

Santa Barbara News Press
July 24, 2002

Letter to editor

By Paul Orfalea

Founder & Chairperson Emeritus - Kinko's, inc.

**“Paid Leave: \$2 a Month;
Happy Workers: Priceless”**

When I started Kinko's over 30 years ago I was fortunate to be surrounded by co-workers who believed in and supported the business. As Kinko's grew into what would eventually become the world's largest document copying service, I found a company is no larger than the dedicated people who come to work everyday and give their time and energy to help a business grow.

I also found that, just like me, my co-workers had lives outside of the stores. When they felt motivated about coming to the branch or office, they worked better and Kinko's thrived.

Many businesses have lots of machines, but our competitive advantage was the sparkle in the workers eyes.

Various things make people feel good about their work, not the least of which is when they feel respected and valued by their employers. When one of my co-workers grieved, I grieved.

When I could help them deal with the challenges that they faced in their lives, not only did I feel good, the business prospered. Productivity was up, turnover was lower, and our customers had a more positive experience when each store ran like a well-oiled machine. Again, I could always tell whether it was a good store by that sparkle in the worker's eyes.

Recently, legislation was introduced that would provide paid leave to workers who must take time off from work to care for a seriously ill family member or to bond with a new child. Not surprisingly, there is opposition to this bill.

Opponents of SB 1661 typically say the costs of providing such a benefit would harm the bottom line and competitiveness of companies doing business in California. With a cost of about \$2 per employee per month shared between the worker and the employer, that argument barely holds water.

It seems that it would cost a business more if it didn't provide this type of insurance, especially in these tough economic times. Families are struggling to care for aging parents and young children while maintaining dual careers.

It only makes sense that when a medical crisis arises or when a new child comes into the home, that the already limited resources become even more important. A responsible employer does not want their workers to suffer hardship. However, we know that millions live below the poverty level or barely above it.

Expanding the State Disability Insurance to include a benefit for people taking leave to care for family makes sense. It seems a fair solution to the inevitable problem of medical crises. Among the bill's supporters are early childhood development organizations, elder care agencies, women's rights groups and family services agencies. Even businesses think that paid family leave is a good idea; they just don't want to pay for it.

Being a responsible corporate citizen is not an easy task. It takes a strong commitment to give back to the community, actively protect the environment and to offer employment, all while delivering a return on shareholder investment. But it can be done; it has been done. It must be done.

Paul Orfalea is founder and chairperson emeritus of Kinko's Inc.