

9 Tips to Help You Re-Enter the Workforce with Confidence

Is your “career self” slipping away with every Cheerio stuck to your kitchen floor? Or has it vanished altogether as your kids head off to college? Eventually, most of us return to work. Saving for retirement, paying for college, divorce, or a growing desire to do something for ourselves are motivating factors. How marketable are you today? How marketable will you be in 5, 10, or even 15 years?

*Through our recruiting and placing of part-time professionals, **FlexProfessionals** works with many women and men re-entering the workforce after career breaks. We won’t sugar-coat it: it is hard to re-enter, and lack of confidence is the biggest barrier to success. Whether your re-entry is imminent or a distant thought, there is a lot you can do NOW to make the experience a whole lot easier and much less frustrating. Consider these 9 tips.*

Believe in Your Professional Self

Most importantly, do WHATEVER it takes to maintain or regain confidence. You bring tremendous value to employers, especially small businesses. Not only do they benefit from your diverse skillset, but you bring good judgment, commitment, unparalleled productivity, and trusted communication skills to the workplace. Start to become aware of how you communicate your value. Most re-entry candidates begin by highlighting the number of years that they have been out of work. Instead, be proud - never defensive or apologetic - of your decision to stay home . . . and then move quickly to your skills and accomplishments. Be careful not to dismiss your volunteer work because it is unpaid, or prior professional accomplishments because they are old. Try creating a short PowerPoint or Visio presentation of your top skills and related successes. Then practice presenting (try using a mirror at first), as if you were giving a sales pitch as to why you should be hired. Not only will you sharpen a skill, but you will build confidence. Think of yourself as the talented professional you are, and people in a position to hire you will think of you as the same. Be confident, or at least play the part until it feels natural again! Watch this [Amy Cuddy TED Talk](#) for a little motivation and encouragement.

Stay Current in an Ever-Changing World of Technology

Outdated technology skills are a top concern of employers hiring re-entry professionals, and they are often the reason for a failed return. Upgrade your software and systems now, and have fun using and learning the technology. Claiming in an interview that you are a “quick learner” is not an effective

strategy. Identify the basic and specialized computer skills you will need to be competitive. Take a skills assessment test. Learn and apply as many skills as you can before you interview for a job. Lastly, demonstrate during an interview that your technology skills are strong by using technical jargon, sharing assessment results, providing examples of how you utilize a specific software, or sharing work samples. If this sounds overwhelming, check out our [step-by-step plan to boost your technology skills](#) with links to free or low-cost online resources.

Take Time to Self-Explore

Self-exploration is a critical part of the re-entry process that many neglect. You have to know what it is you want. Maybe you don't want to go back to the demanding, high-stress job you had. Maybe you want to transition altogether to something new. What is most important to you: a job close to home, flexible hours, content or substance of work, job title, compensation, work environment? There are no right or wrong answers, but you need to think this through and prioritize. Similarly, you have to be able to articulate what your strongest skills and personality traits are. You can't expect a potential employer to figure this out, so saying "I am open" or "I can do a lot of different things" is not helpful and can even be a turn-off. Know your value, and always start and end with your value. Our [self-assessment resources](#) can help you with this.

Consider Part-time as a Transition Option

Today women and men re-entering the workforce have more options than ever before. The notion that you have to be "all in" or "all out" is simply outdated. Part-time may be a great option as you transition back to paid work. Finding meaningful part-time or flexible work is still a challenge (that is why we launched our company), but there are pockets of opportunity, mostly with small businesses who need the expertise but have tight budgets. Part-time allows you to ramp up at a pace that is best for you and your family. It often serves as a stepping stone to that dream job!

Update Your Resume and Get Intimate with the Details

If you are already foggy about the ins and outs of your last job, this will only worsen over time. Update your resume, focusing on the most relevant successes, accomplishments, and results. Quantify as much as possible, or at least identify the impact or benefits of your work. Your resume should be concise, with only substance. Think of your resume as a reflection of the top skills you have and want to use in the future, rather than a laundry list of past job duties. Try not to obsess over your resume, but make sure you are familiar with the details so you come across as sharp and fresh during an interview. Use this [formatting and editing tip sheet](#) for quick reference.

Connect to Your Professional Network

Your former network remembers you as your professional self. Meet your old boss for lunch. Have coffee with a former customer, client, or vendor. Don't forget about co-workers who were junior to you, as they may be climbing the corporate ladder while you are on career break! Connect with them on social media. Send an occasional email or note, or share an article of professional interest. Pick their brains about industry trends and opportunities. Not sure you want to return to your former career or

industry? It doesn't matter. Your former network may still be helpful if you transition to something new. Plus, you will need professional references upon return to work!

Grow Your Professional Network

Most jobs are found through networking, not online. Don't lose sight of the fact that your personal network is your strongest professional network. Staying home affords you an incredible opportunity to make valuable connections via neighbors, schools, playgroups, church, sports, and clubs. Now you just have to put your professional cap on and tap this powerful network. Ask your friends about their careers, and share some of your professional experiences. Keep a list of companies, jobs, and industries that excite you. LinkedIn is a powerful networking resource. This [article](#) has some great tips for using LinkedIn to support your return to work.

Volunteer with Purpose

Volunteer to sharpen a skill, learn a new one, explore an industry, grow your network, or ignite a passion that may later become a career. Does a local organization you support need someone to help with strategic planning, fundraising, digital marketing, graphic design, web content management, grant management, or financial management? Think about the skills that you have (and love to use) or want to acquire, and offer your services pro bono. Sure, you may still want to chaperon a field trip or put fresh paint on a bench, but it doesn't hurt to be selective about some of your volunteer choices and use the opportunity to further your professional brand.

Use Social Media to Engage Professionally

You likely use social media, but are you using it to stay connected to your professional contacts, join professional groups, expand your network, follow industry bloggers, research companies/industries/professions, stay current on industry trends, and contribute to the conversation? LinkedIn and Twitter (you don't even need to tweet) are a "must" for all, but these are just two in a growing menu of [social media platforms](#) used by business owners and recruiters. Explore and engage so that you will be "in the know" when new platforms arise (and they will).

Treat yourself to some professional development time every week or month, depending upon how quickly you want to get back to work. Just like planning for a vacation or special event, put it on your calendar. Then use these tips to make the most of the time you have set aside for yourself. Find a friend or mentor to support you. Getting back to work may take some time, but your efforts will be well worth it when you find meaningful work that utilizes your best skills and personal qualities.