

My first performance review after maternity leave was disappointing. It was difficult to be a great mom and a great employee. - AOL.com

Source: gnews-performance-review | **Published:** March 20, 2026 | **PMS Relevance:** PMS CORE | **Type:** Opinion/Commentary | **Geography:** United States

Source URL: <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMijAFBVV95cUxNMINKWXNOMUJJVUpzUWVLd0Jvell>

Executive Summary

This article addresses the intersection of postpartum recovery, workplace re-entry, and performance evaluation in the United States. The author, a working mother and primary household earner, recounts returning from maternity leave following a medically complicated delivery and subsequently receiving a lower performance rating — dropping from 'Exceptional Contributor' to 'Successful Contributor' — with direct implications for promotions and compensation. The author argues that standard annual performance review frameworks fail to account for the physical and psychological demands of postpartum recovery, nor do they adjust for reduced availability during parental leave periods. Key evidence is drawn from the author's personal experience, including health complications, sleep deprivation, and the absence of a structured workplace transition plan. A 2024 Parentaly survey is cited, noting that only 20% of expecting mothers in the US receive career support from their manager throughout the parental leave experience. The article concludes that performance management systems in the US workplace are structurally misaligned with the realities of new parenthood, particularly for birthing parents, and that this misalignment carries material financial and career consequences.

Key Insights

1. Performance review ratings tied to a full 12-month output cycle may systematically disadvantage employees who were absent for a portion of that year due to parental leave, creating an implicit penalty for taking leave.
2. The absence of structured transition plans — both before and after parental leave — leaves returning employees without clear recalibrated goals, exposing them to evaluation criteria that do not reflect their actual availability or circumstances.
3. Physical recovery from childbirth can extend well beyond the duration of even 'generous' parental leave policies (the author reports not feeling fully recovered until seven months postpartum), suggesting a gap between policy design and biological reality.

Practical Takeaways

- Annual performance goals for employees on parental leave may warrant prorated adjustment to reflect the actual months of employment within the review cycle rather than a full 12-month assumption.

- The presence or absence of a formal re-entry transition plan appears to influence how effectively returning parents can recalibrate to workplace expectations — its absence is identified here as a contributing factor to performance decline.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article provides a detailed, emotionally coherent first-person account that illustrates specific, concrete mechanisms by which performance management systems may disadvantage postpartum employees — including goal-setting timelines, rating nomenclature, and HR file permanence. The narrative is specific rather than generic, lending it descriptive credibility. **Limitations:** This is a single anecdotal account and cannot be generalised. No causal claims are supported by comparative data. The one external data point cited — a 2024 Parentaly survey — originates from a parental leave consultancy with a commercial interest in the topic, which introduces potential bias in framing. The article does not engage with employer perspectives, HR policy rationale, or alternative interpretations of the rating change. The piece was originally published by Business Insider, a consumer media outlet, not a peer-reviewed or academic source. **Bias:** The article is written from a strongly advocacy-oriented personal perspective. While the experience described is valid as testimony, the framing presents one interpretive lens without acknowledging confounding factors such as objective output differences, manager subjectivity, or organisational rating calibration processes.

Organizational Practice

The article describes a US-based organisation that provided 12 weeks of paid parental leave but did not implement a structured transition plan for the employee before departure or upon return. Annual performance reviews used a tiered rating system ('Exceptional Contributor', 'Successful Contributor') with ratings linked to promotion eligibility and stored as reference points for compensation decisions. Goals were set on a 12-month basis without adjustment for parental leave absence.

Strategic Implications

The article surfaces a tension in PMS design between standardised annual evaluation cycles and variable employee availability due to leave. It points to a gap between leave policy generosity (measured in weeks) and performance system design (measured in annual output), suggesting these two organisational systems may operate independently rather than in coordination. The cited statistic — that 20% of expecting mothers receive manager-led career support through the leave experience — indicates low prevalence of formalised re-entry support, which may have downstream effects on post-leave performance ratings and talent retention among working parents.

Validation Status: passed
