



## The Mother of Reinvention

### Tips for on-ramping into the work force after a parenting break staying home with kids

Seven years ago, I was working as a newspaper reporter covering some of the city's biggest crimes and juggling care of my infant and toddler daughters. I loved my job but missed my kids. When chaos began to eclipse the satisfaction I had once felt from my career —and despite real fear about mommy tracking myself — I decided to step away for a while to raise my children.



As a stay-at-home mother, I reconnected with my daughters and regained some sanity. Yet even as I sang through story times, toured kindergartens and communed with other mothers and fathers on work hiatus, I had already begun to obsess over two little words: What's next?

Over the past 12 years, the percentage of stay-at-home mothers has spiked after a decades-long decline. Many more fathers, too, are taking time off to raise children. But what happens when we, the legions of stroller-pushing professionals on break, decide to go back to work?

What if your skills are outdated — if the jargon around that water cooler is entirely different than it was BK (Before Kids)? Do you go back to school, rely on networking? How do you explain the gap on your resume?

What do you do if the job you left is not the one you want to return to?

The quest for reinvention is becoming common as mothers and, increasingly, fathers navigate the ever-more-porous divide between staying at home and working outside the home.

"Becoming a parent certainly affects your availability to dedicate to a job," says Malia Morrison, an assistant director of academic programs at UW Professional & Continuing Education and a mother herself. "You might have to pick up your kid from day care and have to leave at 5 o'clock every day, or maybe travel becomes impractical. For many people, work consumes much of their identity and mental energy, and you have something new taking that place.

Even if making it to pickup on time is not your top concern — maybe you've found a dream nanny (lucky you), your kids are old enough to be independent, or your spouse is taking a tour of duty at home and plans to have those chicken nuggets ready by the dinner bell — you might be primed for a career makeover.

"If you look at age span, we could all have three separate careers of 20 years each," says Lisa Quast, a business consultant, executive and career coach. She spent 20 years climbing the corporate ladder and is now in her second-act career as a career coach and author. "Embrace the possibilities," Quast says.

But is jumping to a new chapter in your career as easy as turning the page in one of those oh-so-familiar children's fairy tales?



## Take stock

A good first step in reinventing yourself professionally is to take stock of what you've done during your time away and plan ahead if possible. Many of the tasks and projects of parenting can actually help you grow professionally.

Quast tells the story of working with a client who took time off work to be with her kids. "She was so worried, saying, 'What am I going to do about this gap? It looks bad.' Then I dug a little deeper and found out that during this time she actually built the website and managed payroll for her husband's business and fielded the customer service calls. I said, 'What is your husband going to do now that you are leaving?' And she said, 'He'll have to hire an office manager.' Well, there you go, all those skills were ones she had built."

Going back to school — either in a full-time program or a course or certificate program like those offered through UWPCE — is another great choice for people who want to refresh skills or jump into a new job.

## Own the gap

Many parents who want to get back on the career wagon worry about whether to address their domestic gap on their resume.

"Include it," says Sarah Kummer, field sales acquisition account manager for Monster.com. Kummer was the secretary of her child's PTA during her gap — not the most glamorous job, but a skill-building one, she says. "There are many things you learn from staying home: patience, organization, scheduling, finances."

While you shouldn't hide the child-rearing gap on your resume, there is an art to how you frame it, experts say.

Don't use terms such as homemaker or domestic diva, says Katie Walters, development and community relations manager for the Bainbridge Island Museum of Art. In 1996, Walters left her full-time job to raise her children. Then, in 2012, after earning a certificate in museum studies, she re-entered the full-time workforce. While she was home, not only did she serve on the PTA, she also became the publicist for the soapbox derby organization her kids were part of. She wrote their newsletter and built her skills.

Some experts recommend that job seekers with a gap highlight skills in their resume, rather than dates.

## Activate networks

When you are ready to work again, don't underestimate the value of connecting with people — something that most parents become naturals at.



Include [your gap on your resume]. There are many things you learn from staying home: patience, organization, scheduling, finances.

