

A helping hand for parents planning to go back to work

Sometimes the idea of finding that perfect new job or settling back into your old job, while still finding time to manage and enjoy family life, can seem impossible. After being absent from the workforce for 12 months or more, parents commonly agree that they experience a loss of confidence, feel their 'work' skills are rusty and more importantly, believe that employer demands may mean that work life balance is unobtainable.

However, there is some good news for all those parents planning to re-enter the workforce in 2007. The current labour shortage is continuing and now, more than ever, organisations in Australia are fighting to retain their skilled and talented employees, and that means increased opportunities for employees to be more selective about their job conditions and working arrangements.

Past Australian Bureau of Statistics figures reveal that there are over 2.2 million women in the workforce with children under the age of 15. Just imagine how many more there are that haven't yet re-entered the workforce and are just waiting for the right opportunity. Many organisations have realised that they need to think outside the square about how jobs can be structured and performed. These organisations are implementing flexible work practices that satisfy the needs of their employees. If they don't, they risk losing or missing out on a valuable resource – you.

So how can parents – both mums and dads – returning to the workforce, take advantage of this trend and get back to work without feeling like they have sacrificed their career and family life? The practical ideas below can help parents make their return to work transition a bit easier. These are:

1. Review your personal needs and those of your family, and think about what you hope to gain by returning to work, both in the short and long term. If you are currently on parental leave, will your current job meet your future needs?
2. Review and make a list of all your skills and experience, your strengths and attributes, your motivators, your job interests and what working arrangements you will need.
3. Determine all the possible job options that you find interesting, and consider and explore these further. Create a short-list of the best options. Make a list of all the positives and negatives. Think about what you're willing to compromise on - after all it's important to be realistic.

4. Consider how these job options will impact you and your family from a personal and financial perspective. Weigh up the pros and cons and rule out unrealistic options.
5. Make a list of what you'll need to arrange and attend to in order to prepare for your return to the workforce, e.g. child care, re-training, flexible work hours or other arrangements, a review of your role and a discussion of options with your employer. Create a 'to do' list with timeframes.
6. Seek support from others in the areas you need most, e.g. someone who can provide child care while you attend interviews, consult a career advisor to discuss your options, outsource household chores so you can focus your efforts on job searching, etc.
7. Start the job searching process and update your résumé. Register with online job search engines such as www.jobsearch.gov.au and set up a job match profile to be matched to current job vacancies in your field, in order to find your ideal job.
8. Be prepared to clearly state what it is you want and negotiate working arrangements with potential employers, to provide solutions that will work for you both.
9. Review your job search and your goals if you find you're hitting a brick wall. Are you being realistic? What could be preventing or holding you back from re-entering the workforce. For example, if during the recruitment process you keep getting turned down for interviews, make sure your résumé is up to date and well formatted, and that you provide an appropriate cover letter. Practice your interview techniques by preparing your responses to commonly asked questions in order to present you and your experience in the best way.
10. Prepare for your first day back at work by making the necessary arrangements with your family and employer as early as possible before the big day (approach it like your child's first day at school). Be organised!

How to negotiate with Employers:

Whether it's a new employer who you need to approach about re-entering the workplace or negotiating a more appropriate working arrangement once you are back at work, you may feel uncomfortable about how to negotiate a 'deal' that will work for you. This may be because you lack the skills and confidence to handle a negotiation situation effectively. The following steps will give you ideas about negotiating with an employer.

1. Prepare

Preparing in advance is essential. Be clear in your own mind about what it is you are trying to achieve. Know the facts about your situation and consider your employer's needs before you initiate a meeting to discuss your position. For example, you may wish to negotiate shorter working hours, a pay rise, to relinquish some work responsibilities. What are your needs and how might they affect an employer (both positively and negatively)?

2. Clarifying your position

To begin the negotiation process start by stating the topic you wish to raise. To clarify the needs and concerns of your employer, ask questions, and then discuss your needs.

3. Explore Options

Ideas, ideas, ideas... Generate as many options, ideas and alternatives as possible. Work on solving any problems that have been raised by your employer. Be realistic about your expectations, and acknowledge the issues you and your employer face.

4. Seeking Agreement

Work with your employer in partnership to try and help one another. Don't forget things can be agreed to on a trial basis. Discuss what you can both do to reach a conclusion, and agree next steps.

We hope this article has given you practical ideas and provided some inspiration on how you can help make your transition back to work a bit easier.

For more information contact us on 02 9967 8377