CAREER RETURNERS

Mini-Guide

How to Stay Motivated along the Return to Work journey

Introduction

Returning to the workforce after an extended career break is an exciting, empowering and sometimes challenging time! Whether you stepped away to raise your family, care for a loved one, recover from a period of ill-health, pursue your own entrepreneurial interests, study, travel or simply take some time out, re-entering professional life often comes with its own unique set of ups and downs. This mini guide is here to help you stay motivated as you navigate this journey, offering practical advice and tips to start strong, maintain your motivation levels in the face of setbacks, and create a path toward success. Remember, every action taken is a step closer towards your goals.

Reflect on your return to work drivers

Take some time at the outset to reflect on your 'why'. WHY do you want to go back to work? Understanding your deep rooted motivation at the start is really valuable, as you can remind yourself of this regularly at key points along the way when you need a quick boost.

Are you craving intellectual stimulation, to use your qualifications, or to be a role model for your children? Are you looking for a more tangible sense of achievement or to get your professional identity back. Are you financially motivated; either through financial necessity, wanting to contribute your fair share or seeking the value you feel from earning your own money.

Spend some time reflecting on your key drivers and write them in the box below. Add some illustrations if that appeals. Consider printing these out and pinning it to the wall where you'll be working on your job applications, to give you that constant visual reminder of WHY you're embarking on this exciting journey.

My Why

Reconnect with your professional identity

After an extended career break, you can lose sight of who you were professionally and the body of experience, skills and strengths that you built before your break. This loss of confidence can knock your belief in your ability to make a successful return, making you more likely to give up if it's not smooth sailing. As you look to re-enter the professional world, it's therefore really valuable to reconnect with your professional identity, reminding yourself of your key strengths and areas of expertise, developed both pre break and from activities during your career break. This will remind you of the value you bring to a future employer and can provide a real boost to your professional confidence.

My core strengths (what I'm good at and what energises me):

My professional experience pre-break (sectors/companies worked for, qualifications and professional certifications):

My career break experience (transferable skills gained from activities e.g. volunteering, entrepreneurial activities):

Build your Return to Work Support Team

As with any other challenging task, think about who can support you along the way. Look for encouraging and positive friends and family who will champion your efforts, celebrate the small wins with you and pick you up if you're having a down day. If you're not already a member of our Career Returners Professional Community, then join today for a ready-made returner peer support group. Within our Community, seek out others treading a similar path to you, or in a similar location, and organise to come together for inspiration, advice and motivation!

My support network (friends, family and other returners to pick me up):

Engage your Inner Mentor

Adopting a positive and proactive mindset can make a real difference to your experience. We all have our ups and downs, and we all have an 'inner critic' voice of negativity that can show up when we're out of our comfort zone. It may be telling you you're too old, you've been out too long, you'll never succeed. Noticing when this is playing loud and clear can help you to manage it, turn down its volume, and instead dial up the volume of your 'inner mentor', your voice that is kind, supportive, encouraging and who really believes in you. Your inner mentor will remind you of your strengths, your previous achievements, and the progress you're making.

What my Inner Mentor would say to me now:

Create a Return to Work Action Plan and celebrate small wins

At the start of each month, reflect on what you'd like to achieve that month, and then break it down into weekly goals and then small daily tasks. This may be around doing some research, engaging in some online learning, having a 'networking' coffee, updating your CV or reconnecting with former colleagues on LinkedIn. Include getting out and about chatting to different people to build your energy and help you to feel more in control.

Reflect on when you work best and dedicate regular slots to achieving your tasks so that it becomes part of your weekly routine. Make a 'Done List' to get the satisfaction of making progress and celebrate all wins, however small!

If it appeals, keep a journal that you can enjoy writing in, to keep track of your activity and reflect on your learnings from the research you've done or the conversations you've had. This can help to ensure you stay on track - or to change track depending on what you discover! Either way, you'll have tangible proof of the progress you're making towards finding your next role.

Be Realistic in your Timeframe

Getting back to work after a long break often takes more time than you think. Avoid setting yourself a goal of getting a great job in a few months, to avoid setting yourself up for disappointment and disillusionment if it takes much longer. This doesn't mean you won't get there in the end, but you do need to be patient and persistent.

Build in Moments of Joy

Ensure that you set clear boundaries in your day as to when you're working on your return to work, and when you're not. To keep buoyed and energised, make sure you diarise activities that bring you joy - whether that's a walk in the park, a fun workout, coffee with friends, volunteering in your local community, or learning a new skill like pottery or photography. It's important that you have things to look forward to, that you enjoy and that you can talk about, outside of your desire to return to work.

Activities that bring me joy:

Seek out inspiring role models

In those moments when everything seems a bit too hard, curl up with a warm drink and delve into our Success Story Library to read stories of returners who have been exactly where you are. If you prefer, head outside in the fresh air for a bracing walk with a pair of earphones and listen to our Career Returners Podcast. Either way, you'll hear from a wide range of returners from different backgrounds, roles and sectors who share their stories – why they took a career break, the challenges they encountered along the way and how they found success. We'll be hosting some 'Success Story' Lives in our Community Hub so make sure you check in regularly for your essential dose of inspiration!

Career Returners Podcast: https://careerreturners.com/returners/career-returners-podcast/

Success Story Library: https://careerreturners.com/returners/success-stories/

Join our Career Returners Professional Community:
https://community.careerreturners.com/signup

Notes/Reflections

CAREER RETURNERS

We're on a mission to build a fairer and more inclusive working world, by making career breaks a valued part of a lifetime career

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