

WOMEN

by ANAGH PAL

GET BACK TO WORK: THE SMART WAY

Getting back to work after a career break is never easy. Here is how to make a smooth re-entry and balance work and family

In a survey by professional networking site LinkedIn last year, 43 per cent of working women respondents in India said they would never leave their jobs to become stay-at-home moms. Priti Paul, 46, director, Apeejay Surrendra Group and a proud mother of three sons, Jad, Kias and Jai agrees. She says: "It's important for women to keep something going, something they can pick up again when the kids grow up. Not only is there a financial reason, it helps to keep the interest in the world around you alive." That said, for women, who might have a reason to take career breaks, either because of child-birth or to take care of the elderly, getting back to work isn't easy. Keeping a few things in mind will, however, make the re-entry easier.

Getting back to work. During re-entry, it would help matters if one is able to find a job in a company that has women-friendly policies and offers the flexibility required to juggle the demands of work and family life.

There are resources one can tap into while making a re-entry. Initiatives, such as Fleximoms and relaUNCHER connect experienced women professionals on break to

companies and help them come back to the corporate world, whether they want to work full time, part-time, work-from-home, freelance or start up on their own.

Says Karthik Ekambaram, assistant vice-president, consulting services, FLEXI Careers India, a part of AVTAR Career Creators: "A well-thought out plan and systematic preparation is vital for a successful comeback. This would begin with identifying the skills that have to be refreshed or learnt anew."

There are scores of things to learn, invest in and gain while one is on a break. Says Sairee Chahal, co-founder, Fleximoms, "These include certifications, continuing and executive education courses, entrepreneurial opportunities and volunteering." For someone out of direct touch with the professional world, both online and offline networking is a must. Keeping in touch with batchmates and ex-colleagues helps one stay abreast of the trends in one's area of expertise as well as help identify opportunities

Create a support structure. Build a support network of a group of people—family members, friends and colleagues who can help you with information and support when needed. It also will help matters if one has a mentor, a senior and experienced person to offer advice—both personal and career-related.

ACTION POINTS

- 1 Find job in a company that has women-friendly policies and offers work and family-life balance
- 2 Learn skills, do certifications and courses that will prepare you to take up your old job or go for a new role
- 3 Build up a network comprising family, friends and colleagues to help you with information and support
- 4 Understand needs of your children and when they need your attention
- 5 Do proper research before evaluating a day-care centre. Also take into account its proximity, timings, hygiene and number of nannies
- 6 Judge what is important at any time and prioritise it accordingly
- 7 Find smart ways to readjust work schedule through effective time management and work planning
- 8 Do not feel demoralised over lost time. Make the most of the situation in hand, work diligently and try to adapt fast with the changes

Outlook Money

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For instance, Priti A. Sureka, 41, director, Emami, took a three-year break from the professional world when her two children were born. She says she is fortunate to have a supportive family, with her husband, in-laws and children showing

tremendous encouragement to her professional life. She says, "Without their support, it would have been quite difficult for me to achieve the kind of corporate excellence that I have achieved today."

Manage your children. Childcare

needs differ depending on the age of the child and stage of career a woman is in. It's not just about finding more time for the child but utilising the time in hand in a better way to engage with him or her. Involving the child in activities (cooking, shopping) and getting involved in his or her activities (dressing up for school, watching cartoons) is a good way to spend quality time with a child. Paul says that children should be showered with love and affection whenever they need it.

Evaluate day-care options. When the baby is young, day-care centres can be a boon for working couples. That said, choosing the right day-care centre for a child could be a bit tricky. For most couples, proximity to the home is a deciding factor.

Says Sushant Kalra, director, Parwarish Institute of Parenting, "List what is it that you are looking for; it could be open spaces, a big playground, modern educational aids and so on and judge a centre based on one's needs."



PRITI PAUL 46

City New Delhi, Marrakech (Morocco) and London

Occupation Director, Apeejay Surrendra Group

Her Story Mother of three children. Started working early and devoted 15-20 years in the family business before she had children. Support from her husband and family has motivated her to work constructively.

"One has to have the ability to judge what is important at that point of time and prioritise it accordingly, both at a personal and professional level."

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COULAM ROY

PRITI A. SUREKA 41

City Kolkata

Occupation Director, Emami

Her Story Took a break for three years from her professional work when her two children were born. Strict adherence to time management and work planning and support from her family has helped her come back to the professional field and achieve professional excellence

“Women should pursue a career irrespective of their marital responsibilities or childbirth—nothing should deter them from achieving professional excellence.”

When her children were small, there were times when she would skip board meetings to spend time with them. Now that they are grown up, she takes up more work.

So, effective time management is crucial and one should find out ways to readjust her schedule. Says Sureka, “The moment we learn to adopt them effectively in daily life, we’ll find that a lot many things can be accommodated in the ordained 24 hour daily cycle.” Her advice to women is not to feel demoralised and start afresh the next innings with full gusto. She adds: “Instead of ruing over the lost time, make the most out of the situation in hand, work diligently and try to adapt fast with the changed business environs. Nothing can deter you if you have faith in your own capability.”

To sum up, a career break should not be perceived as a negative period of one’s life. Instead, a woman should use it as an opportunity to revitalise herself, reassess her career path and explore new avenues and come back with confidence. □

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To start with, zero down on a centre and then do a spot analysis. Visit the centre, sit in a classroom and find out for yourself how the students are engaging. Also keep in mind the fees, whether the drop-off and pick-up timings suit one’s own or spouse’s work timings, the meals provided and the hygiene and safety standards at the centre. Also find out about the number of nannies and assistants as that determines

how much attention a child gets. **Get a work-life balance.** It’s good to put housework lower on the list of priorities and hire a help, if affordable. This way, a woman can have spend more quality time with the child and her family.

Paul stresses that one needs to have the ability to judge what is important at any point of time and prioritise it accordingly, both at a personal and professional level.