

Getting Back to Work After a Break: 10 Things You Need to Know to Return to the Workplace

By Cathie Ericson

“The Opt Out Generation Wants Back In” heralded the headline of a 2013 *New York Times* article about women who had taken a career break and then subsequently desired to re-enter the workforce. The story itself, however, painted a rather bleak picture of these women’s futures. And while no one claims that finding the right fit is easy, there are ways women can prepare themselves for transitioning back to the workforce.

We spoke with iRelaunch.com cofounder Carol Fishman Cohen and Michelle Friedman, an executive coach who has worked with iRelaunch as well as many companies currently hosting “returnship” programs.

Here are 10 practical ways women can get ready to launch their next chapter of life.

1. Address unresolved issues you may have had about leaving your job. Friedman says that she routinely hears from women that they perceived their exit as abrupt — as though they just quit, that they couldn’t hack it. Letting go of that stigma will allow you to move forward.

2. Self-assess what you are looking for in a job. Analyze what you’ve done in the past and what you’re interested in doing, and most importantly whether your interests and skills have changed. “Perhaps in your pre-break career you were ready to travel at a moment’s notice and have 24/7 accountability,” Cohen says. “Realistically think through what you can and will do when you return. Financial services firms are huge, and there’s bound to be a spot that fits your needs.”



3. Then have someone else help with the assessment. Many times working with a coach can be very helpful in pinpointing what your strengths are and how they have emerged or transitioned over the years. Cohen also advises clients to check with their alma maters — many universities have been expanding their services and now offer career assessment tools to alumni.

4. Looking for a job *is* a job. Friedman recommends that women schedule in their job-searching time as they would any other appointment. Figure out how many hours a week you intend to devote to it and where those hours are coming from. Also determine who will be doing the tasks you previously did, an exercise she calls “ADD” – Automate, Delegate or Delete. Once you have the time blocks chosen, prioritize exactly what you will do during that time.

5. Learn what’s new in the industry. Cohen advises women to subscribe to the Wall Street Journal and read it cover to cover to find out what’s new in the business. She remembers that when she first went back to work, she was terrified she would talk about a company that no longer existed, due to the rampant industry changes which resulted from mergers, name changes and the like. Add in the new acronyms and new financial instruments that have emerged and there’s a lot to learn to look current.

6. Update your knowledge more formally. Larger colleges typically offer semester or year-long courses on very specific business topics. This is a great way to demonstrate that you’re serious, and also make connections with those people in the class, which can be especially fruitful in an executive program.

7. Use social media to research companies. Many times companies will have multiple Twitter accounts, so Cohen suggests you search “company name” and “Twitter” to find a complete list of their different handles. They might have a page dedicated to career news where they post open jobs, or ones dedicated to investors or customers. Then use that information in your interviews, subtly underscoring your comfort with social media.



8. Use LinkedIn to connect with former colleagues. One major challenge for returning professionals is reconnecting with a network they may have been out of touch with for years. “LinkedIn a low-key way to get back in touch,” Cohen says. “People are typically delighted to hear from you, and once you’ve connected, you can open the door to a more involved conversation.”

9. Be in “information gathering mode.” Cohen says these are the magic words to establish connections. “You don’t want them to feel like you’re putting them on the spot, so instead guide the conversation toward how the industry has changed or some of the career choices the person has made.” She says these types of questions allow you to get valuable information and also reestablish a relationship without looking opportunistic.

10. Build a support network. Group coaching or online support groups, like the iRelaunch LinkedIn group, can be the perfect place to find like-minded women on a similar journey. Having others to bounce ideas off of and lift your spirits can be invaluable as your journey progresses during this new phase. “You don’t always know who is going to be most supportive during a relaunch process,” Friedman says. “Staying in regular contact with others who can relate during this new chapter is vital.”

Whether it’s for external (financial) or internal (satisfaction) reasons, women who are opting back in are reaping the rewards. An unexpected byproduct? According to Cohen, the job search itself can be a great confidence booster as you talk to people who remember you at your competent best.

[Research shows that the typical time it takes to find a new job has shrunk](#), which is great news. But for returning women to find the plum jobs they deserve, they should approach it with a plan – just as they would any other business challenge.