

Job hunt: Returning to the workforce

After learning about a number of CareerOne readers overwhelmed by the prospect of rejoining the workforce after a period of absence, Careers Fast Track kindly put together this article of encouragement.

Careers Fast Track is a Melbourne-based organisation dedicated to helping people from all walks of life tackle the job market.

There are few things as daunting as leaping back into a career. Whether you've been out of work for six months or six years, everyone returning to the workforce faces the same fears.

Are my skills still relevant? What do I put in my resume? Where do I find jobs? How will a return to work affect my family?

The first step for most returning to work is to contact a former employer or seek a position in a similar field.

But changes in many industries have been rapid and comprehensive. Does your old job, as you remember it, still exist?

Seek expert advice on the job market, current trends and the skill changes that may have taken place within your industry.

Talk to those still in the field. Ask how things have changed since you were in the role. Are they finding themselves working greater hours, for instance.

Just because you haven't been in the workforce for a year or two doesn't mean you haven't gained skills that may lead you in a new career direction.

You may have discovered a knack for organising events, or supervising others. What skills have first time motherhood brought out in you?

As one employer once remarked: "I only employ mothers because as a mother they are used to getting things done."

Of course, most ignore these skills because they can't put them on a resume. Or can they?

Resumes are not a mere catalogue of work experience.

They should demonstrate the traits that will attract an employer. Highlight that school council presidency and the responsibilities that came with it.

Let an employer know you negotiated the property lease when your son's scout group needed a new hall.

If you highlight these positive aspects, there's no need to be afraid of "black holes" or gaps in a resume, which is a common fear for those returning to the workforce.

And remember, not all referees have to be work-related.

Another aspect to consider is the practicality of a return to work.

The need to balance the household budget often means family life becomes unbalanced.

Child care, school holidays, children's inevitable sickness, and your need to balance work and home chores can affect not only the ability to return to the workforce but also the ability to maintain a job.

But it doesn't need to be a deterrent.

The trend to part-time and casual work has been a boon for working parents, while many employers are linking childcare into the workplace.

There is assistance out there. Both State and Federal Governments have programs for those wishing to return to work. Contact your local Centrelink office to find out more.

Remember, the most important part of any company is its people. Employers may well need you more and your new skills more than you realise.

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