



## 5. FIVE

### Not Hiring Women for Fear They Will Go on Maternity Leave

There are many workplace challenges facing Canadians. From observations while working in the field of workplace and community human rights over many years, Stephen Hammond has chosen what he considers the top 10. This video transcript is intended to start a dialogue. If you feel it may help your workplace or your association, please use it. Print out the text, have a discussion, and try to come to resolutions that can be helpful to your group. The best way to deal with workplace challenges is to talk about them in a respectful way. If you would like to access the video that goes with the transcript, it can be purchased at [HumanRightsTrainingStore.com](http://HumanRightsTrainingStore.com)

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**O**ne of the biggest areas of discrimination against women relates to women having children, or the mere chance a woman may have children. It's also protected by all human rights legislation in Canada. Discrimination based on pregnancy is considered discrimination based on sex or gender.

The term "family values" is used in many different ways in Canada, and in recent years it has taken on certain negative meaning. But for the purposes of this issue, let's say that supporting families is a good thing. If Canadians want to have children, then we should be supportive of that. It is a personal choice and in times gone by married couples were automatically expected to have children. Now-a-days, men and women, single, co-habiting, married, heterosexual, gay, or lesbian – people decide if they want children or not. Since Canada's birth rate is as low as most Western industrialized countries, it seems many people are choosing not to have children, or to have just one.

The workplace studies show consistently that women sacrifice their careers by having children. When you look at a woman's career advancement and salary, if she has had children, she is behind women who have not and way behind men, regardless if they have had children or not. That time she takes off for parental leave is often like an anchor which is tied around her, holding her back ever so slightly. In many cases, the anchor seems to grow bigger. Will she have other children? Will she be taking time off to look after the sick kids or day care needs?

I don't need stats to show this. Let me tell you about the firing of Neil French, one of the top creative directors in the advertising world. On October 6, 2005 Mr. French was here in Canada speaking to a big crowd of advertising execs in downtown Toronto. During the question period, a woman in the audience asked Mr. French why there weren't more women creative directors in the business. He replied:

"Because they're crap." He then made comments that women eventually "wimp out" and "go off and suckle something."

When asked a couple weeks later by the Globe and Mail, he said:

"You can't be a great creative director and have a baby and keep spending time off every time your kids are ill. You can't do the job. Somebody has to, and the guy has to do it the same way that I've had to spend months and months flying around the world and not seeing my kid. You think that's not sacrifice? Of course it's a sacrifice. I hate it. But that's the job and that's what I do in order to keep my family fed."

Mr. French was forced to leave his job with WPP Group, the world's second largest marketing companies.

With the flak his company got from women all over the world, it makes sense that he was forced to leave his job. How insensitive to say women are "crap," "wimp out," and "go off and suckle something." But as far as his views that women can't be relied on because they have to take care of the kids, he was dead on. That is, he was correct that this is how women are perceived and that they are denied opportunities while fathers or potential fathers are not.

We know we will be in a different time and place when a person of Neil French's stature in the business world answers the same question on a big stage and says, something like this:

*"It's because women aren't given the opportunities due to the perception that a woman, whether a mother or not, will be taking care of children and therefore she can't do her job. As a man in this field of work, full of men, I constantly speak up when I see that women aren't supported. It's not fair that women shoulder so much of the downside of having children and having a career at the same time. That's why you don't see many women given these opportunities even though they are just as capable, or even more capable than me."*

Here's what needs to be done to ensure women are not denied opportunities because they choose to have kids, or may choose to have kids:

Think like a scout – be prepared. Don't be surprised when a woman tells you she is pregnant. It takes very little planning to prepare for a woman or a man, who takes time away from work to

have children. Does your company have a separate budget to take care of extra expenses such as training and overlap with another employee? If not, this may be time to get one or make other arrangements.

Value Families. Let everyone in the company know that for those who choose to have children while working, they will get support, with flexibility, with moral support and with policies that don't discriminate against women, or men who take the time to have children.

Erase this form of discrimination. If ever leaders in the organization begin to make decisions based on whether an employee may become pregnant, put a stop to any level of discrimination.

When you are very supportive, you will find parents, or potential parents, will be very up front. Many people keep their family plans a secret because they see how women and men have been treated in the past. When they know their family plans won't work against them, you may find they are much more open. Then they will speak up and offer support for a project, or a job, knowing they want to have children.

If Canadian businesses want to support families, the best way to do it is to make it very clear the support is tangible.

What do you think?

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