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From Marc Cenedella

JULY 30, 2012



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Job Search

How to Return to the Workforce at Any Age

Are you coming off a career break? Here are seven tips to speed your re-entry.

MAY 15, 2009

By Lee E. Miller

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Amidst one of the worst recessions of the past 30 years, many individuals who have left the workforce for family or personal reasons are finding that they have to return to work sooner than they had planned.

What's more, many people who had been planning to return to work are having trouble re-entering. They find themselves in competition with many well-qualified individuals who have recently lost their jobs. A fast re-entry requires candidates to understand what employers are looking for. Here are seven suggestions to avoid obstacles candidates encounter when they return to the market:

1. Hit the ground running.

When times are tough, employers don't want to take risks. Businesses are looking for individuals who can have an immediate effect. Be prepared to demonstrate to a prospective employer how you can help the company *now*. Offering references and success stories from your past that show you get the job done will facilitate finding a job quickly. This is not a good time to consider a career change. Going back to doing what you have done successfully in the past is the best return-to-work strategy.

2. Connect with those you don't have to convince.

Try contacting former supervisors. They know you and the quality of your work. They may even have a position available. If not, you can use the opportunity to update them on what you have been doing since you left and what you are looking for. Hopefully, they will be willing to serve as a reference and offer you some possible contacts.

3. Highlight your time off.

It is also important to demonstrate that you have put your time at home to good use in terms that a potential employer will value. Those resume gaps can be highlighted if you engaged in activities that will further your career, such as blogging, joining organizations or volunteering. Taking courses online or at a local college will also make you more marketable.

4. Be up-to-date with technology.

A gap in employment history prompts hiring managers to wonder whether you've kept up with advancements while you were out. Prepare to demonstrate, not only that you are current with the technology needed to do the job but also that you are comfortable with learning new technology. Having a professional presence on the Internet, (a personal Web page, a



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blog, articles published on the Internet or a profile posted on a professional networking Web site) and being able to talk about trends in technology that are relevant to the job will eliminate any doubts about your ability to adapt to rapidly changing technology.

The keys to a successful re-entry into the workforce are creativity in your approach and confidence in the value of your skills. Don't apologize for taking time off; speak with confidence about the reasons why you took time off and why you are seeking to go back to work now.

5. Exhibit confidence.

Once you have found an employer that wants to hire you, don't be afraid to negotiate.

The only difference when it comes to negotiating successfully when you are employed versus when you are returning to work is confidence. The skills and experience that made you valuable when you were employed are just as valuable when you return to the workforce.

Employers don't hire employees because they are cheap. They hire them because they want them. If you can convince an employer to hire you, they will be willing to pay you what you are worth if you know how to negotiate. Ask, don't threaten, and wait until the employer is ready to offer you the position before negotiating. Know what individuals in the industry with your skills and experience earn.

Don't specifically make accepting the offer contingent on getting what you are requesting. Instead, ask for help and leave the possibility open that you might take the job even if they cannot satisfy your request. Use phrases like, "I am really excited about the job but was hoping that the salary would be more in line with what I believe is the market for the skills I bring to the table."

6. Inquire about training.

Put hiring managers' minds at ease by letting them know that you're determined to stay up to date. Two things that should be high on your list are training and ensuring that you are given the tools for success. Training is critical to your continued success.

Getting a commitment to be allowed to avail yourself of in-house training opportunities and on-the-job training is normally relatively easy to do before you are hired, and requests of this nature are usually well received. Similarly, candidates who talk about what they will need in terms of resources such as budget, staff and equipment reflect foresight. Their reasonable requests are usually granted, whereas once you start in a position resources are harder to come by.

7. Don't be pushy.

On the other hand, if you are returning to work in a full-time position, generally it is a good idea not to try to telecommute, at least not initially. Most employers, even in good times, are much more likely to allow these perks employees they trust to work independently and who have a track record of producing results for them.

Asking to telecommute may cause a prospective employer to have second thoughts about your commitment to the job. You can also raise the issue of telecommuting later on, after you have proven yourself. The same is true about limitations on the hours you can work. If you show that you can get the job done, then your employer is likely to be flexible in terms of the specific hours you work.

Demonstrate that you have kept your skills current. Be prepared to show, with specific examples and strong personal recommendations, that you can get things done. Those qualities will not only get you a job but will allow you to negotiate the terms of your return to work.

Your skills, enthusiasm, preparation, persistence, strong work ethic and can-do attitude did not disappear when you took time off from work for your family. Those qualities were valued by your previous employers, and they remain extremely valuable in a challenging economic environment.

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Lee E. Miller is managing director of NegotiationPlus.com and an adjunct professor at Columbia University, New York. He is a career coach, corporate trainer, negotiating strategist and professional speaker. He is the author of [Get More Money on Your Next Job ... In Any Economy](#) (McGraw Hill, 2009) and [A Woman's Guide to Successful Negotiating](#) (McGraw Hill, 2010), which he cowrote with Jessica Miller, his eldest daughter. You can contact Lee at Lee@YourCareerDoctors.com

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