The following is a collection of research from phone calls and Skype interviews with companies who have led returnship programs or are leaders in the mothers/parents "return to work" topic, including:

Return Path
Yelp
iRelaunch
Palo Alto Software
MotherCoders
NCWIT

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Proposal

We are proposing an eight- to twelve-week program at Etsy akin to summer college internships, but geared toward mothers returning to the workforce. This program would happen separately from our internship program, and would be focused on helping the returnees get more recent work experience and learn recent technologies.

The program's goal would be to equip the women to return to the workforce by having recent work experience and technical knowledge. We could potentially hire from this pool of women for full-time work at Etsy, but our primary goal is to ready them for a return to full-time work in tech.

Why?

These programs have had a positive effect in the financial and legal industries, and are just now gaining traction in tech. Many women leave the tech industry midway through their

career, and returning to the industry is a challenge due to how fast new technology emerges (for example, developing for native apps). 81% of women are moms by age 44.

Women interested in returning to work after a period of time away have years of experience working in office environments and learning emerging technology, unlike college interns. They are already experienced in managing work/life balance. They may be more senior in their careers already, and the two major barriers to returning to the workforce are the gap in time on their resumes and lack of hands-on time with recent technology. They could bring a great amount of leadership and diverse thinking to our organization.

There are positive side effects of focusing on a program like this at Etsy, including the opportunity to better the culture and working experience for other parents here. Quite a few of the tips we've gathered on how to make a returnship program successful would help improve the quality of working at Etsy for a large group of employees.

Requirements

1. **Teams who take on a returnee need to be explicitly on-board with the effort.**
   Repeatedly we heard that the most successful returnships happened when the manager explicitly understood the need for flexible hours, understood the challenges of parenthood, and understood the value of what this program brings to the organization. Teams should understand that team bonding can happen during normal work hours (not happy hours/after-work activities). Teams should also understand that the returnee's background may not map exactly to the work that the team is currently doing, and that's okay. Etsy should provide training for the managers of these teams and make sure they can function as a supportive cohort, too.

2. **The cohort of returnees needs to start and graduate together.**
   Repeatedly we heard that the strength of the group of returnees aided in the success of the program. The group should all start on the same day, go through the same orientation, be encouraged to meet with each other, and graduate together. There should be planned time for bonding and group activities.

3. **Regardless of whether or not we want to hire the returnees, we should offer resume and interview help.**
   Our goal should be to ready the participants to return to working in the tech industry. Four weeks before the returnees graduate, we should begin looking at opportunities for them at Etsy or in our network, offering resume feedback, interview coaching, and other aid in being ready to return to full-time work.

4. **Given that returnees' children may be a spectrum of ages, make improvements to our environment to be more inclusive for parents.**
   We gathered a number of ideas (more information below) on how installing

industrial-grade breast pumps, giving training to managers on how to navigate tricky parenting topics, and being explicit about flexible work hours can benefit all parents at Etsy, not just returnees.

5. **Create sick time forgiveness/flex working hours.**
    Given that returnees are shifting their schedule and responsibilities to return to work, we should be explicit about this program having flexible hours to accommodate all the scheduling and childcare surprises that may otherwise cause anxiety or confusion. Mothers are more likely impacted by these kinds of surprises, as they are typically the primary caregiver.

6. **Acknowledge the messiness and beta-ness of the program.**
    One of the repeated notes we heard in our research was how important it is to acknowledge that this kind of program is something that will be iterated on over time, won't be perfect the first go-around, and is open to feedback from the returnees. Returning to work after having a child is full of challenging surprises, and it's exponentially more tricky for LGBTQ parents, single parents, and WOC. We want to take every opportunity we can to learn how to improve the program and our culture for the returnees, their teams, and all parents at Etsy.

Logistics

- **Applications:** Other companies have had success reaching out to Facebook parenting groups and parents in their current employees' network to apply to the program.
- **Pay:** ??
- **Timing:** Explicitly not overlapping with our summer intern program, nor during summer vacation.
- **Mentor system:** Other companies have found it beneficial to appoint a mentor for each returnee, much like we do with summer college interns.
- **Corporate support:** iRelaunch is an organization that explicitly offers help to companies testing returnship programs.

Things we can do now, to better parenting @ Etsy

[The New Mothers Group at Etsy has additional ideas!]

Industrial-grade, rented pumps for nursing rooms.

At Etsy we should be really clear about the fact that coming back to work after pregnancy is more intense than coming back from a vacation/sabbatical.

We could offer sensitivity training to managers in how to react to pregnancy news and other traditionally stigmatized topics, such as being sensitive to pump times and moving around scheduled meetings.

Additional Resources

https://hbr.org/search?term=carol+fishman+cohen

http://www.irelaunch.com/node/4352

http://www.fastcompany.com/3044475/second-shift/the-case-for-creating-a-re-entrance-program-for-new-mothers

http://www.irelaunch.com/CareerReentry

http://www.geekwire.com/2014/hey-practice-coders-zillow-wants-unique-3-month-trial-program/

http://www.onlyonceblog.com/2015/04/returnship-program-part-ii

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHZkGh93GsY and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnrxSi8CgdQ