

What's the best way to go back to work after kids?

Returning to the workplace after having kids can be challenging, to say the least. Before starting a new job, mothers constantly contemplate: Will I be successful? What if I am slow to catch up? Will I like the new organization or my boss? Will my children suffer emotionally? How will they get their homework done? What if someone gets sick? Who will transport the kids to and from soccer practice, Tae Kwon Do, choir or band? When will the house get cleaned? How will I provide a healthy dinner on time?

Fears mount and emotions spike as mothers wonder: "How will I manage everything?" The answer? By pursuing a career you enjoy – one that capitalizes on your skills and competencies and provides fulfillment.

Because managing a career and family poses many hurdles, loving your job builds a solid foundation for success. If you are unhappy at work, you will be unhappy at home. You may perpetually question your choice to return to work, be consumed by guilt and stress and feel constantly "behind".

Alternatively, if you are happy at work, you are much more likely to be happy at home. Think about the last time you had a bad day. How was your disposition by 6pm? 8pm? Were you more likely to lose your patience with your family? While only one aspect of our well-being, career happiness boosts our confidence and self-esteem.

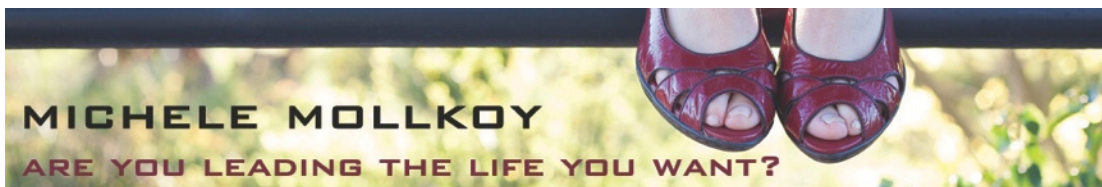
Finding a job you love is critical to success at returning to work, in any field.

Therefore, before going back to work, devote time to creating a career that will allow you to overcome the guilt and be successful both as a mother and as a professional. Reframe your job search process as an opportunity to pursue a challenging and worthwhile career. Furthermore, redefine career to mean the right things for you now, rather than what career meant prior to having kids.

How do you achieve this? By following these 5 steps:

1. Conduct a career evaluation (either a self-evaluation or partner with a career consultant or coach)

Viewing your job search process as an opportunity to create an ideal work situation that is challenging, rewarding and personally fulfilling translates into an opportunity to find the right position for you at this point in time. Your pre-children career might not be your post-children career. Too often, women automatically re-assume the job they pursued prior to having children. Since having children, you have grown as an individual – developed new skills and competencies, honed soft skills and identified new passions. Your shifting priorities may necessitate a less traditional career – or a new route altogether. Be prepared to spend money and time retraining and upgrading credentials, if necessary.



2. Create a career bucket list

Use this opportunity to define what career means to you. Career does not necessarily require long hours, two hour commutes and six-plus figure salaries. Consider typical career values (autonomy, type of organization, independence, impact on decision-making, impact on company strategy, work environments, culture, etc.) and rank them in order of importance. In other words, list what you value in a career most and what you value least. Most importantly, include non-tangible factors such as commute and career growth opportunities.

3. Develop your best resume

The amount of focus and clarity gained by completing steps 1 through 3 can be channeled into creating a blockbuster resume. Your resume broadcasts your mission statement and your brand. Completing a career assessment and targeting companies clarifies who you are and what you bring to the table. Therefore, a blockbuster resume succinctly highlights your brand, articulates your level within an organization, underscores your understanding of the business/industry and highlights your key accomplishments and the impact those accomplishments have had on respective businesses. Leave dates off your resume, to avoid distracting employers from your skills, and recount past work successes in specific terms, as if they happened yesterday.

4. Practice interviewing

You wouldn't run a marathon without training and you shouldn't interview without practicing. Your qualifications landed you the interview - therefore your qualifications must be appealing. Emphasize the value you can bring to the company now, rather than your time away. If asked, explain your career break briefly and in positive terms, then move on. Network in depth, asking for critiques of your résumé and interview skills from those who may not be matches for you right now but have wisdom and experience that you lack.

5. Diversify your approach

Try different job hunting tactics. If you really want a new job, don't search purely online. Use a variety of methods such as word of mouth, keeping in touch with old colleagues and managers, and contacting organizations where your skills and background are relevant on a speculative basis. Apply for full-time as well as part-time positions, as these roles are often open to negotiation on flexible hours. It's best to start out positioning your skills and experience and convincing them that you are right for the job. After this, you will then be in a far stronger position to negotiate flexibility. Most importantly, keep at it and don't give up.

All of these tips are meant to help you move forward with the next steps for your career and life as a new type of working mom. It's not an easy or simple path, but it can be fulfilling and rewarding in new exciting ways. **Press on and lead the life you've always wanted.**