

# toolbox

## RETURNING TO WORK

Returning to work after a long absence can be both exciting and overwhelming. If you've been away for as little as a few months or even more than a few years, there are some things you should consider before you take the plunge back into the workforce. Keeping current with your field's trends, staying up-to-date on all the new technology and networking with industry professionals are just a few steps you can take to ensure an easier transition for you and your employer.



## How to Go Back to Work After a Long Absence

While you took time off to raise a family, care for elderly parents, go back to school or travel around the world, chances are there were major changes in your field's trends and technology, as well as at your former workplace. Get up to speed first before you to return to work.

### Step 1

Keep up with your field while you're away. Stay in contact with co-workers and bosses, and meet for lunch or cocktails occasionally. Subscribe to professional journals and keep licenses or credentials up-to-date. As you get ready to return to work, use the Internet to read up on changes in your profession and discuss them with your colleagues.

### Step 2

Start networking at least a year before you're ready to go back to work. Join a professional organization or a networking group. Talk to friends, family and former work associates who can help you develop contacts.

### Step 3

Invest in a career counselor. You'll get the latest information on your industry and the job market in general, work on strategies to maximize what you have to offer and learn how to get the word out about you and your skills.

**Step 4**

Decide whether you want to go back to the same kind of work or whether you're ready for something new. Your interests and needs may have changed, your capabilities may have expanded or the job you enjoyed years ago may no longer exist due to changing technologies.

**Step 5**

Sign up for refresher courses and additional training to become more attractive to potential employers. You can study online or enroll in classes at a nearby college to brush up your skills.

**Step 6**

Create a functional resume rather than a chronological one that focuses on your skills and not the dates you held previous jobs. Include the skills you have developed, goals accomplished – became president of the PTA, for instance, or organized a food drive.

**Step 7**

Develop a transferable skill, such as sales or accounting, which you can pick up easily after a long absence. Or use your old skills in a new job. If you taught math in your past life, but want more flexible hours now, look into private tutoring.

**Step 8**

Be open to taking a lower position than the one you left long ago. You may consider it a blow to your ego, but you can use it to take advantage of new opportunities in the work place, develop your skill set and get back on track.

**Step 9**

Hang your own shingle if a "9 to 5" job seems unbearable after all these years away. Become a consultant or start your own business, but be prepared for hard work, long hours and an unpredictable income and benefits.

Source: eHow Careers & Work Editor, [www.ehow.com/how\\_138128\\_go-back-work.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_138128_go-back-work.html).



## Return to Work After a Long Absence

So you've been out of the paid workforce for a few months or even a few years, and you want to go back to work? It's an exciting idea, if a bit daunting. You may have been away from work for any number of reasons. Whatever your reasons were, now it's time to work out how you can go about moving back into the workforce.

### 1. TAKE THE FIRST STEPS

Returning to work can be both exciting and overwhelming. After all that time off, you may no longer feel confident that you can cope with the workplace. Remember, though, that you've also developed skills in your time away, skills you didn't have last time you held down a job. Here are some common concerns about returning to work:

#### *"I don't have any work skills."*

Even though you haven't been doing paid work, you've still been using all sorts of skills that are relevant to work.

#### *"My skills are out of date."*

Consider retraining or upgrading your skills. A key skill for many jobs is using computers. If you have one at home, you can train yourself in the use of some of the more common software packages. Think about taking classes. Community colleges often run computer courses for beginners. And there are still many jobs available that don't require you to use a computer at all.

#### *"I'm too old."*

Employers make decisions based on factors other than age. Research shows that there is no link between age and ability. Ultimately, companies focus on getting the right person for the job, regardless of age. Make the most out of the experience you have, the work ethic you've developed and your reliability.

#### *"I'm tied down by family commitments."*

Before you start thinking about returning to work, think about who will take on the role you have been performing during your career break. Many people hold down a full-time job, have a family and manage a house. It's all a matter of planning and cooperation.

#### *"I'm still not feeling 100 percent after my illness."*

If you're returning to work after a severe or long-term illness, you should do so gradually. Your illness may have made it impossible for you to continue in your former occupation. You may need to set new goals, and these may be quite modest when you first start back at work. As your health and confidence improve, you can revise or build on them.

## 2. WORK OUT A STRATEGY

**What skills do you have?** What work can you do now, given your current skills? Many people returning to work have the skills they need to get the job they're looking for, but they need to re-package these skills to make them marketable.

**What career field are you interested in?** You may first want to:

- Generate career ideas.
- Explore the ideas that suit you.
- Decide which of these ideas you'll pursue.

To plan a career, you need to know who you are. You need to have assessed your own values, interests, strengths, weaknesses, accomplishments, personal resources and goals.

**To research a new career field:**

- Read extensively about it.

- Attend related seminars and lectures.
- Enroll in related courses.
- Network with people in that field and use their inside knowledge as a resource.
- Find some way to get on-the-job experience, even if it's unpaid at first.

**Work out short, medium and long-term career goals once you've:**

- Assessed your values, interests, strengths, weaknesses, accomplishments, personal resources and goals.
- Identified your career field of interest.
- Researched the current world of work.

**Develop an action plan.** When you have identified the dream job you're aiming for:

- Compare what you've got to offer an employer with what the employer needs.
- Identify any gaps in your skills, knowledge and experience that might be barriers to getting a job.
- Work out ways to overcome them.

**Barriers and how to overcome them.** A barrier can be anything that you believe will stop you from reaching your planned goal. Some of the biggest barriers to people re-entering the workforce are:

- Thinking you look bad to a potential employer when you've spent time away from the workforce.
- Worries you have about your transition into the workforce.
- Feeling as if you have only outdated skills to offer.

**In a job interview,** you need to have confidence in your answers. You need to steer the interview around to focusing on:

- The skills and knowledge you can offer.
- How quickly you can become productive in the workplace.

A barrier can also be a concern that an employer feels about some factor that might prevent you meeting their needs. To address an employer's concern, consider the following questions:

- Can I do the job?
- Am I motivated to do the job?
- Do I present myself as being dependable?
- Do I fit the image and attitude the company is looking for?
- Am I eager to learn and extend my skills?

**How do you explain the gaps in your resume?** An absence from the workforce can often mean that you have gaps in your resume. You do need to indicate what you did during these times, particularly if they are very recent or ongoing. Do so briefly and calmly. Don't



apologize for your decision to take time off. Make a positive statement about what you did, or have been doing, in the time away, and then focus on why you're ready to rejoin the workforce.

Try putting together a functional instead of a chronological resume. A functional resume highlights your skills rather than on how continuous your employment has been in the past.

Don't forget to include volunteer activities on your resume. Consider further education and training to open up your options. Any kind of training is an investment in your future. Part-time study can help you build up confidence, and bring you into contact with other people changing themselves and their lives.

**Dealing with change.** If you have been out of the job market for a number of years, prepare yourself for some changes there. Talk to employed people you know, particularly people who have recently been job-hunting.

**Getting help.** Where can you get expert help in planning and implementing your return-to-work strategy? Use a professional counselor, career advisor, mentor, colleague, family member, friend or any combination of these. Anyone who can give you objective opinions and help you feel cheerful about job hunting is useful to you.

**How long does it take to find a job?** It might take six months to a year to find the right job for you. If you've decided to get back into the workforce, don't sit around waiting for that job – go out and meet it, by volunteering or undertaking work experience to gain skills in the area you're interested in working in. This way, you can try out a possible career, as well as meet new people who might know about available work.

### 3. CONSIDER ALL YOUR WORK OPTIONS

**Permanent work.** If you have had a short career break, or you're confident about your return to work, you may wish to go straight into a permanent job.

**Temporary work.** If you are not sure about what work or hours you're looking for, temporary work is ideal. It's completely flexible – you can choose the days and hours you want to work and the jobs you want to take. Working as often or as little as you like may solve child care problems. Temporary work can also provide a great training ground. Some other benefits are:

- You can try out the work before you make your final decision whether this is an area you want to work in.
- No long-term commitment is required of you.
- You experience, from the inside, companies you might not previously have considered working for, but which are real career possibilities for you.
- You get to work for businesses of all sizes, and see which you prefer.
- You may have the chance to try working for non-profit organizations.

**Volunteer work.** Volunteer work can allow you to strengthen your skills and learn new ones without the pressure of working in a paid job. It also gives you a chance to network, meet new people and find out a work area of interest to you.

Source: [www.myfuture.edu.au/The%20Facts/Work%20and%20Employment/Get%20that%20Job/Return%20to%20Work%20after%20a%20Long%20Absence.aspx](http://www.myfuture.edu.au/The%20Facts/Work%20and%20Employment/Get%20that%20Job/Return%20to%20Work%20after%20a%20Long%20Absence.aspx)