



25 TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL RETURN TO WORK AFTER A (PARENTAL) BREAK



DURING YOUR BREAK



#1 Plan ahead

If you can, plan your return ahead, ideally as soon as you start your break, so you can fill this period with other relevant experiences that will allow you to show continuity in your activities even if they are part time and/or unpaid. Such activities could be studies, volunteering, part time work or freelance or other types of relevant ventures.



#2 Study

Explore the numerous online self study programs that can help you keep your skills fresh and up to speed or even better give you a new edge (e.g. with new softwares or technologies in your field). Many short duration self-study programs are available. Check www.edx.org/courses they deliver very affordable certifications (EUR50-100) for courses of 6-12 weeks on a very diversified range of topics. Make sure you mention such studies (whether they result in a certification or not) in your resume.

#3 Keep working as a freelance

Depending on the reason for your break, consider the possibility to keep working in your field or in a similar area as a freelancer. Having your own small "business" as a freelancer will allow you to claim employment continuity independent of your workload or revenues and will also present you as entrepreneurial.

#4 Spin a passion into a small biz

Want to do something different from work during your break, because after all it's a career break? Then just dive into one of your passions and bring it to the next level and "monetise" it even if you are selling your stuff at friendly prices. Sell your cakes, offer photo shootings to your friends, build a blog, host creative playgroups at your place, etc. Such activities are entrepreneurial by nature and will show employers some skills that can be very appealing to them. It will also allow you to present your "work gap" not as a break but a temporary change of activities.

#5 Run a project of your own

Can't find a volunteering opportunity that offers relevant skills? Not comfortable with freelance or monetising your passions and hobbies? Then make a project of your own. Organise a fundraiser for a charity of your choice, set up a social or support network, organise networking events or some training, organise a community project, etc. Find a project that you can create and carry out and present this in your resume and/or as a case study to show case your skills (project management, networking, putting together and leading a team, managing a budget, raising funds, etc.).

#6 Get recent endorsements

Whatever you do or have done in the (recent) past, get some endorsements from people you have worked with or worked for be it through volunteering, a project you have carried out, or any other context where you have used technical and/or soft skills that people can testify on. If you are in a new/foreign country this is also very relevant to prove that you can fit in to the local culture. You can ask for endorsements on LinkedIn as well as use a short testimonial in your resume to substantiate your claims about your skills or achievements.



DURING YOUR BREAK



#7 Keep networking

Just because you are not working does not mean you need to go completely silent. Whoever you meet and whatever the context, think of networking opportunities, connect with them on LinkedIn and expand the pool of people who will be able to inform you of openings or refer you for jobs when the time comes. This is particularly important if you are an expat in a new location. If your circle is composed of people in a similar situation, ask about their spouses' work or their previous work area so you can map who they can connect you too as well.

#8 Think of your branding

Your profession is an important part of who you are whether you are working or not. When presenting yourself talk about your profession first before putting yourself in the unemployed, expat spouse or stay at home mom box. As a second step, you can mention your current situation of being in a career break - but do so in an empowered way and don't be sorry about it. It's always wise to open doors even if you are months or years ahead of returning to work so talk about your future plans and when you plan to return to work.

#9 Technology & software updates are on you

Technologies and softwares are important parts of every business nowadays and one of the biggest drawbacks of a career break is to lose track of the latest trends in this field. It is costly for employers both in terms of time and resources to bring employees returning to work up to speed in this regard so take it on you to remain up to speed with the latest technologies and softwares AND to demonstrate it in your resume.

#10 Volunteer

Volunteering is a great way to fill a career gap but not all types of volunteering will open up the same level of opportunities. To be strategic about volunteering, you need to ensure your volunteering activity meets the following criteria:

1. Relevance of skills used/developed: to be claimed as a relevant experience, your volunteering needs to make use or enable you to develop skills that are in line with the type of position you are applying for. That will allow you to claim a "continuity" in the practice of those skills and leverage towards recruiters that you are still up-to-speed.
2. Relevance of the network exposure: the value of your volunteering will in large part depend on the people that it exposes you too. The more you are exposed to people in your field or in the workplace in general, the more connected you are to potential recruiters when the time comes.

**For more tips and information on
volunteering, watch my recent Live Talk
on:**

*Two Key Strategies to
Create Career
Opportunities through
Volunteering*

**To watch, join the Facebook Group by
clicking [HERE!](#)**





#11 Take the focus away from employment dates

Avoid presenting your work experience using a left margin where the employment dates are presented first before your job titles or similarly where you align the job titles on the left and align the employment dates on the right. This gives the importance and focus to the dates and will only highlight your career break. Rather put the focus on the job titles (align left) with the dates directly next to it on the same line. Skip the months if this makes the picture look better.

#12 Fill the resume gap with "relevant" experiences

Don't limit yourself by only presenting "work" experiences. You can title that section of your resume "relevant" experience and include both paid and non paid work as well as part time work and volunteering - as long as what you were doing is in line with the type of work/responsibilities/skills needed for the type of positions you are applying for.

#13 Look back at your activities with a different perspective

If you are already job hunting and it's too late to think of what you could have done to help your return to work, chances are, you've done much more in your break than you have thought of presenting in your resume. Go back to the list of things you can do during your break and brainstorm (ideally with someone who knows you well) to find ideas. Have you been blogging? Have you started a project in your community or at your kids school? Have you handled an international relocation? Those are all examples of non-paid activities that show what you can do and demonstrate that you're are dynamic and have been keeping busy and that will ease your return to work (and attenuate recruiters' worries about it).

#14 Think transferable skills

Transferable skills are skills you develop in a context different from your work but that are relevant to your work. For example, having a small cupcake business will teach you about the functioning of a business, about accounting, sales, marketing and legal aspects. Whether it applies to cupcakes or to another industry, to a small or large company, it is knowledge and skills that will enable you to better do your job and get a better understanding of any company you may work for. Another example would be managing a relocation, this may involve managing various suppliers, collecting quotations and signing contracts, and simultaneously handling various aspects of this project from time management to the administrative portions to all the customs formalities. You may never work as a relocation agent but managing suppliers could be a skill transferable to many other types of positions.

#15 Use a skills & core competencies section in your resume

If you have been out of the market for a long time, it can help bridge the gap to include a section on your skills and core competencies below the summary section of your resume, especially if you have no or little other relevant experiences to present in your experience section. You can include in this section both technical and soft skills (personality traits) that will help them get to know you better. Make sure however that you substantiate your claims by explaining in your cover letter how you acquired those technical skills or how/where you demonstrated your soft skills (for example you may have shown leadership in leading a team to solve a problem in your community, developed project management skills during your relocation, etc.).



IN YOUR RESUME



#16 Show your dynamic, resourceful, hard working and motivated side

Be upfront about your break, present it as an empowered decision and a period where you have kept yourself busy both with activities and learning opportunities. Mention your motivation for both the break and the return to work and put the emphasis on everything you have achieved during your break. Show yourself as a dynamic, resourceful and hard working person to go around any potential negative impression that a break can make on a recruiter.

#17 Don't volunteer information that you have not been asked for

There is no need to volunteer information that you have not specifically been asked for or are not required to disclose, especially if you believe this information may be discriminatory to you as a candidate. For example, if you are afraid that having children will reduce your chances of landing a given job - then do not volunteer that information upfront on your resume. You are hired for your skills and your resume should be about your skills. You should however disclose the information if specifically asked about it and be prepared to give it a positive spin (we'll talk about this further).

#18 Lower the perceived "risks" of hiring you

Put yourself in an employer or recruiter's shoes and think of what may keep them from hiring you.

- Will you be up to speed with new technologies and softwares?
- How will you cope with the learning curve and the workload after a break?
- Will you be rusty and take time to get back in the game?

Brainstorm about your "risk factors" from a recruiters' point of view and address them in your resume and cover letter, even before they are voiced by recruiters. Talk about what you did during your break to "remain sharp", demonstrate that you are a "quick learner" by giving examples from a previous job or recent activities (freelance, volunteering, own venture, etc.). If you are in a foreign country, any collaborative type of work with local people/team (like volunteering) will also help alleviate the risk of you not fitting in culturally. As a parent of young children, demonstrating that you have remained active and can juggle many things at once increases the chances of you being equipped to handle the work/family life balance.



DURING YOUR JOB SEARCH



#19 Be wise about your social media presence

Whether it is allowed or not in the country where you are job searching, there is no way to prevent or know if recruiters will look you up online and chances are they will. So take control of what your social media platforms say about you. You are afraid that having kids will play against you? Then make sure you have a profile picture that does not show your children. Be professional in what you post, avoid "grumping", etc. and even make a special effort to post "educated" publications and articles or anything else that will show you in a good light.

#20 Present yourself positively while answering "objections" in job interviews

Anticipate the questions and objections that you may receive from recruiters and prepare your responses. You should leverage every objection to present a positive side of yourself and demonstrate how you handle situations. "Yes, I had to quit my job to relocate because of my husband's promotion" shows you in a very different light than "Yes, I decided to postpone returning to work so that I could get some studies done, started a blogging project I had in mind and immersed myself in learning the local language. I am now looking forward to put my new xyz skills into application by returning to work". See the different wow factor?

#21 Offer a sample of what you can do through a case study

Disarm all the potential questions about your skills and competence following a break by giving a real time example of what you can (still) do for a company. Research the company you are applying for or the specific job opening and prepare a small case study of how you would solve one of their problems or approach the new job if you were to be selected. Plug some tech in it for even more impact.

#22 Mindset, motivation & choices

How you came to take a career break and how you go about it says a lot about you, your motivation, your planning approach, confidence and proactivity. It makes a far better impression on recruiters if you "gave yourself the luxury of a break" or enabled yourself to take some time off from your career to do something else that you are passionate about. So think about how you approach this topic, the motivation you give behind your decision to take a break and what drives your return to work. Your best strategy is to present your return to work as a "pull" towards something that you are enthusiastic about (e.g. "I look forward to getting back into the action and challenges of a new job") rather than "moving away" from your situation (e.g. "It's too difficult financially on one salary"). The same applies to the reason and motivation you give behind your break. In short, show them that you "want" to go back to work rather than "need it".

#23 Tell your story

For many, it pays off to be bluntly honest and confident about one's decisions and/or to use humour to stand out. If this sounds like something you can do and be comfortable with, it can also be a strategy to be upfront about your career break. Use story telling to present your situation and motivation and make yourself stand out for what you have done during your break, your initiative and self-confidence, communication skills, creativity and resourcefulness.

This approach is best used when communicating with recruiters or potential referrers in person (or through the phone), namely because it makes it easier to adapt what you say to your specific audience and to respond as a function of their reaction. Be prepared to answer any objection that they may express (ideally do this in a creative way as well).



DURING YOUR JOB SEARCH



#24 Propose an internship, trial period or sample contractual project

Another strategy to alleviate a potential employer's perceived risk is to propose a trial period if they are concerned about your capacity to get back in the game or get up to speed with a new job after a long break. This could take various forms from a traditional internship (this is increasingly popular in the US for "returners"), you may also propose to be hired on a contractual and therefore non-binding way for the first 1-3+ months. This can allow to circumvent certain countries' rules with regards to the permanency of a position once you have been employed. In countries where such rules are in place, companies tend to take much less risks with hiring because they can not let go of employees in the event they do not perform well.

This is more of a "last resort" option if you are already in the recruitment process (e.g. being interviewed). However, if you have companies on your radar, offering them to take you for an internship or special project can be a great way to approach them and put a foot through the door. You may offer to do it for a reduced price (offer it for free as a last resort).

#25 Proactively expand your network with the right people

Surround yourself not with people who share the same struggles but with people who are doing what you want to do. Join professional networks and events and proactively mingle with people who will help you get back in the game, have business discussions, get informed about the latest trends, expand your network and ultimately get you in touch with the right opportunity for you.





There is Nothing more Powerful than a Woman with Harmony, Self Belief & a Passion!

If you find yourself at a personal & professional crossroad, this is your opportunity to build the career path that will allow you to thrive and find fulfilment without sacrificing your personal and family life.

If you are ready to make this your reality and would like to discuss how I can help you thrive in your professional life while still having time and finances to enjoy your personal life - visit my website to book a free discovery call::

www.catherine-leduc.com

or email me for more information:

info@catherine-leduc.com



Before becoming a certified NLP & RSCI coach, Catherine spent nearly 20 years working in senior strategic roles for the pharmaceutical industry holding various consulting roles in which she advised on marketing strategy, portfolio management and product development. She also developed primary market research and consulting services for an Indian-American company based in Gurgaon/Delhi, India. In addition, as a self-employed consultant, she helped start-up biotech companies in their early stages with strategic planning and financing. She has lived and worked in America, Europe and Asia and has extensive experience managing multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural teams across the world.

Despite a stellar career, Catherine had to overcome many struggles. She fought with repeat burnouts, found herself torn apart as a stay-at-home-Mom in a foreign country and later returned to a very senior role trying to juggle family life with a demanding job involving monthly commuting to Asia. Ultimately she was fired during her second maternity leave which prompted her to become an advocate for women equality and focusing her career on helping women finding themselves at career crossroads.

Her passion and mission is to empower women to build a professional path that gives them satisfaction and fulfilment and allows them to thrive without sacrificing their personal and family lives and giving them the time and finances to enjoy their passions.

