

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



265 Six-Month Job Leave Program to Start a Business

How would you like to be able take off from your job for up to six months in order to start a business, knowing that your employer would have to put you back on the payroll if you decide to return to that job? I'm Jerry Roberts and I'll tell you where to find such a deal, next, on The Extra Point.

In America the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act allows employees to perform military service and to return to their job with status, seniority and rate of pay as though they never left. The law does not cover independent contractors, just employees. However, another country has just upped the ante a bit.

In Sweden, employers now give workers up to six months leave from work to start their own business. If they succeed they can separate from the employer. If they decide to return to their former job, like the USERRA provisions, the employer is required to take them back. Thus, it's a bit of a safety net if things don't go as hoped.

Maybe you're saying to yourself, "Sweden is a socialist country with sky-high tax rates, free medical care for all, free higher education, 18-month parental leave during pregnancy and after giving birth — so sure, it would work there." But the entrepreneurship scheme is different in that it was conceived to boost the country's business scene, and thousands of workers have taken advantage of it.

Here's some of the small print. The leave is unpaid, and may only be redeemed by employees once per employer. Employers are only entitled to reject the request if there are significant operational reasons or if the new business is considered a direct competitor.

So, what has been the impact? Sweden hasn't kept official records of the number of people

who have taken advantage of the program. However, over the past decade, there has been an increase in the number of people who have registered for leave, while the number of registered businesses has nearly doubled. Observers have credited the entrepreneurial leave plan for helping to drive that.

Here's a fact that might get your attention. After Silicon Valley, Stockholm has the world's highest number of billion-dollar start-ups per capita, including major names like Spotify and Minecraft. In the U.S. there are five start-ups for every 1,000 employees. In Sweden, there are 20.

Has the thought yet crossed your mind, "What's in it for the employer?" To begin, disruption. You have to keep a position open on the team in case former workers return. Therefore, the replacement worker is considered temporary until six months have passed? I don't know.

I did peel back the onion enough to find a legitimate advantage for the employer. It's this: most workers in this leave program are not successful in their own business and many do return to their job. When they do, the reports are they are more energized, more engaged, and they appreciate their job more.

So far, Sweden is the only country where such a job leave program exists. I'm not sure it could work in the U.S., but would you like six months to think about it?

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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