

A When Mark Zuckerberg announced that he and his wife were expecting their first child, he said he was going to take two months' parental leave after his daughter was born.

B Yes, he made a very public announcement about it on Facebook and then on the first of December last year, he told the whole world the daughter was born.

A Apparently it's had a positive flow-on effect for Facebook employees - the company now officially offers four months' paid parental leave.

B That is good, but it's a pity it wasn't done until Mark Zuckerberg realised it was necessary for himself.

A But people knew what they were letting themselves in for when they went to work there - Facebook's always been known as a lucrative place but you have to be able to take the high pressure.

B That's true. They were pretty much only hiring young people and made no secret about preferring younger, childless employees who were presumed to be more productive. Mark Zuckerberg once said: "Young people just have simpler lives. Simplicity in life allows you to focus on what's important."

A You can't blame him - he was probably young at the time.

B He was about twenty-three I think.

A And now their people are getting older and their needs are changing.

B All the same, I think that when you run a big company, you should ensure the policies are broad and inclusive enough to make employees with children feel they fit in and are appreciated. Because otherwise, of course, it's the women who suffer. Tech companies are already known to employ a disproportionately small number of women.

A But it's a good thing that these firms are willing to change their policies when they realise people are dissatisfied. There's not any absolute need for them to do so, with the constant flow of young people coming up, ready to take the place of someone who's unhappy with their work.

B For too long, employees have had to sacrifice their family life to their work out of fear that if they admit they're struggling, they'll not be considered committed to their work.

A But I don't think it's just the employees who are under pressure to battle on with long hours in the office, being connected at home, and weekend hackathons. Clara Shih is the chief executive of the social media marketing management platform she founded, and her husband is a tech founder and chief executive of Halo Neuroscience. When they recently had their first child, she said: "Being a tech founder is all-consuming; you can never really turn off. You can't skimp on your start-up, and you can't skimp on your family, so you end up skimping on yourself. "

B Yes, they're expected to lead by example, roll up their sleeves and just get on with the work. But they're shooting themselves in the foot.

A recent study found that sixty-three per cent of start-up founders who are also parents said that every day was a struggle to balance parental duties and their work at the start-up. Only ten per cent of the four thousand respondents didn't have that problem. And some reported that when they were the first person at the company to have a child, they would then discover that there was no existing parental leave policy.

A The positive thing is that it's changing now. Spotify has headquarters in London and Stockholm and offices worldwide - it now offers full-time employees six months' paid parental leave plus one month of back- to-work transition when they can work flexible or shorter hours. So the change is now involving tech firms all over the world, not just in Silicon Valley. Employees are also being encouraged to talk with their bosses about their family life and set up schedules that enable them to accomplish what they need to, inside and outside of work.

B About time too. This should have positive results for female employees. Women's careers are affected much more substantially than men's when companies don't have such policies. That's why women tend to be the ones who ask for family-friendly policies like paid leave or flexi-time. It's also women who feel they have to work extra hard once they've got children to change the perception that they're not serious about their careers.

**Outline** Employees are under pressure with long hours in the office, being connected at home, and weekend hackathons, but so are start-up founders who are parents: they find every day is a struggle to balance parental duties and their work at the start-up. Big companies should ensure their policies are broad and inclusive enough to make employees with children feel they fit in and are appreciated, because when companies do not have such policies, women's careers are affected much more substantially than men's. Not until he and his wife were expecting their first child did Mark Zuckerberg realise that parental leave was necessary, and now Facebook officially offers its employees four months' paid parental leave. The change is now involving tech firms all over the world, not just in Silicon Valley.

### Questions

1 During job interviews, will you inquire about a company's policies on flex-time and paid parental leave? 2 Would you be attracted to working for a company that openly declares it prefers employing young people? 3 Should employees be encouraged to talk to their boss about their family life, or is it better to keep one's private life separate from one's professional life? 4 Is the younger generation more aware of the importance of work-life balance?