

I Want to Re-enter the Workforce



Whether you've been out of the job market for two months or twenty years, going back to work can be scary. Giving yourself time and making the proper preparations are the keys to successfully navigating your way back. Take the time to figure out what you really want, update your skills and be willing to wait for the position that's right for you.

Why people leave the job market

- They get married
- They raise children
- They pursue a hobby or other goal
- They opt for early retirement
- They don't need the money

And why they go back to work

- The children grow up
- Financial strain
- Divorce
- The death of a spouse
- Boredom
- The need for personal fulfillment

Updating skills



A couple of classes can make a world of difference in your job credentials. (See the **JobSearch Guide *Where to Get Job Training***.) Even though you may have plenty of education in your

own field, you need to seriously consider whether you need a refresher before heading back to work. Ask yourself:

- Are you computer literate? Life in the 21st century demands that you know basic computer skills. If you're completely clueless or your skills are obsolete, consider taking a course or two to learn about basic computing, word processing, database management, spreadsheets, the Internet and social media.
- Have licensing requirements, job standards or regulations in your occupation changed markedly since you left? Talk to industry associations before getting started and see what seminars they have to offer, or visit your local community college.
- Are you changing your job focus? Talk to a career counselor at your local community college to decide which course work you need. You don't always need a complete degree program; a few pertinent courses will often do the trick.

Before you start job-hunting

1) **Take Stock of You.** Don't just dive back in by answering ads and sending out résumés. People who have been out of the workforce have a unique opportunity to reflect on who they are and what they want and need out of a job. Ask yourself these key questions:

- **What do I need in a job?** This is critical to your return. Is it money? Flexible hours? The need to do something interesting or fulfilling? Be honest, so you don't settle for a job that doesn't address the reasons why you returned.
- **What do I want in a job?** You may be going back to work because you need the money, but what is it that will make you look forward to going to work every morning? A job that challenges you mentally? The chance to meet and work with the general public? A job outdoors? The chance to travel? *Don't be afraid to let yourself dream a little. Explore all of the possibilities.*

2) **Take a Skills Inventory.** What skills do you possess? Honestly assess what you have to offer and write everything down.

- **Evaluate** the skills you've already used in the workplace. Are they applicable to the occupation you want to obtain now? Do they need to be updated? (See **JobSearch Guide *How to Determine Your Skills***.)
- **Translate** non-paid experience into paid skills. Have you done volunteer work? Helped a spouse launch a business? Been active in other pursuits?
- **Research** the marketplace and determine what skills you do need. Now would be a good time to take some classes at a local community college and update your skill level.

3) **Develop a Plan of Action.** Once you know what kind of job you want and have brought your skills back up to speed, you're ready to put together a job-hunting strategy. Among the steps you should include in your plan:

- **Write Your Résumé.** A functional résumé works best for those re-entering the workforce, since it de-emphasizes chronology and focuses attention on skills, abilities and accomplishments. Include any skills you acquired during your time away from the job market. (See the **JobSearch Guide *How to Write a Résumé***.)
- **Network.** Seven out of ten people find their jobs this way, and many of those re-entering the workforce find it to be especially effective. Talk to former colleagues, friends and relatives about your goals and the type of job you're interested in. (See the **JobSearch Guide *Using Your Network to Locate Jobs***.)
- **Be Assertive.** Even if a job opening seems to be out of reach, don't assume that you're automatically locked out. You might be surprised at what a few years of maturity adds to your marketability.



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Tips for interviewing

(Review all of the **JobSearch Guides** related to Interviewing)

- **Practice.** Enlist the help of a friend in the workforce to take you through a dry run or two. This will prepare you for any trendy interviewing styles or questions and help you consider how best to answer tough questions. Most importantly, it will help alleviate anxiety.
- **Be Prepared for Questions about Your Time Away.** These might include: *Why did you leave your last job? What have you been doing since then? Why do you want to return?*
- **Support Your Statements.** Don't just say that you're a good people manager. Give examples of how you've successfully managed in the past. Discuss problems you've faced and how you solved them. This will give credence to your contention that your time away has not impacted your ability to handle the job.
- **Research Salaries.** Don't go by what you once earned or you might shortchange yourself. Find out the going rate for your occupation before walking into a negotiation by consulting *The American Almanac of Salaries* or *The Occupational Compensation Survey*, located at your local One-Stop Career Center. Networking will also give you insight into salary expectations.
- **Follow Up.** Send a thank you note. Call back if you haven't heard anything a week after the interview.



How to answer questions about your time away from the job market

- **Don't Dodge the Issue.** A potential employer has the right to be concerned about any lapse in employment.
- **Don't Apologize.** If you were a stay-at-home mom, for example, discuss your time away as a choice, not something you were forced into.
- **Do Be Positive.** Talk about the value of your time off as it relates to your job. Remember, you were learning skills while you worked at home or pursued a personal goal.
- **Do Show Commitment to Working.** Don't leave the impression that this is a temporary lark for you. Be very open about your desire to work and about your long-term goals.

References

Employers will rely heavily on your references, so make certain that you have excellent sources. A few tips:

- **Call your references** before naming them. Get back in touch with former co-workers and ask them if they mind being used as a reference now.
- **Get in touch with old bosses.** Your prospective employer is likely to call them for a reference, so give a quick call first to remind them of your contributions. Even if you were fired, a phone call from you beforehand can't hurt the situation and it might help.
- **Update your information.** This includes home phone and address and your last place of employment and job title.



A few special situations...

The homemaker

If you're heading into the job market after years of raising children, your case is different but not difficult. Fear will likely be your only obstacle, so take it slowly and build up your confidence with proper planning and strategizing. To get started, consider the following:

- Take advantage of the resources offered at your local women's center. These community-run facilities offer a number of services, including career counseling, support groups, personal skills workshops, job leads and referral services.
- Visit a local chapter of the Displaced Homemaker Center, which offers financial aid for college courses and vocational schooling to divorced and widowed women.
- Make an appointment with a career counselor at your local community college and take some courses. Not only will this develop skills, but it can help improve your sense of accomplishment outside the home.
- Stick your toe in the job pool with these skill-enhancing jobs:
 - ✓ **Temping.** (See the **JobSearch Guide *Pluses & Minuses of Temporary Employment***.)
 - ✓ **Seasonal positions.** Companies hire in bulk during their high seasons and are less stringent about previous experience. A good time to jump into the job market is during the holidays.
 - ✓ **Part-time positions.** Working 20-hour weeks allows you time to adjust to the work-life while still earning experience and references.
 - ✓ **Performance-based jobs.** Sales positions in fields like retail stores, advertising, real estate and pharmaceuticals are easy to get and keep if you excel on the job.

The post-retiree

Everyone wants to retire but fewer former workers want to stay that way. In fact, one out of three workers will head back to work less than two years after their "last" day on the job. Read the **JobSearch Guide *Job Search Tips for the Experienced Worker***, and consider these opportunities:

- **A career change.** It may be time to pursue all those dreams you've harbored. But be prepared for criticism, self-doubt and setbacks. Change is never easy but can be rewarding. (See the **JobSearch Guide *I Want to Change Careers at Mid-Life***.)
- **The Entrepreneur's Life.** Start your own company or become an involved and active partner. (See the **JobSearch Guide *Starting Your Own Business***.)
- **Consulting.** There are plenty of firms willing to pay for your wisdom. For information on ordering **JobSearch Guides** for your organization, visit www.jobsearch-guides.com and experience.

Internet resources



www.msmoney.com/mm/career/transitions/reenter_workforce/reenter_workforce_intro.htm -- Information for women returning to work.

www.iRelaunch.org -- Provides information, webinars and seminars about how to get back on the career track.

www.vocationvillage.com/how-to-re-enter-the-workforce-after-a-long-absence -- A workplace psychologist and career counselor provides excellent advice.

www.jobsearch.about.com/od/workfromhome/a/workathomejobs.htm -- Work from home ideas and suggestions.