

Six-point guide to get back on the job

Going back to work after a mommy sabbatical can be daunting for many mums. Here are some simple ways to prep yourself and go for it...

Words Ramya Srinivasan

Are you ready to get back into the workforce after a hiatus but struggling with where to begin? You are certainly not alone. An HBR blog cites a US study by the Centre for Work-Life Policy which shows that among women who left work for a while to raise children, 93 per cent of them said they wanted to come back to work, but only 74 per cent returned, and just 40 per cent of them to a full-time job. When women decide to return to work, it feels like a nightmare, not knowing where to start. There is a gap in the resume, a disconnect from the outside world and the task ahead appears daunting.

Stop fretting; we have a few guidelines for you to simplify this overwhelming task...

1 INVEST TIME ON YOUR RESUME

The resume is often the first impression one makes on a prospective employer, so a shoddy job on it is definitely not going to help your case. List all your core competencies and validate every skillset by referencing a corresponding project that you have worked on.

More importantly, do not bluff; there is no need to add something that you don't have experience on, just to make your resume

look good. Interviewers will eventually see through it and the misrepresentation will only reduce your chances of getting hired even further.

Also be careful to add only the most recent and relevant work and to not make the resume a laundry list of things that you have ever worked on. If you have a five-year work experience, you can be positive that no one really cares about your college summer project.

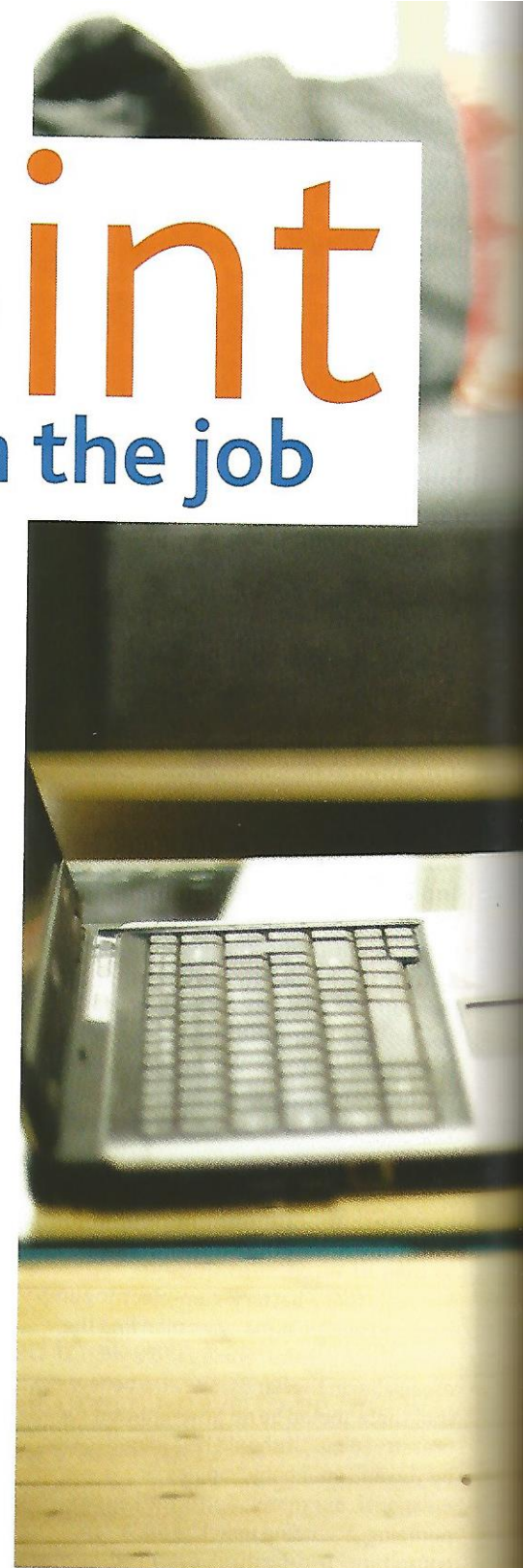
2 EXPLAINING THE GAP

This is almost a certain question in the interview, "Can you explain the gap in your resume?" Just be forthright about it, there is no need to appear embarrassed or guilty about your choice. "In an effort to justify the gap, sometimes candidates feel compelled to talk about hobbies they took up or places they travelled. It's quite a put off because it shows lack of confidence. Unless they did a course or acquired a certification directly relevant to the job, there is no need to detail what you did during the break years," explains an HR professional.

It was your decision, so back it up and be upfront about why you decided to take a break. Interviewers meet such examples more often than you think. They have surely

reviewed your resume before calling for the interview and so it's safe to assume they are fine with the break you took. So, just be confident and focus on promoting your strengths for the job.

You should also be able to explain why you feel you are ready to come back to work. Again, do not make this a lengthy conversation, keep your response crisp.





3 PREPARE FOR WHAT IS ON THE RESUME

If you are listing something on the resume, you better be prepared for it! Responses such as "Oh! I did that many years ago!" is not going to fetch you brownie points.

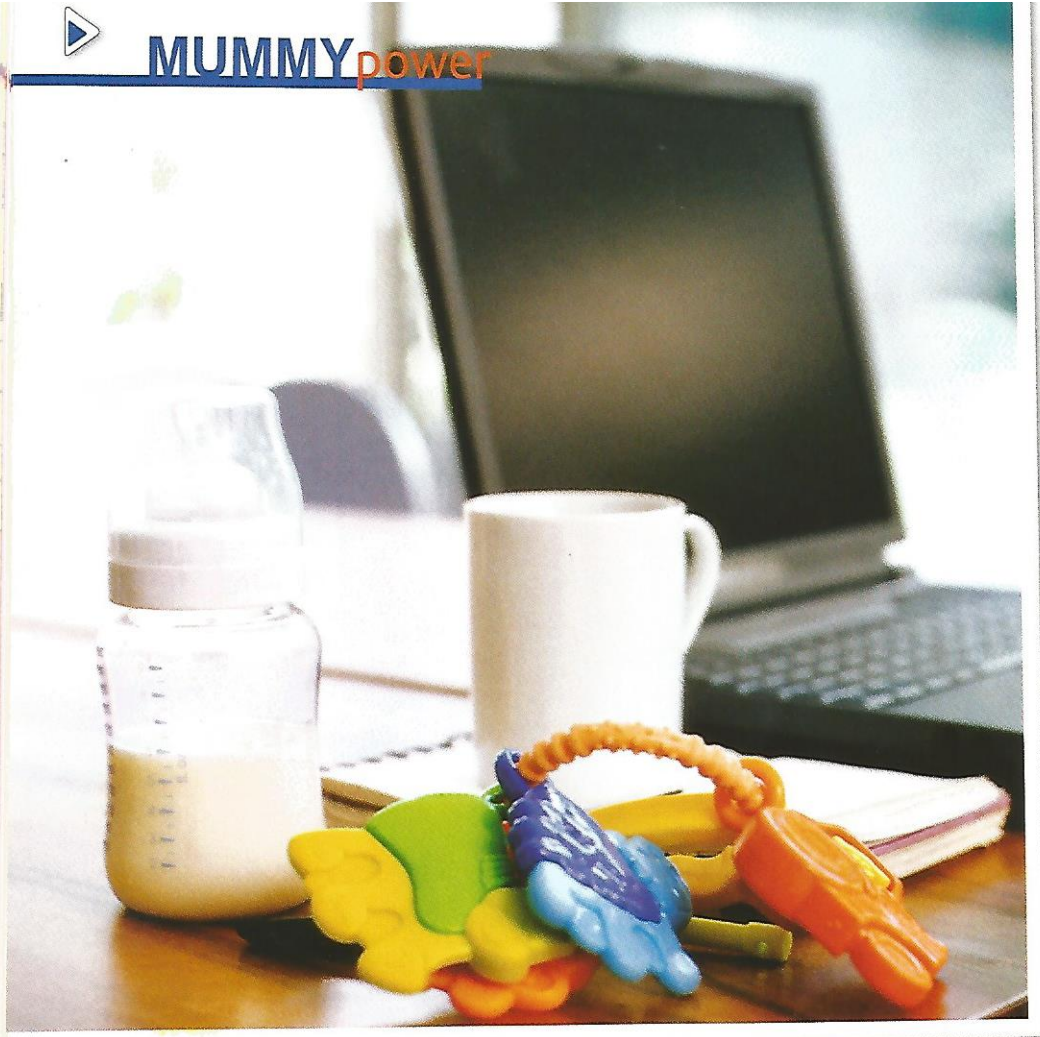
IT professional Prathap Narasimhan explains, "Often, I find that interviewees have lost

touch with technologies they have listed on their resume. It's understandable, since they have not been working on them for a while. But, sometimes they seem to have forgotten even the fundamentals. This is a sore point because I don't want to hire and invest valuable time in training the new person. The minimum they can do is to brush up their basics before showing up for the interview."

Every competency and every project listed on your resume should be something you can comfortably discuss in the interview room. However, once you are actually there, if you do not know something, it is better to be candid about it.

4 STAY UP-TO-DATE
Most returning mothers find themselves so sucked in their family





lives that some of the new trends in the profession appear alien to them. In the few years that they have been out of practice, things could have changed manifold. It could be the terminologies or tools or just people's approach to a specific problem or the operating style.

To stay up-to-date, you can look to attend seminars, conferences or conventions where people from the industry converge and discuss pertinent topics. If that appears to be a lot of effort, the easiest way to stay glued to current updates is to read literature or magazines on your subject.

Friends can be of great support too. A returning mother Chitra Venkat says, "I was so caught up in the world of raising my son that when I wanted to get back to work, I felt a bit lost. That's when I did a luncheon with a few friends, who were still in the workforce. Catching up with them and asking questions turned out to be very insightful. They shared about their challenges at work, the office gossip and detailed the projects they were working on. Just a couple of conversations helped me

feel like I understood the vibe of the work scenario better."

5 TAP YOUR NETWORK

Leveraging one's social network has never been easier with the variety of online forums. Finding a school friend or an ex-colleague cannot be any simpler. It's just a matter of putting yourself out there and asking for help. Sometimes job seekers are not confident enough to project themselves and feel more assured to talk about it only after securing a job. Initially, it might be awkward to reach out, but it's better than adopting a cautious approach.

Many multi-national corporations are consciously taking a look at the issue of less number of women in middle and senior management levels. To address this, many on-ramp programmes are being done to provide a platform for women to return to work. Being connected to human resource channels or diversity networks in these corporations can help you be plugged in to such forums and can provide an interview to start with.

A human resource manager from an MNC says, "Last year, our return-to-work programme, based on referrals, was hugely successful. We offered internships to selected candidates and post the internship, we recruited 95 per cent of the group. We believe in bringing candidates with diverse profiles and the female talent pool is still one of the untapped resources. India is still rated low in the participation of women in workforce. It is mutually beneficial for us to explore this further in years to come."

6 THINK THROUGH YOUR CHOICE

Finally, do an analysis of your own readiness. Ask the right questions – would it make sense for you to take a part-time opportunity before you go full on, or are you ready to take the complete plunge? What hours work best for you at the workplace – would you prefer reaching work early and leaving early or do you wish to wrap up work late in the night after putting your child to sleep? How much of a help is the spouse – make a realistic assessment here. Do you need to hire a nanny, cook or else how do you plan to manage?

Be clear with your choice of returning to work and visualise how your day will be after you join work and evaluate if you will be comfortable with it. Ensure your spouse and other family members living with you are on the same page and if they are not, do the prep work to get them adjusted. Set their expectations about how they need to share the workload and train them ahead. If this is the first time you are going to leave your child alone with either a nanny or in a day care, do a trial period beforehand to ensure the child is comfortable and so are you.

Your world is going to undergo a significant change, so make sure your company's philosophy is in line with the lifestyle you expect. Some firms offer attractive part-time opportunities whilst some others have in house day care options for new mothers. Some have women forums which can be leveraged to discuss challenges. These firms have more likelihood of understanding your background and may offer better support systems. Remember that you are also choosing the firm as much as the firm is choosing you. **M&B**