



Born Yesterday

Whether by choice or under pressure, some new moms are back in the office quicker than ever.

Illustration by MATT COLLINS

When Alexis Glick gave birth to her first child in 2001, she was eager to spend at least 12 uninterrupted weeks bonding with him before returning to her high-pressure job as a trader at Morgan Stanley. But five days into her maternity leave, her boss asked her to head up the firm's New York Stock Exchange business—starting immediately. “I remember sitting with my baby and saying, ‘Okay, is this going to be good for you and me or not?’” recalls Glick, now the anchor of Fox Business Network's *Money for Breakfast*. She decided that the offer was the chance of a lifetime, and so, six weeks after having her son, she was back in the office. “There were times when I felt I was giving up my new mommy time, and I felt sad about that,” she says. “But I also realized you don't get those opportunities very often. You have to seize the day.”

While pregnant, Glick never considered that taking a three-month maternity leave would be unreasonable. After all, it was endorsed by her company, and didn't most women take off at least that? Doesn't the body need time to heal? It's not like one day you give birth and then—poof—the next afternoon you have your body and your life back. Or is it? In an era when

France's justice minister recently gave birth on a Friday and attended a cabinet meeting the following Wednesday—and when, more famously, Sarah Palin took just three days off from her Alaskan gubernatorial duties after the birth of her fifth child—an increasing number of women are making childbirth look, if not like magic, certainly a lot easier than it was for their mothers by taking mere weeks, not months, off from work.

“I don't know anybody who is taking three months off anymore,” says a high-profile Manhattan boutique owner who brought her two toddlers to market appointments when they were just weeks old. “You can be tired at home or tired at the Balenciaga showroom,” she says.

Though many companies provide new mothers with six weeks' paid leave, the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act stipulates only that larger companies allow qualified employees 12 weeks of unpaid leave. (In a 2007 survey, out of 173 countries, the U.S. was one of only four that did not offer federally mandated paid maternity leave; Swaziland, Papua New Guinea

“[Work] is my other baby,” says Vanessa von Bismarck. “And in this economic climate, you have to take good care of it.”

Born Yesterday

and Lesotho were the others.) But many women these days are choosing to take only half of that. "By six weeks postpartum, typically everybody looks back to normal [internally]," says New York ob-gyn Rebecca Amaru, who adds that after a second or third child, a woman can feel back to normal in as little as two weeks.

For moms who own their own businesses, taking three months off is often not an option, and can seem especially irresponsible in a financial crisis. "[Work] is my other baby. And in this economic climate, you have to take good care of it," says publicist Vanessa von Bismarck of Bismarck Phillips Communications and Media, who stayed home for three months with her newborn son this winter but worked via e-mail. Designer Rachel Roy, who was away from the office "for weeks, if that" last year after having her second daughter, felt the same pressure. "If I wanted to keep my company afloat, I literally had to go back to work," says Roy, whose mother helps take care of her children.

Meanwhile, some new moms who toil in more traditional corporate environments feel that they have to return to the office quickly so as not to lose the status they've worked so hard to attain, even if their bosses don't verbalize such expectations. "If you're working in a guys' world, you have to play the game," says one hedge fund manager who was on the treadmill three days after giving birth and back at work five days after that.

Amaru's assurances about the resilience of women's bodies aside, a speedy return to the office can have messy consequences. Especially when it comes to breast-feeding. "It's hell," Roy says. "You're trying to make a point or have people respect you, and you have nipple leakage."

"I pumped everywhere," says Celerie Kemble, an interior designer who resumed work almost immediately after having each of her children, Rascal, two, and Zinnia, one, thanks in part to a baby nurse. "The UPS man [at my office] saw more boob in the last couple years than in his teenage heyday."

But the hassles of pumping and leaking often mean that breast-feeding stops shortly after the maternity leave does, and it's a trend that has doctors concerned. According to a recent University of California at Berkeley study, women who take fewer than six weeks off are four times more likely to fail to establish breast-feeding.

CNN anchor Campbell Brown, who had anticipated taking six to eight weeks' leave after having her son in 2007, recalls being asked to moderate a presidential debate in Texas roughly eight weeks after giving birth. She agreed to do it and pumped in the wings during breaks so that she could FedEx breast milk back to her newborn—until a snowstorm delayed all outgoing flights. "My husband said, 'Look, I'm going to have to give him a bottle of formula.' I had an aha moment," Brown says. "I thought, He can have a bottle of formula; it's not going to kill him." (Brown is due again in April and hopes to take six to eight weeks off.)

And then there are the less tangible ramifications of returning to work quickly. "Those [postpartum] weeks are really critical for bonding," says New York ob-gyn Francesco Callipari. "[New moms] miss their babies." Glick spent the final weeks of her maternity leave



"I cried constantly," confesses Alexis Glick about her speedy return to work after having her first son.

"dreading leaving" her son, she says. "I cried constantly." Plus there's the guilt. "I worried that if I went back, I would not be giving my baby what my friends had given theirs," says Glick, who took 14 weeks for her second son and 10 for her third. Pumping and stockpiling breast milk gave her more of a sense of being in control: "That made me feel very connected because I felt like I was doing something really good for them."

"Lack of sleep is also a big deal," Callipari says. "When you're sleep deprived, cognitive function goes down, and your emotional irritability goes way up." Los Angeles designer Jenni Kayne discovered that the hard way after she gave birth to her first child last October. She began bringing her son and a nanny to the office with her just weeks later. "I would come home from work the first week [back] and be like, 'What am I doing?'" she says. "I was exhausted and really emotional. And my husband would say, 'This is why people spend three months at home.'"

Amanda Brooks was consulting at Hogan and Tuleh when she had her daughter, Coco, seven years ago. At the time she was uninspired by her career, so she had no qualms taking three months. "It was a bonding time," she says. "It was just us. No nanny, no help." But by the time her son was born two years later, Brooks employed a nanny so she could return more quickly to consulting part-time at Tuleh. She attributes one difference in her children's behavior to the disparate maternity leaves: "My daughter is much more dependent on me than my son," she says, sounding as if she's not sure whether that's a good thing or a bad thing.

"Any mother will tell you that if she feels she really hasn't had a chance to attach to her kid, it's extremely stressful," says Amaru. But in the end, many women want to return to their jobs fairly quickly. And Amaru says that's okay. "You'll find just as many women who are depressed because they stayed home too long. I think that kids are better off with well-adjusted mothers."

By hiring a nanny to help with her second child, Brooks realized how much more time she had for herself and for a job that she loved. "When Coco was born, I would never even have a babysitter on the weekend. I was really moral about it. And as joyous as those moments were, part of it was slightly miserable," she admits. "I was being too much of a martyr to the mom world."

—EMILY HOLT

Above, from left:
Working moms
Celerie Kemble;
Campbell Brown;
Alexis Glick;
Rachel Roy.

KEMBLE: JAMIE MCCARTHY/WIREIMAGE; BROWN, ROY: DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/WIREIMAGE; GLICK: JAMES DEVANEY/WIREIMAGE