



## CAREER BREAKS: KEEPING ON THE CAREER PATH

Children are not the greatest career moves. Having them means that you are entering another world in which your once important career does not seem so important any more. Many parents do take a career break to bring up their children and wish to return to work at some point, especially now as a new school year has begun. But once off the career path it can be hard to find it again.

The world of work has changed. Parental leave gives parents guaranteed rights to return to the same (or similar) job after an agreed period of leave (up to twenty-six weeks for each child). In this way parents, usually the mother, can resume their careers with little interruption. Others may wish to take a longer career break, staying at home with their children usually until nursery or school age. This could last years and in the past such a move was viewed as career suicide; but in the modern world of work, it can in fact be regarded as career freedom.

Having children is a momentous event that can change everything. Once they have arrived, everything is different. Plans that have been made to return to work can go out of the window. Carefully structured career plans can be dropped in a second. Yet at some point you have to consider your future and ask yourself: what do I want to do? Do I return to work or stay with the children? Do I want to change jobs or do I even want to change careers? The world has opened up.

Modern careers are different from the career paths of a generation ago. Then, there was a set career ladder to follow. You rose up within the company, your position being determined by experience and time served. Those days have long gone and now you have to build career self-reliance. It is up to the individual to have a specific career plan and follow it.

The ladder has gone, being replaced by a more complicated road map, where moving sideways is as valuable as moving up, and hopping from job to job is no longer frowned upon. The key to your future is in your hands; it is up to you to see and take opportunities, to apply for training and network with potential contacts. If you do not take action, no one else will do it for you.

When you are taking a career break to bring your children up, it will serve you well to cultivate this attitude of career self-reliance. It is always useful to make the decision about how much time you are taking off early on, but usually that is hardly ever possible; having children is too big an event. You should have some idea before the end of your maternity leave

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or within the first year of returning to work if you want to continue working or not. If you do decide to have an extended career break, there are a few things you can do to help you resume your career.

Firstly, know yourself. What are your talents and interests? What are you good at and what do you want to be good at? Keep a record of all your skills that you have built up inside and outside of your career. Keep revisiting and revising your CV. Do not wait to start it only when you are actively looking to return to work. Keep an eye out for training opportunities to boost your skills (and escape the house).

This is a time where you can decide what you really want to do. If your old career was not fulfilling, you can now start considering a new one. The time off spent with your children has given you a freedom and a perspective that you never had when you were stuck behind a desk in the office.

If you wish to remain within your old career, keep in touch and build up a relationship with the industry. Use websites and newsletters to learn about new developments and to know what skills to update. Keep a network of old work colleagues to give you a personal viewpoint and to inform you of opportunities. If you can, consider working part-time within your old career or working part-time from home. This can help to ease you back into the working world and build up confidence. You can move from job to job until you find the right one; job-hopping, once looked down upon, is now perceived as a positive attribute.

Taking time out to raise children no longer spells the end of your career, but can be a new beginning. How you use that new beginning is entirely up to you.