund the extra full time positions, so how could the budget not accommodate my request? My arguments fell on deaf ears. It was endlessly frustrating to say the least. I was advised by my team leader to wait another 6 months before trying again. Three months went by and then the boss stepped down from his position and a new boss was in the job. I thought I would give it another try and see what this new boss would say. By this time, 3 new full time staff had started and I was keen to secure full time hours once more. I emailed the new boss with my request and he said he was aware that I'd put in for full time hours and agreed to have a chat about it with me. The following day, an ad was circulated for a full time position; on a 12 mth temporary basis (all jobs were advertised on this basis, this was not particular to this position). My team leader encouraged me to apply for the position (which I thought was stupid, given I was already doing the job and had done so for a number of years) so I applied for the advertised job and was successful in getting it. In the 'interview' - an informal chat at a coffee shop with the new boss and my team leader - I was told that at the end of the 12 mths, in the worst case scenario, I would return to 2 days per week, rather than be out of a job altogether, as would be the case if things didn't turn out well with one of the new persons. I again reassured the boss that I was not planning on having any more children and that it was my desire to work full time on a permanent basis. He asked me in a serious tone if I was really sure that I wanted to work full time, as he could not imagine his own wife going back to work full time after being a stay-at-home mum for so long. I was shocked by his comment. I wanted to say 'But I'm not *your* wife, I am me and I'm telling you, I want to work full time! Why should me having two kids be a factor in this?' Instead I sipped my latte in stunned silence, inwardly shaking my head at the gall of this bloke. Again, this would not be something a man would have to deal with!

My husband and I had talked about us swapping over the traditional roles for a few years and after I finally got the full time hours again, we started to go hard in paying off the mortgage. He had changed his full time hours to part time, though he was working more hours part time than I had been as a part timer. He was also planning on leaving his job altogether so that he could stay at home with our daughter and also be there for our son as he had started school by then. My husband was really relishing his changed hours and loved being around more for our kids. He was looking forward to giving up his job altogether, so that I could be the breadwinner and he could be the primary caregiver. We were both happy with this arrangement. However, by the time the 12 months was up, my

employer decided to put me back down to 2 days per week. Once more I asked as to the reason why and was told that it was because of 'the budget'. I was once again knocked back for permanent full time hours. The other 3 staff members (new to the organisation) had all been granted permanency at the completion of their 12 mths service. So once more, I had to stand by while newer personnel secured permanent full time jobs and I was downgraded to part time hours. My performance over the previous 12 mths had been good; I was not at all a poor performer, in terms of securing new clients, retaining wavering ones and gaining back lost ones. I was not at all bad at my job. I could not understand this decision at all but after 4 years of this repeated rejection, I had no option but to start looking for other employment. I did that and was fortunate enough to secure a full time permanent position once and for all within another organisation. Amazingly, or maybe not so, my ex-employer found enough money down the back of the couch to advertise not one, but two new full time positions two days after I resigned. I declined to complete their exit interview survey when it arrived in the mail about 4 weeks after I left. I was still too angry.

So on the whole, my experience with having a career and starting a family had a negative effect on my job security. With that employer, it was just one thing after another, the moment it became clear that I was pregnant the first time. While I received some paid Maternity Leave, the other issues were endlessly frustrating and should never have occurred. But this is how it is for women when we are in paid work and want to start a family. It is we who shoulder these issues in the workplace, not expectant fathers. To my mind it should not have to be this hard. I can certainly understand why the majority of women do not return to full time jobs after having kids. It is just way too tiring negotiating the obstacles in our path!