12-1-2006

The Workaholic's Guide to Planning for Maternity Leave

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Of course, all my planning came to naught. My last day at work was *supposed* to be Friday. I would then have a whole week to get things ready at home before the baby arrived. After all, this was my first pregnancy, the one everyone always says is going to be late. I saw no point in spending a whole lot of time at home, twiddling my thumbs and surfing through reruns on the TIVO.

The baby arrived on Wednesday.

Fortunately, I had already prepared the library for my maternity leave. I had trained the library webmaster on many other technical tasks, I transferred the bulk of the work for faculty course pages to our faculty administrative assistants, and I had created a 65-page document covering every possible contingency.

Sixty-four of these pages were devoted to my electronic resources duties (one page was for reference duties). The document covered everything from troubleshooting the proxy server to obtaining statistics from our subscription databases. It explained how to handle the day-to-day operations of the Electronic Resources Group, describing what the webmaster and the two student programmers should be doing in the coming weeks. It included detailed instructions, complete with snapshots, for especially important tasks. And it reassured everyone that everything would be just fine during the twelve weeks I would be at home with my new baby.

Debbie Ginsberg is Electronic Resources Librarian at Chicago-Kent College of Law. Pictures of her baby are posted at http://www.flickr.com/photos/debgpi.
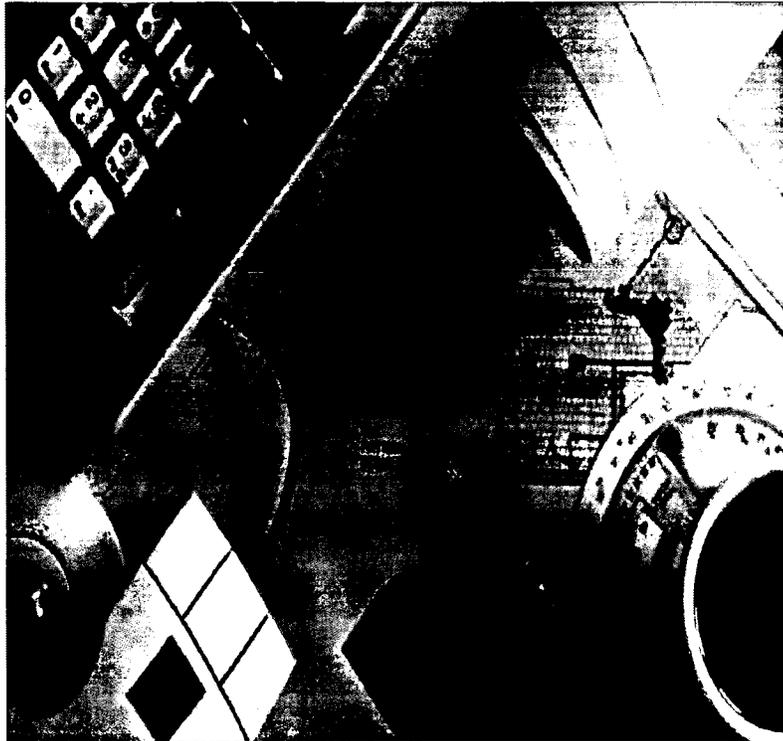
The Workaholic's Guide to Planning for Maternity Leave (continued)

If you're an electronic resources librarian who expects to be out on maternity leave or paternity leave soon:

1. Congratulations!

2. Plan early — babies can come at any time, often when they are least expected. I had completed the bulk of my documentation by early November even though the baby wasn't due until late December.

3. Write out every task you do each day — both what's covered by your job description as well as all of the other matters you handle. I had accumulated a lot of tacit knowledge that I hadn't the chance to pass on yet. By writing out everything, I was able to easily determine what the other librarians and staff members needed to know when I was away.

4. Train others to handle as many of your tasks as you can — The added benefit of this is even after I returned, other people still handle those tasks!

5. Beware of over-planning — At 65 pages, my document was too long. It was sometimes difficult to find instructions for the most important tasks.

6. Make sure the information is accessible to everyone who needs it — Wikis are ideal for this kind of document because they are searchable and can be easily modified. Unfortunately, we couldn't install the wiki software properly in time for my leave, so I uploaded a PDF to the library's intranet instead.

7. Realize you can't plan for everything, but know that all issues will work themselves out — I had specially trained two student workers to assist the library webmaster during my absence. Both had assured me they would remain at the library throughout the spring semester. Both were gone by the middle of January. Despite this setback, the webmaster was more than able to handle her projects.

Planning for maternity leave was a difficult but rewarding project. It forced me to better organize my work and my time. It allowed me to train others to handle routine tasks. And, in the end, I got a marvelous baby and 12 weeks off with relatively few worries about how the library was holding up. Everyone was fine while I was away – but they were awfully glad to have me back when I returned!

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