

# Act II: Mom Returns to the Workplace

**FIRST, I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE** stay-at-home moms who deserve our heart-felt thanks for endless hours spent in car-pool lanes, chauffeuring kids to various activities and enduring the joys of repeating 9th-grade geometry. Many have gladly put their careers on hold to take care of their families. So what happens when the last kid is off to college and you are left with a gap that was once a 24 hour-a-day job? Some women may see this as a chance to pursue their passions, to start a new career, or return to their old career.



Going back to work may be easier than you think because amid increasing competition for talent, many organizations are often interested in bringing back female employees who left for personal reasons. Research also indicates that many women are interested in returning to work. For example,

a study by the Center for Work Life Policy found that 93% of highly qualified women want to resume their careers. Because of this trend, many colleges have developed programs to help women develop new skills and brush up on advances in their field. Many of these programs also include working with career coaches to overcome gaps in resumes and learn job-seeking strategies.

So where does one begin? The very first step is to look inward. What are you passionate about? What careers do you fantasize about? I believe that following one's passion is the most important ingredient for happiness and success. And when you combine passion with talent, you have a profound formula for excellence. Although I would recommend working with a career professional to determine your path, you can uncover your patterns and desires by listing answers to this simple question:

When my life is ideal, I am \_\_\_\_\_.

Once you have decided your career direction, determine the skills needed to make your goals a reality. Sometimes this means going back to school, but not always. Talk to people working in that field, gather information and ask for advice. Education is great, but do not assume that getting an additional degree will automatically result in landing your dream job. For example, one of my clients assumed that quitting her job and earning an MBA would result in landing a management job. In reality, companies typically fill management jobs with someone with management experience or they promote a "high-potential" employee. An MBA may be one factor of many considered, but soft skills

like leadership and the ability to communicate are often higher on the list.

The next step is to determine your "Personal Brand." What is it that makes you special that an organization needs? What is your unique promise of value that helps you stand out? What type of culture would you be most successful in? The Personal Branding discovery process takes time and effort. In combination with our PathFinder process, my firm draws from the work of William Arruda and Kirsten Dixson to help our clients develop their brand. A great resource is their book, "Career Distinction," which can help you determine your personal brand.

Next, develop a targeted resume that conveys your brand/value, beginning with a thorough "Executive Summary" section. Gaps in employment are okay as long as you can explain them. Emphasize responsibilities and accomplishments that fortify your brand and are related to your career goals. Remember, the primary purpose of the resume is to get you interviews. It should be two pages or less, concise and targeted to the job you want. In addition, you should practice interviewing with someone who will give you honest feedback. Be ready to communicate your soft skills, accomplishments, strengths and weaknesses and what makes you special. Sharpen your skills by going to all interviews offered.

Now that you have targeted jobs, articulated your brand, created a resume and practiced interviewing, you are ready to begin job prospecting. Start with your network (everyone you know) and ask them for contacts that might be interested in talking with you (75% of all jobs are not advertised). You should also apply directly to jobs in organizations that fit your goals. Working with employment firms can also be productive as they have many contacts. Even working temporary assignments may get you into an organization, which can later result in a permanent position. Posting your resume on-line can also be helpful as can searching the job boards (but your network is the priority). Make sure you also Google yourself to be prepared to discuss what comes up because many hiring organizations routinely do Google searches.

Starting a new career or reentering an old one can be a scary endeavor at first. Fear is okay as long as you don't let it keep you from achieving your aspirations. There is a saying that I'm fond of, "leap and the net will appear." Have faith in the support you will get from family and friends, trust your instincts, and most importantly, chase your passions like there is no tomorrow.

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