

# Learning about First 1,000 Days of Life Inspires Changes at Schwan's Company

## Company implements Cleo program and extends paid maternity leave

Scott Peterson, chief human resource officer of Schwan's Company, initially learned about the lifelong impact of the first 1,000 days of life at an Itasca Project breakfast meeting.



As he sat listening to Dr. Jakob Tolar, dean of the University of Minnesota Medical School, describing the science behind brain development, he was inspired to re-examine his company's approach to supporting families, particularly those with young children — and to join the Itasca Project task force on the first 1,000 days. Peterson is a member of the Itasca Project, an employer-led alliance drawn together by an interest in new and better ways to address regional issues that impact the future economic competitiveness and quality of life in the Minneapolis-St. Paul region.

Peterson decided to look into new ways for Schwan's Company to support families and expectant parents. His team's research into various programs and approaches led to two significant benefits enhancements: implementation of two [Cleo](#) programs and an extension of paid maternity leave.

### Benefit solution for working parents and caregivers

Cleo is a company that partners with employers to offer benefits for working parents and caregivers, from prenatal through 12 years old. Cleo Baby provides support and information to help employees from pregnancy through a child's first birthday. The program answers questions about topics such as birth preparation, newborn care and feeding, newborn sleep, mental wellness for new parents, return to work and many more. Cleo Kids is designed for families with children between the ages of 1-12. The program covers topics such as positive discipline, childcare 101, creative learning, building healthy habits, and provides support on parental confidence, adolescent transition and more.

The goal of the program is to help employers attract and retain the best talent and to foster a diverse and inclusive workplace by supporting parents. Any Schwan's Company employee can take advantage of the free benefit. Schwan's Company rolled out Cleo on February 1, 2021, and has received great feedback from employees as they've learned about the program.

Peterson said, "This benefit is a way for us to support our employees in their most important work as parents, spouses, and partners."

### Brain development research influences changes

Schwan's Company is a leading food company based in Minnesota that offers brands like Red Baron®, Tony's®, Freschetta® and Big Daddy's™ pizza, Edwards® and Mrs. Smith's® desserts, and Bibigo® and Pagoda® Asian-style foods to retailers and foodservice operators throughout North America.

According to Peterson, nearly 80% of the company's employees are in the field, which means navigating family responsibilities and work can be a challenge for the parents and caregivers among their 7,500 employees.

"We have a talented workforce, and we want to retain our employees and help us remain an attractive place to work," said Peterson. "We also see supporting families as part of our civic and societal role. We need to invest in children, particularly in those early months and years of life."

Brain development research has advanced tremendously since Peterson's children were young. The father of three did not realize that 80% of the brain develops by age 3 and that an infant's brain reaches half their adult size within three months. Learning more about the science led him to research and implement programs for extending paid maternity leave so parents can spend those critically important early weeks focused on their babies.

"Through my work on the First 1,000 Days Task Force, I've become a passionate advocate for creatively thinking of ways that employers can support families with young children," said Peterson.

"We're excited to join the Little Moments Count social movement to ensure that all children have the experiences needed early on so they can have a bright future."

