

Ask the Career Coach: Coming Back to Work After a Break

What's the best way to present yourself when you decide to re-enter the workforce after a break?

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Dear Career Coach Lisa,

As I prepare to return to the job market after taking a deliberate break for the past four years, I struggle with how to present myself. Through a written resume, social media or in person—what is the best way to make connections?

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Short Hills

Jumping back into the job market after taking a break or sabbatical can be overwhelming. The market is challenging at present and the approach to connecting has changed significantly with social media and online presence that did not play a prominent role in the past.

Reconnecting with your network from prior work experiences is easier now due to social media. If you lost contact, you can typically find individuals on one of the many social boards. If you are interested in re-connecting with an old company, try connecting through LinkedIn where you can view current employees, new hires, former employees, recent changes and promotions.

Typically, one of the best ways to initiate connections is to begin to let your inner social circle know that you are interested in re-entering the job market. Begin exploratory discussions with them. Ask this inner circle for contacts that may be able to help you connect to selected companies or for opportunities that play into your skills and strengths. As this circle of connections grow, keep looping back to the people who gave you referrals and inform them of your activity and thank them.

When you do not know what you want to do next, try exploring job boards by advanced search and search on key words instead of searching by title. This option will show you listings that would never have surfaced based on title searches. As jobs are shifting and changing with the influence of social media and technology, there are many new job titles that exist today that did not exist in the past.

Exploring career opportunities can be very time consuming so be prepared to enjoy the journey of discovery. Once you identify a few jobs that interest you, explore some social boards and find individuals with these titles and consider conducting an informational interview to learn more about this type of work, what skills are required, what education and certifications are expected and how to break into this area.

Another way to gain knowledge about a career is to follow some subject matter experts on social boards, blogs and ask questions or follow discussions. This can help you learn about new areas and the terminology or buzz words associated with them. Doing research in your local library with a reference librarian can open your eyes to many new possibilities and it is free. You can also return to your alma mater's career services center for support. Each college and university differs in their offerings, so call and ask which services you may be able to use.

Remember, we spend a significant portion of our time working, so enjoying what you do is a great privilege and one for which you can plan. Speaking with a career coach may be helpful.

About this column: "Ask the Career Coach" is a column dedicated to those who may be in transition or wrestling with a career dilemma by providing a forum for advice. We welcome your questions. Please send them to CareerCoachLisa@gmail.com. Lisa Chenofsky Singer is a Millburn-Short Hills resident and the founder of Chenofsky Singer & Associates LLC. She offers Executive and Career Management Coaching and Human Resources Consulting, writes and speaks on job search and career-related topics. Her web site is www.ChenofskySinger.com.