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What Stay-at-Home Parents Need to Know Before Rejoining the Workforce



By Robin Madell | U.S. News & World Report LP - Mon, Aug 26, 2013 9:33 AM EDT



Your kids are growing up; they've entered school. As a stay-at-home parent, what's next for you? For some, it may mean gearing up to [re-enter the working world](#), whether part-time or full-time.

But things may have changed since you last dusted off your résumé. In your years devoted to caring for small children round-the-clock, industries have continued to evolve and needed skill sets to shift. You may wonder whether you can still compete successfully against job seekers who never took a break.

If so, you're not alone. A July study commissioned by talent acquisition and career development firm Mom Corps and market research firm Harris Interactive found more than half (58 percent) of all working adults surveyed feel taking a significant break from the workforce would set their career back.

To help transitioning parents get back in the corporate or entrepreneurial game, consider [this strategic advice](#):

How can stay-at-home parents prepare to land employment?

One way is to be flexible. Tom Gimbel, founder and CEO of staffing firm LaSalle Network, suggests parents returning to the workforce stay open to career exploration. "Don't feel confined to doing what you did before leaving the workforce," he says. "Skills can be transferable, and those that were picked up in a previous career or during volunteer work can certainly transfer to other career options."

But what options might you explore? That's where your research skills come into play. Whether you pursue an opportunity in your previous field or a new one, author April Masini recommends getting up to speed in that industry. "You've been living colic, separation anxiety and potty training," she says. "Meanwhile, the world has gone on (to everyone's surprise!) without you. Read the trades, and the local and national press, and be prepared to talk about what's been happening while you were gone as if you weren't."

During their time at home with children, how can stay-at-home parents remain competitive for the workplace?

When your day consists of [child care](#), it's easy to feel disconnected from professional life. Yet your parenting experience may hold the key to a powerful network of new business contacts and potential opportunities.

"It's important for parents to leverage new relationships through their children," Gimbel says. "Connections can be made through the parents of your children's friends, teammates and schoolmates. Some other ways to build a network are to get involved in volunteering, or make a list of everyone you worked with prior to leaving the workforce and start reconnecting."

What are the best strategies to move smoothly from full-time parent to working parent?

Taking the time to ramp up gradually - and cutting yourself some slack in the super-parent department - can go a long way toward a more manageable re-entry. Masini points out that many new moms move directly from maternity leave to a full nine-to-five work schedule. This leaves frazzled parents little time to adjust. "Even if it means cutting your maternity leave short, it's a good idea to start with a week of half-days before coming back to work full-time," says Masini. "This gives your mind and your body (and your heart) a transition phase to get used to the change in schedule."

Should stay-at-home parents provide an honest approach of their non-working years?

Honest is the best policy. When it comes to gaps in a résumé, Whitney Forstner, founding partner of staffing firm Momentum Resources, suggests "ripping the Band-Aid off."

"Don't hide behind a gap in your résumé," Forstner says. "Don't put 'homemaker extraordinaire' on your résumé. That is not effective. Instead, own it. Tell people that even though you have not been working, you have been involved in the community, you have taken online classes, you have kept your skills relevant and intact. You are [ready for the new challenge](#)."

Can stay-at-home parents pick back up where they left off, or do they need to account for the gap in some way?

Though it would be nice to seamlessly re-enter the workforce after a gap, it may not be realistic depending on how much time has passed. Embrace the idea of "that was then, this is now," Forstner suggests. "You might not step back into your old job and that is OK. Actually, it is more than OK. You have changed, the market has changed and now you are ready for a new job. Find one that matches who you are today and not who you were 10 years ago."

Gimbel agrees that it's important to have realistic expectations at this stage. "It's a good thing to lose any sort of ego before hitting the job hunt," he says. "It's not about the money or title, it's about getting practical work experience again. Be willing to take a pay cut or accept a position of a lower rank than you previously held."

How can stay-at-home parents take a more practical approach to their job search?

It's easy to get discouraged during a transition, but the shift from stay-at-home to working parent can be particularly tough. "It's likely that a lot has changed in your life since you last worked," says Sara Sutton Fell, CEO and founder of FlexJobs.com. "Not just having children, but how [your priorities have shifted](#) and what effect that has on your professional aspirations and what having a job means to you."

Therefore, it helps to stay realistic about what to expect during your transition and be prepared to face challenges. At the same time, if you approach this time of life as an opportunity to find a career you enjoy, you'll be happier both at home and at work. Gimbel suggests taking a test drive of any new opportunity with a temp-to-perm arrangement, to ensure you find a solid fit.

"A temp-to-perm position is a great opportunity to learn another line of business, acquire a new set of skills, or absorb

information that could be useful for a future position," he says. "If you don't like the position, you can end the assignment and search for other opportunities. If you love it and work hard, there may be a job offer at the end."

Robin Madell has spent two decades as a writer, journalist, and communications consultant on business, leadership, career, and diversity issues. She has interviewed over 200 thought leaders around the globe, and has won 20 awards for editorial excellence. Robin serves as a speechwriter and ghostwriter for CEOs and top executives, with a specialized focus on women in business. She is author of *Surviving Your Thirties: Americans Talk About Life After 30*, which is scheduled for publication in September 2013.

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