

CASE STUDY:

The Single Mom Who Boomeranged Back to Work

Evangeline Eng

- Deer Park, NY, 56 years old
- Associate Fellow, Estée Lauder Companies, Inc.
- Single mom of one son, 16

HER JOB:

As a scientist for Estée Lauder, she manages the third-party manufacturer product development from concept to commercialization.

PARENT SUPPORTS SHE HAS USED:

- Flexible hours
- FSA, applied to before/after-school care
- ERG participation

Evangeline's Story

Evangeline's story is a twisty one, that shows how—and why—valuable progress is made. When Evangeline was a young, ambitious scientist at Estée Lauder, she figured she'd never be a mother. "I said, it's impossible, there's no work-life balance, and I'm never going to do it," she recalls. Then, her own mother got sick, and she found herself pulled into her care, more and more. She'd have to call in sick or use her vacation days, and by the time her mother died, Evangeline was burnt out and quit.

“I'm a survivor and a doer, and I've seen everything evolve. Coming back, I didn't even bother interviewing anywhere else.”

Needing a fresh start, she moved from the New York area to Arizona to work for a lower-key competitor, and there, in her 12 years away from Estée Lauder, she had a son and eventually launched her own business. She was able to be Craig's Class Mom, and to participate in her son's life in ways she never could have imagined doing in her former work life. It was idyllic.



Then, a plot twist: When her little boy was six, her extended family had needs that drew her back to the East Coast...and back to her former employer. And by then, Estée Lauder, “was totally changed,” says Evangeline. “Now, we have five months of family leave, ramp up, or a flexible schedule if you need.” As a single mom, she found that the new benefits and culture made life and ambition possible. “I had before- and after-school care and could save up pre-tax for Craig's summer camp,” she says. She flexed her hours to line up with the school day—a shift that made her more productive as she worked with teams across the globe in other time zones, and she was better able to work through the pandemic, too.

These days, Craig is in high school, but care work is never truly finished, and shouldn't have to be. “My dad is super healthy right now,” Evangeline says, but through her job, “there's senior daycare available if and when he needs it.” And when and if he does, Evangeline knows she's set up to be able to stay. →

“Boomerangs” bring extra value.

As a “boomerang employee”—someone who has left and come back, Evangeline brings both institutional knowledge, and all of the new skills she learned in her time away, to her team. Boomerang employees also have higher levels of engagement and loyalty than those who never left. High employee engagement has been shown to yield a 14% increase in productivity.



After-school care is still paying off years later.

“I have zero help. If I had to stay late at work, it was me, or nobody,” says Evangeline. After-school care, paid for with pre-tax dollars from her FSA, solved that for her family. And while Craig is old enough now that he doesn’t need babysitting, Evangeline still credits it for enabling her to maintain and grow her career. And her team members with children—including Evangeline—have access to backup child care, too

Flexible school-day hours enhance productivity.

Evangeline has kept her 7:30 a.m. start time, which aligns with Craig’s school start time, for years because, she says, it makes her less stressed and more efficient. It’s also created four specific pluses for her company:

- 1) Efficient use of equipment:** “Early in the morning, I can knock off a lot of lab work that requires specialty equipment. I don’t have to waste time waiting in line because other people are on it.”
- 2) Focused email time:** “By the time others get in at 9, I’ve had four workdays, and I’ve gotten through all of my emails,” she says.
- 3) Better alignment with European hours:** “We’re global—any calls and meetings with Europe need to take place by 2 p.m. My start time lets me take those calls first thing, and my European colleagues don’t have to stay late. It’s beautiful.”
- 4) Open afternoons for staff development:** “I get 80% of my responsibilities done by noon,” says Evangeline. So in the afternoon, she hosts an extra hour of “office hours” for mentoring. Mentored employees have been shown to have a 19% increase in daily revenue. She also uses that time to participate in multiple affinity groups and philanthropy.

Calculating the employer’s estimated R.O.I. on benefits she used in the past year

INVESTMENTS

FSA administration: **Typically around \$60**

15 days of backup daycare available (estimated cost based on the average daily cost of daycare in NYC area): **\$2,596**

One-Year Investment **\$2,656**

RETURNS

14% increased engagement as a boomerang employee (calculated based on an estimated industry benchmark base salary band midpoint of \$190,000 for role/level): **\$26,600**

Added value of 5 hours of mentoring per week (based on the difference between a coaching rate of \$200/hour and her estimated hourly compensation): **\$25,642.50**

One-Year Savings **\$52,242.50**

18.7x R.O.I