

After *That* Work-Break

My Story

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Once upon a time, a **10-year-old career** had to hit the long-pause button. Don't ask why. Days turned to months and months to years. The savings dipped and dwindled as did the convictions and beliefs around the pause-career decision.

But time is a great healer. After a **hiatus of 4 long years**, the scope and urge to revoke the pause-mode appeared on the horizon. The various reasons that led to the career-pause had ceased to exist.

Reflection and Introspection

Buoyed with newfound enthusiasm, I began exploring options. But wait – did I really wanted to go back to doing something similar to my earlier job in my earlier industry? Was I happy back then? If I had been really happy, would I have let go?

Boom! I had hit the **first hurdle in my path to reboot** my career – **Reflection and introspection** about past choices of work.

The compelling bout of reflection and introspection now began heavily influencing the theme of career-resumption options. Consequent suggestions, advices, counselling, and coaxing from well-meaning relatives, friends, and mentors flooded and overwhelmed the decision-making cogwheels inside my brain.



The loudest sound that rose above the din of options was **UPSKILL**. Awesome! My **andragogy principles** kicked in. Wait – what’s that? The power of being an adult learner. Mostly, the ability to self-learn, willingly, with some prior knowledge, and readiness to apply newly acquired knowledge right away.

Who Funds Upskilling?

The study table underwent a swift cleanup, as did the entire household to create that essential adult-learning environment – soundproof walls, Do-Not-Disturb posters, fixed-menu meal plans, regimented social-life, etc.

On an auspicious Monday, after the house calmed down post morning routines, the desktop booted up purposefully, hopeful about witnessing new types of input-process-output after years of tolerating Solitaire and Farmville’!

Quick search for upskilling options threw up a **bewildering plethora of new vistas**. Block Chain, Project Management, Data Analytics, Digital Marketing...the list was endless, but none looked familiar. 4 years of being out of the professional circuit appeared equivalent to 14 years! Mercifully, **MBA** still seemed the top drawer from when I first came to know about it.

A few keystrokes to explore MBA options threw up anaconda-long list of schools. Full-time, part-time, classroom, distance-learning, weekend programs, executive programs...*phew!* Refusing to give up, I short-listed a few schools and homed in on finer details – curriculum, duration, affiliation, past placements, and fee.



Average fee for this familiar sounding upskilling option hovered around **7digits!**

Yikes! I had no earnings or savings now, today, at this point, when I am sitting down to search for ways to resume earning.

Bank loan? No way. Regardless of 80 or 100 percent, loans were only added stress in life. So, guess what?

Meet the **second hurdle** – **who funds** my upskilling?

Is this a story about hurdles to resuming career after a break?

Ha, ha. Not really.

A Toe Inside

Obviously, upskilling had to wait. But then, **what next?**

Obstinate minds always perform best under pressure. So, a scribble pad soon got filled with a list of skills I possessed.

1. Cook and provide boxed meals to work-weary neighbors.
2. Babysit preschoolers
3. Try for cashier jobs in nearby retail shops
4. Teach in college
5. Teach art and craft at home

Luck favored. I got selected as a college faculty by leveraging my industry experience with subject knowledge. The rhythm of a work life restarted and the pocket felt happily heavy at month-starts. Simultaneously, weekends were filled with kids excitedly trying out art and crafts.

A small start, but a toe inside is as good as the whole foot in.

Accept, Adapt, Do Not Compromise

A small start isn't bad always. The pay may not match earlier drawings. The quality of work or work environment may not be as before. New colleagues may treat you like a wild-card entry, unsure of how and when you might change the dynamics of their comfort zone. **Accept. Adapt.**

But, remember – **do not compromise** on your

- Time
- Energy
- Goals

A streak of self-doubt, low confidence, guilt-trips, and persecution complex can compel us to compromise on multiple fronts. Eventually, such compromises discourage any step towards greater goals and demoralizes the spirit of rebooting career.

My **time** needed to be **valued** and that began by regulating and restricting my availability hours for everyone around me, particularly folks at home. My firm resistance met their resistance to change with equal force. **No guilt trips** allowed to creep in.



In the passage of 4 years of career break, my energy levels had undergone profound changes. Fatigue and lethargy were twin devils at constant play. I had to be **judicious about** where I expended **my limited edition** high-adrenalin **energy**. Irrelevant talk was avoided as assiduously as the comfy couch in front of the TV. The keywords in house chores were “**effectively delegate**,” “turn blind,” and “monitor maids on weekends” instead of “daily.” **Sleep times and meal times were sacrosanct**, even if that meant being the only one to follow.

Finally, **goals** had to be set. Both short and long term. Being able to reboot career meant a second chance at something many do not experience even once in their lifetime. **Short term goals** for me included getting back to **being a thorough professional** – no excuses for lapses by citing “problems at home.” No matter how small the engagement, my **commitment to time and quality never wavered**. The fact was I could aim for greater goals only if I could accomplish these smaller ones.

For me, long term goals were to:

- **skill up** and perform **higher-order tasks** that would fetch **greater revenues**
- **ensure** a sustainable **work-model** that would **enable me to live productively** even during my twilight years

Cross-Skill and Pivot

3 more years passed from the time I rebooted my work life. The college job did not turn out as promising as it had appeared. However, **new colleagues and happy patrons** of my art and craft classes helped me **grow my network** of well-wishers. Moreover, **my persistent lookout** for better earning avenues convinced my ecosystem of relatives and friends that I was **serious about** sustaining this post-break or **reboot** phase.

I was still far from being able to fund any upskilling options. So, I tried **cross-skilling**. Reading stories and writing letters and essays had been a constant presence throughout my life. However, I never considered these interests to act as contributors to my career. A chance conversation about exploring careers with **my writing abilities** led me back to the reflection and introspection state. And luck favored me yet again!



I was offered a chance to be an **editor** for manuscripts by a relative who was starting up a **publishing company**. The next 3 years were a time of new experiences in a **completely different domain**. What had once been a latent interest became a full-time occupation. My andragogy principles returned with renewed zest. It was a learning process, kind of **upskilling-on-the-job**, combined **with steady earnings**.

Not many in my known circuit, even today, advocate in favor of changing industries or domains. Their main arguments base around losing seniority and bargaining power. True. But, what use is seniority or bargaining power when there's no job in hand? In any case, re-entry into same industry after a break and without upskilling mostly entails a downward negotiation of salary and seniority.

Happy Second Innings

11 years have passed since my pivoting to a different industry in a different role. 8 years ago, I joined an edtech company as a content reviewer. **Andragogy principles have been a constant throughout**. Natural interest towards learning and experimenting with new tools to design digital content translated into steady stream of achievements and accolades. It helped immensely to be **surrounded by encouraging mentors and managers** who readily entrusted me with newer tasks and responsibilities.

5 years ago, I discovered the meaning and implications of making all **products and services accessible** to all people. Thus, I started a journey to upskill in the truest sense. The next few years I read and worked in projects that had anything and everything to do with **digital accessibility compliance**. Then the time came when I had the finances to fund this upskilling option.



I cleared the exam to become a **Certified Professional in Accessibility Core Competencies (CPACC)** from the International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP). I now analyze,

audit, solution, and remediate (to a limited extent) digital courses and websites for WCAG 2.1 compliances.



Finally, I **achieved my long-term goal** of finding a sustainable work model that would keep me productively engaged for the rest of my life.

Takeaways for Rebooting Career

- ☐ Reflect and introspect on past career choices
- ☐ Upskill if fund permits
- ☐ Accept meaningful assignment to enable a toe inside the work-arena
- ☐ Cross-skill wherever and whenever possible
- ☐ Adjust and adapt to new work-culture and colleagues
- ☐ Do not compromise on your time and energy
- ☐ Set short-term and long-term goals and stay focused on them always
- ☐ Flex and pivot to find a work that combines and aligns with your skills and interest and enables you to attain your long-term goals.

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