

Back to work – at last

For women reentering the job market, a little preparation can go a long way

• By ANN GOLDBERG

When I went back to work in the outside world a few years ago, after a hiatus of 25 years, I was nervous. Most of the people around me were my children's ages. However, it didn't take me long to realize that I had many advantages over them.

Staying late is not a problem, as there's no nanny or babysitter waiting for me to pick up my children. I don't have to take time off for my children's illnesses, and I'm not as exhausted as the young mothers and fathers who never get an uninterrupted night's sleep. I'm pretty calm, have more self-confidence than many of those youngsters, and I don't get upset over criticism. Outraged parents and badly behaved pupils (I'm a teacher) don't faze me.† After bringing up six teenage daughters, nothing much fazes me.

Yes, maturity carries with it many advantages. And yet, many women in their 40s and 50s, whose children have either left home or are well able to take care of themselves, are terrified of going back into the working world.

It certainly pays to prepare yourself both emotionally and professionally if your absence from the working world has been a long one.

Judy Feierstein, career counselor and CEO of Transitions and Resources Ltd., (www.maavarim.biz) suggests asking yourself quite a few questions before you start to look for a job:

- Do you need to help with the family finances and is it therefore urgent for you to find work?
- Do you want to fill your spare time?
- Do you want to be in a social environment or do you prefer to work by yourself?
- Do you want to work full time or part time?
- Do you want to work from your home?
- Do you want to go back to the field you were in before you stopped working?

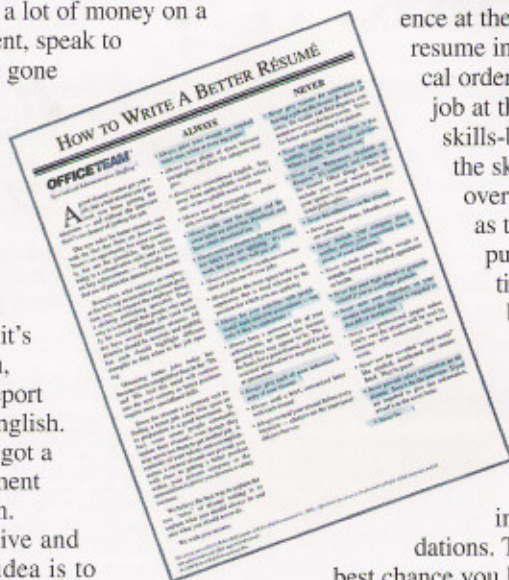
- Do you want to be your own boss and open up your own business?
- What are your skills – e.g., organizational ability, good with elderly people?
- What knowledge do you have that can be used in your work, such as foreign languages, computers, dressmaking?
- What are your limitations – language or distance you can travel?

You may want to see a career counselor to help clarify your goals. But before spending a lot of money on a private assessment, speak to others who have gone the same route and check if the results were worth the expense. Ask if they were given a copy of the final analysis; and, if it's important to you, check that the report is available in English. Also ask if they got a practical assessment they could act on.

A less expensive and more practical idea is to take part in a workshop on returning to the workforce to get an idea of what training plans are available, how to go about finding a job, writing a CV and preparing for an interview. Often these include role-playing, where you practice being interviewed. These workshops are also very encouraging when you see that you aren't alone and that many others are going through the same experience as you.

If you want to work in an office, Feierstein says you will have to have some computer expertise and be familiar with the programs the company works with.

If you know someone who works in a profession, office or organization you are interested in, speak to them and see what skills and abilities are needed.



To get some work experience, you can offer to volunteer your services – but make sure that the terms are clear at the outset and that after a certain length of time (four weeks or two months) you expect to receive a letter of reference which you will be able to use in your search for a job.

Almost every job you apply for will ask for a CV, or resume, which lists everything pertaining to your education, professional and work experience. There are many Internet sites that provide advice about writing one, but the important aspect is knowing what is relevant to the job you are pursuing.

If your problem is that you have no current experience to include, Feierstein suggests listing the skills you used while staying at home raising your family.

Instead of listing work experience at the beginning of your resume in reverse chronological order – i.e., your latest job at the top – write a skills-based one, listing all the skills you have used over the past years, such as time-management / purchasing / organizational, and then at the bottom put a list of your previously held jobs.

Feierstein says that 65% of vacancies are filled through in-house recommendations. That means that the best chance you have of finding a job is by networking: Tell everyone you know, at every opportunity, that you are looking for work. Don't just scour the Situations Vacant column in the paper. ■

INTERNET SITES TO HELP WITH YOUR JOB SEARCH

- www.israemploy.net (all types of jobs)
- www.jobnet.co.il (jobs and resume writing advice)
- www.cji.co.il (computer jobs in Israel)
- www.lila.co.il (women's business site – networking, workshops, etc.)