

(Plan Your Career) Back-to-Work Strategy: Tips for stay-home spouses returning to work

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Did you see this change coming? Women are now the primary breadwinners in over 50% of American households. Unfortunately, that change has come about due to massive layoffs of higher-paid men. While no one wishes for their man to be unemployed, the fact is that women are returning to the workplace. For stay-home spouses, returning to work can be intimidating. Having a search strategy will help.

Keep your spouse involved. When making decisions about a new position, let your spouse support you by keeping him involved in your search activities. Your decision to return to work requires your partner's buy-in if it is going to be successful; no guilt trips allowed.

Know why you're looking. Need to earn money to save your house? Or do you want to learn new skills? Write out some short and long term goals.

Solidify your needs for this job. Consider hours, location, recognition, opportunity and salary and make a list of specifics. For example, part-time is not specific; instead, write "9 to 2" or "flexible, three days per week". Next, categorize the list. The top two or three items may be non-negotiable, while you may be willing to flex on others.

You have no family. Returning to work, parents are tempted to bring cute-kid stories or over-explain their need for flexibility. This is a red flag to potential employers. Your kids might mean the world to you, but in the workplace people want to focus on work. Keeping kid chat to a minimum allows the interviewer to focus on the value you'll bring to the job. Don't deny you have a family, of course. During lunch or at happy hour, whip out those photos, but not in meetings and definitely not during interviews.

Realize it can happen fast. You've prepared a resume, found an interview outfit and called a few friends. Realize a job might find you. Are you prepared to accept? Think it through: if a job were offered to me today, what would I have to get done before I could start? This list might include arranging child care, seeing the dentist, painting a closet or visiting a friend in another state. Start checking off these items so you when you get an offer, you can start ASAP.

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