

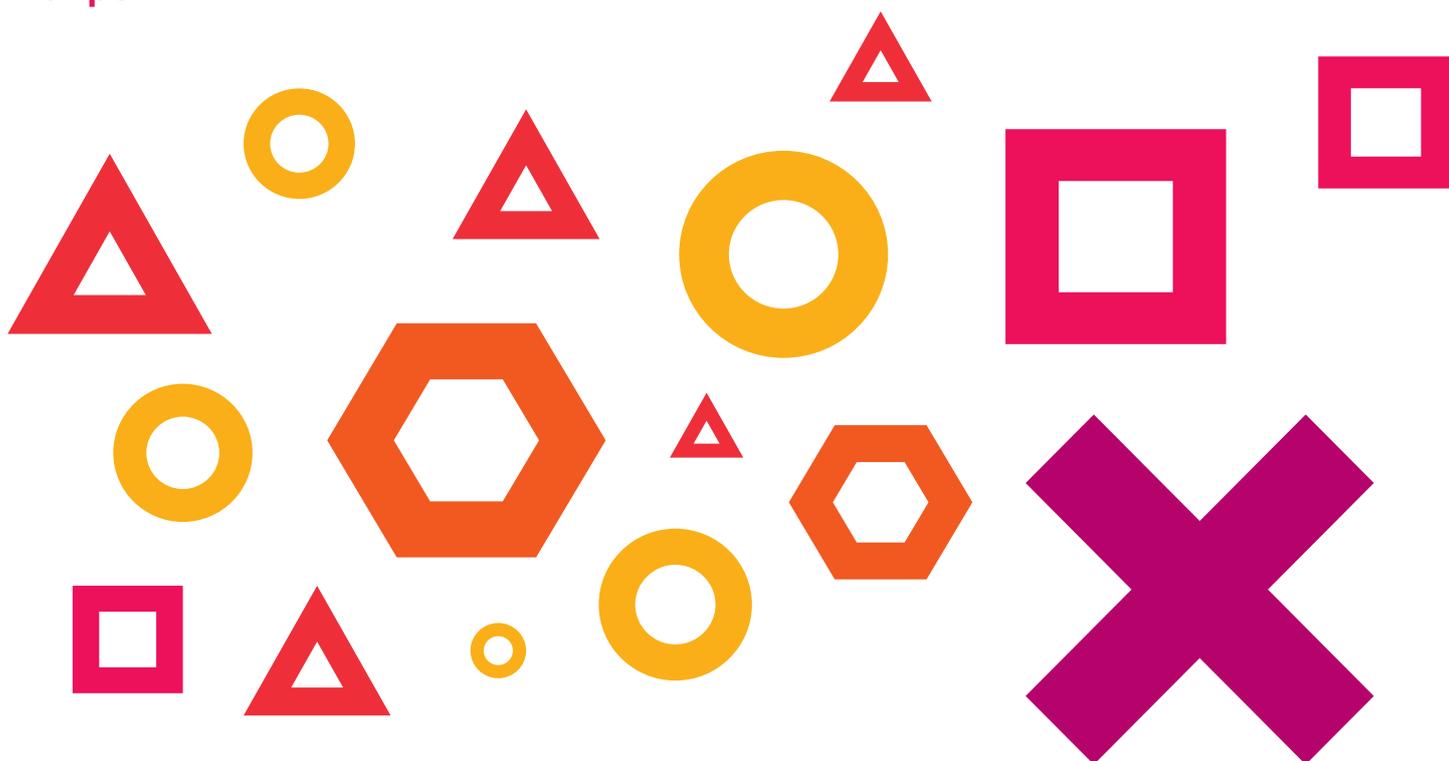
A guide to returning to work after a career break

Introduction

Whether you're starting a family, have gone back to school, were caring for a relative or travelling the world, it's not unusual to take time away from work to focus your efforts on other areas of importance. In today's economic climate, non-linear career paths are the new normal; employers understand that life isn't as straightforward as a one-way ladder to the top and most of us will take a break at some point to focus on something non-work related.

Whatever your motives for taking a career break, there's no reason why you can't jump right back in after some time away from the workplace. However, we know this can be easier said than done. In reality, returning to work can be a daunting prospect, whatever your level of seniority within an organisation, especially if it means hitting the jobs market after an extended period of inactivity.

Our guide explores the multitude of reasons you might take a career break and provides some helpful tips to prepare you for your first day back and getting to that point!



Returning to work after maternity leave

Coming back to work after having a baby can be emotionally challenging – even if it's not your first time. In a recent survey of more than 1,000 women run by MMB Magazine, less than a fifth of respondents felt happy and confident about returning to work. From leaving your baby for the first time to juggling childcare arrangements, there's a lot to consider and so many preparations to make for your return. For women entering the jobs market following maternity leave, it can be all the more nerve-wracking. Planning ahead can help to mitigate some of the stress and allow for a much smoother transition back to work.

Review your career goals

As well as caring for your baby, maternity leave can allow for time to reflect on your career aspirations and reassess your goals. If you made a back-to-work plan prior to taking your leave, now is a good time to review that plan and decide whether it still holds up. Do you still feel the same about your career? What are your long-term aspirations? Does your current employer offer opportunities that reflect your ambitions? As a new parent, you may be seeking a role that allows for some extra flexibility with your schedule. Perhaps there's even scope in your current role for you to scale down your working days. If you hold a senior position, going part-time could result in less responsibility, but it all depends on the practices and policies of the company.

On the other hand, for some working mothers a 9-5 job is preferable for the peace of mind gained when the clock strikes five. You're entitled to change your mind but making a decision as early as possible will allow you to put the wheels in motion for your return to the workforce.

Ease your way back in

Beyond the logistical challenges and the emotional strain of leaving your little one in the care of someone else, it's normal for new mothers to feel out of the loop and even side-lined by those who covered their duties during their leave. If you're returning to your old job, take the time to reconnect with your manager as well as your colleagues to keep abreast of internal and industry changes. Even just a few casual meet-ups can help to ease you back in to the swing of things and soften the blow of your first day back.

Appreciate your self-worth

Having spent most of your days nurturing and responding to the needs of a baby, you may feel unprepared or unsure of the value you can add to a business. Yet, being a new mother in itself requires women to multi-task like never before, acquire new skills, operate on an unpredictable sleep cycle and make the right decisions under pressure in unfamiliar territory. Having a baby forces you to be hyper-organised – if anything, you're returning to work with more skills and value to add than ever before!

It's all in the planning

As you near the end of maternity leave, making provisions ahead of your first few weeks will help you to balance your new responsibilities with work-related demands and establish a new routine. Addressing issues such as breastfeeding arrangements, childcare, re-induction, office arrangements, workload and additional support ahead of time will ensure a smooth return that isn't bursting at the seams with last-minute worries.

Team up with a recruiter

If you aren't returning to your former workplace and wish to find something new that reflects career goals and suits your schedule, teaming up with a specialist will help you to navigate the jobs market and find a role that meets your needs. Even if you have a role waiting for you with your current employer, it's still worth connecting with a recruiter who understands your industry in case any exciting opportunities arise, or you change your mind upon return.



Returning to work after a career break

Whether you spent your time away from work travelling the world, studying or simply focusing on your personal wellbeing, returning to the workplace after a career break or sabbatical will be a significant change of pace. Of course, settling back into an old routine or establishing an entirely new one isn't the only difficulty you might face. For eager job seekers approaching the market following some time off, even the smallest gap in your CV can feel like a gaping void.

While employers are increasingly recognising the shift away from traditional career paths and are generally more understanding about career breaks, there are certain steps you can take to position yourself as a desirable candidate and prepare yourself for the next step in your career.

Assess your situation

Before you start firing out job applications, it's a good idea to take some time to re-assess your situation. If it's clear to an employer that the next few years are shrouded in uncertainty for you, they will likely focus on another candidate. Approaching the market with confidence, determination and a clear direction will give you the best chance of landing the job of your dreams, but that means defining exactly what a dream job means for you at this stage in your career. Things change, and the type of work you want to do as well as the sector, location and hours might not be the same as they were before your break. Making these decisions now will make the process more productive.

Be upfront about your break

If you are looking for a new job following a career break, it's inevitable that potential employers will quiz you about your time off. When they do, your ability to confidently

explain the reason for your break will determine how it is perceived by an interviewer, so it's a good idea to think ahead. An unexplained gap in employment can ring alarm bells for hiring managers, and rightfully so. With this in mind, it's best to be upfront in your CV and cover letter with regard to the reason for your break and your plans moving forward.

Get ready to return

One of the biggest hurdles that people face following a career break is the feeling of being left behind as industries evolve, technology advances and common practices change. Whether you're planning to come back to the same sector or start a job in a new one, keeping up to date with new developments and market trends can ensure you enter the jobs market informed and prepared. A simple way to stay in the loop is to sign up for newsletters, alerts and blogs, but you should also try to commit to a few networking events to get an idea of the conversations the industry is having.

Try temping

If you're looking to get back into full-time work, exploring temporary opportunities could be an avenue that opens the door to a permanent position in your chosen discipline. Even if the temp job doesn't convert into a permanent position at that same company, it will still develop your skills and build your foundation for a full-time career.

Work with a pro

If you're unsure of how to put your best foot forward in a job application or interview, your best bet is to team up with a specialist recruiter whose job it is to help you craft your proposition as a candidate in order to place you in a role you are suited to. The right recruiter will help prepare you for the job placement process, advise you on how to improve your resumé and coach you on interview techniques to give you the best chance of success.

Returning to work in a whole new field

If returning to work from a career break wasn't daunting enough, diving into a different discipline in an entirely new sector can be intimidating on a whole other level. When every job spec you see demands relevant experience, you may feel your CV is as good as blank. Not only must you prepare for your re-entry in to the workplace, but you must find your footing on a new career ladder altogether.

The good news is it's not impossible to move into a field you want to work in, but if you are to convince a prospective employer to give you a chance, there are certainly things you can do to help your case:

Build your network

Change requires work, but the right connections can help you get your foot in the door and facilitate your transition into the industry. Attending talks, seminars and classes will not only help in familiarising yourself with the sector and becoming a part of the community, but it can bring you together with industry professionals – even if your new relationships don't convert into a job overnight, it certainly can't hurt to grow your professional network when you're switching lanes in your career.

Refocus your CV

Rather than drawing attention to your employment history, craft your CV with your skills at the centre – after all, regardless of the roles you held previously, there will undoubtedly be a number of transferrable skills you can carry over. If you have taken time off to retrain in preparation, don't just simply list off the jobs you had in the past - communicate your story and the passion that inspired you to make such a transformational change in your career path.

Make use of your free time

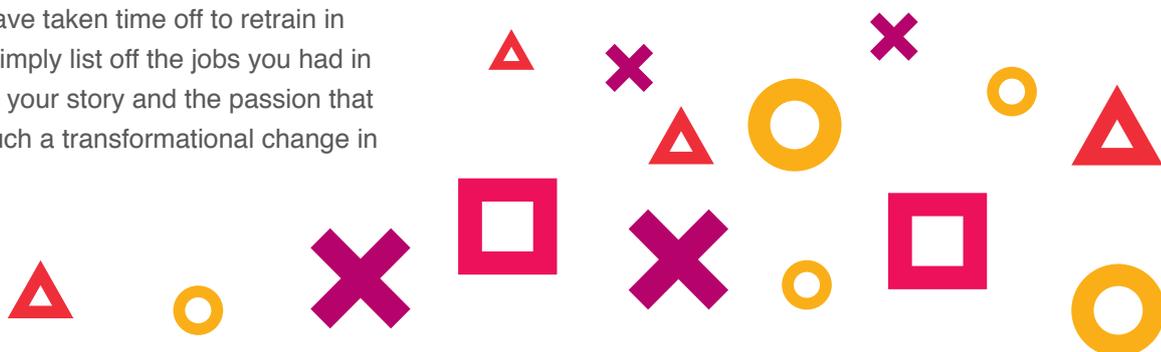
Your biggest advantage in the job search will be your enthusiasm for the profession, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't make use of your free time to learn and upskill. Training courses need not break the bank, and there are plenty of free resources and retraining programmes that allow you to expand your knowledge on a budget. Depending on the nature of your new work, taking on projects in your spare time could help you build up valuable experience in your new profession.

Explore temporary recruitment

The temporary jobs market is a great way to get over the hurdle of having no relevant experience. Whether to plug a shortfall in their existing staffing levels, or additional support or to cover period of absence, organisations are increasingly turning to the temp market for top talent. If you're preparing to make a career change, our dedicated Temps Division can source and secure temporary placements that could unlock the door to new opportunities later down the line.

Use a recruiter

As well as sourcing opportunities in your chosen sector, working with a specialist recruiter can help you to navigate uncharted waters and position yourself as a strong candidate, regardless of your lack of "relevant experience". Since the job of a recruiter requires them to keep their finger on the pulse of sector trends and employer demands, enlisting their support can prove invaluable in providing the insight you need to excel in your search and convince companies of your potential.



Conclusion

Whether it was planned or unplanned, a career break can make for a daunting re-entry into the workplace. In the time you have had away from work, it's more than likely your plans have changed or at least evolved. Setting your goals and planning ahead can certainly help to make the transition as smooth as possible and save everyone precious time, but there will always be unexpected hurdles and creases to iron out as you settle back into a working environment – whether that's in your previous job or a new role in a different company.

At Allen Associates, we help people at all stages of their career journey to find their ideal place in the workforce and take the next step in their professional careers. Over the last 20 years, we have grown as a business to become a leading independent Recruitment agency with offices in Oxfordshire, and London .

No matter how complicated your situation, specific your requirements or vast your ambitions, our specialist recruiters are well-equipped to steer you in the right direction and get you where you want to be.

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