

# MORE

FOR WOMEN OF STYLE & SUBSTANCE

SARAH  
MICHELLE  
GELLAR

HOW BUFFY  
FOUND BALANCE:  
A NEW SHOW  
AND A QUIETLY  
HAPPY MARRIAGE

HOW  
TO AGE  
WELL  
AT 30,  
40, 50

+

WHO ARE  
YOU TODAY?  
THE JOY OF UPDATING  
YOUR SELF-IMAGE

A CAREER  
COMEBACK AT  
ANY AGE

*Plus*

IS YOUR  
CLOSET  
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WHAT  
FRENCH  
WOMEN  
KNOW ABOUT  
BEAUTY

WHEN YOUR  
BOSS HAS  
ASPERGER'S







# → A CAREER COME- BACK → AT ANY AGE

**TWO YEARS. FIVE YEARS. A DECADE.  
NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU'VE  
BEEN OUT OF THE WORKFORCE,  
WHAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE IS  
KNOWING THE RIGHT TIPS AND  
TRICKS TO LAUNCH YOU BACK IN**

**BY LAURA SINBERG AND KATE ASHFORD  
ILLUSTRATED BY AAD GOUDAPPEL**

*We've reached*

gender equality in so many areas—heck, there are even (a couple of) women members of Augusta National Golf Club—but when it comes to taking a career hiatus, women are still twice as likely as men to surrender their building IDs. That's why it's overwhelmingly women who must deal with a difficult résumé gap if they decide to get back in. Joining them on the hunt are women who've been laid off or fired; the unemployment rate for women 45 to 54 is 5.3 percent.

How hard is it to land a job after a break of more than a year? Though no current statistics exist, the answer is “pretty hard.” The best estimate comes from a 2009 study by Sylvia Ann Hewlett, president and CEO of the Center for Talent Innovation, which asked thousands of women about their experiences leaving the workplace. She found that women who wanted to return to work really struggled, since they were job hunting in what we now recognize as the doldrums of the recession. Of the roughly 89 percent of women who tried to get back in, only 40 percent ended up with full-time positions (the study didn't identify how many of them wanted full-time jobs, and women had more success finding part-time work). →



Dreary, yes, and more-current numbers suggest the situation may not have improved much. When Rand Ghayad of Northeastern University surveyed male job seekers, he found that the longer the break, the harder it was to get rehired: Callback rates on job applications dropped from about 16 percent to 3 percent once the job seeker had been out of work for more than six months. The sting of a lengthy gap could be worse for women. "Research shows that when all things are equal, women are less likely to be hired than men," says Pamela Stone, author of *Opting Out?* and a professor of sociology at Hunter College.

But if it's clear that breaking back into the workforce is tough, it is also clear that women bring a vital set of skills to the challenge. "Women are great at using their networks and getting people to vouch for them," says Hewlett. "And that's particularly important right now, since everyone needs a way to avoid mass online job applications." In fact, Hewlett, Stone and other experts argue that women's prospects of landing a job after time off may be steadily improving as companies realize the potential of female returnees and the economy regains strength. "Women are natural advocates—for their kids, for their parents," says Carol Fishman Cohen, cofounder of the career re-entry programming company iRelaunch ([irelaunch.com](http://irelaunch.com)). "Returning to work requires that they now advocate in the same way for themselves." Cohen tells returnees to break down the process into steps, including figuring out whether you want to return to your old specialty; getting up to speed in a new field (or refreshing your knowledge of your former one); and volunteering strategically.

Also important, say experts, is to learn from others' triumphs. In interviews this fall with women around the country who successfully relaunched, a picture emerges. They were all able to present their time away as a useful experience, actively use their networks and bounce back from setbacks such as job rejections. There is no magic formula for rebooting a career, but by mapping out a strategic plan of action and taking the right steps to follow it, you'll be on the fast track to an appealing job offer.

# 86%

**OF FEMALE HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL GRADUATES ON A HIATUS PLANNED TO GO BACK TO WORK**



## CONSIDER A "RETURNSHIP"

**CLEVER LINGO ASIDE**, a Returnship is basically an internship for experienced workers who've taken a hiatus. You do a short stint at a company for little or no pay and with no guaranteed job afterward, although many Returnships do turn into full-time positions. Goldman Sachs has a program that lasts 10 weeks, and the company has hired about half of past participants. You will also find Returnships at Pace University Law School, the National Institutes of Health, Sara Lee and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "It allows you to get back into a field or try out a new field and to reignite your network by making new contacts," says Sylvia Ann Hewlett, an economist and the founding president and CEO of the Center for Talent Innovation. (Visit [irelaunch.com/CareerReentry](http://irelaunch.com/CareerReentry) for a comprehensive list.)



### NANCY RODKIN ROTERING

**YEARS OUT: 10**

**WAY BACK IN: VOLUNTEERING**

**FOR THE BETTER PART** of the 1990s, Nancy Rodkin Rotering logged long hours as an attorney at a top Chicago law firm while juggling the demands of two young sons. Then, in 1997, her older child was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. A few months later, she became pregnant with a third child and received, after a routine amnio, some devastating news: Part of her baby's spine was missing, and he might never walk. "It was the first time I recognized that I wasn't always going to be able to pursue my career goals," she says. A week before giving birth, Rotering quit her job.

Her husband continued to work in finance while she poured her energy into caring for their kids and volunteering for community organizations in their town, Highland Park, Illinois. During that time, her oldest son's health stabilized, her third son learned to walk, and Rotering gave birth to

a fourth child. "I had a running joke that no one on earth was more efficient at emptying a dishwasher or driving a minivan," she says. "But those tasks didn't satisfy me."

The idea for her second act took root in 2000, when she became worried about an intersection near her house. She organized neighbors and lobbied the city government to erect a stop sign, and in the process had an insight: Though she no longer wanted to practice law, she could use her legal skills to advocate for the community. When a seat opened up on the city council, Rotering filed a petition to fill it.

She didn't get it, but she was appointed to two city commissions and volunteered for a challenger's campaign during the next election cycle to gain experience. She also attended a program for women interested in pursuing public office, offered by the Illinois Women's Institute for Leadership; it taught her the basics of running a local campaign. In 2009, Rotering went after the seat again. She won, defeating a 20-year incumbent.

Next, she decided to run for mayor. "I knocked on hundreds, if not thousands, of doors and talked to residents about what was important to them," says Rotering, now 51. When the votes were counted, she'd become the first female mayor of Highland Park, a paid position she has now held for two years. "Volunteering was a great bridge between careers," she says. "The skills I gained make me more effective in my work."





## WRITE A GREAT COVER LETTER

**START BY HIGHLIGHTING A COMMON BOND** If someone referred you to the employer or you're an alumna of the same university, bring it up in the first sentence.

**MENTION THE GAP AND MOVE ON** "Sometimes people get defensive about the fact that they were at home and give too much information about it," says Vivian Rabin, a cofounder of iRelaunch. State that you're looking to return to work after a career break. The end.

**DON'T REFER TO YOURSELF IN THE PAST TENSE** "Never say, 'I used to be a publicist,'" says Amy Gewirtz, director of New Directions for Attorneys, a program at Pace that helps attorneys get back into the workforce. "You are still a publicist—one who hasn't practiced in a while."

# 70-80%



**OF JOBS ARE REPORTEDLY FILLED THROUGH NETWORKING**

## QUIT APPLYING FOR EVERY POSITION

**"SOME PEOPLE THINK** appearing open to anything and everything will make them a more attractive candidate," says Rabin. "But most managers are not interested in hiring people who are willing to do anything. It makes them seem desperate and unskilled, with a lack of direction." Here's how to avoid the jack-of-all-trades trap:

**THINK DEEPLY ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT** Consider your previous field and identify what you liked and disliked about it. If you don't want to go back, ask: Have you done anything during your career break that might point you in a new direction? "For instance, we've known people who had kids with special needs who ended up advocating for them in the school system and then took paid roles at nonprofits that focused on that," Rabin says.

**TAKE A CLASS** Once you begin to identify the route you'd like to follow—whether it's trying something new or getting back up to speed in your previous field—you may need to do some course work to make it happen. "It's usually not as extensive as getting a degree," Rabin says. "But it could be a class or two that will update you in a specific area and indicate to an employer that you're serious about coming back to work."

**BE TARGETED BUT FLEXIBLE** "You could say, 'My ultimate goal is to be the general counsel of NBC, but I know that lawyers function in a number of different departments at NBC, and I would very much like to be in this organization,'" says Gewirtz. That way you're not limiting or pigeonholing yourself.



## SUSAN SCRUPSKI

**YEARS OUT: 5**

**WAY BACK IN:  
HARNESSING SOCIAL  
MEDIA**

**WHEN TERRORISTS** attacked the World Trade Center in 2001, Susan Scrupski, then unemployed, resolved to rethink her professional life. "There's an image that haunts me," she says. "After the towers collapsed, pieces of paper were falling everywhere—this huge wave of irrelevant stuff. I suddenly realized I'd spent my entire life on meaningless work." Only a couple of months earlier, Scrupski, then 42, was working as a chief marketing officer for an Internet start-up; then the dot-com market imploded, and the company went belly-up. When the attacks occurred, she

abandoned any thought of looking for a new job. "I said, I'm done."

I'm not working anymore."

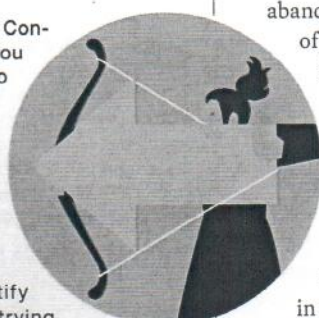
Scrupski and her husband decided she'd stay home with their two young children in Ocean County, New Jersey; the family would make do on his salary as a construction worker. The transition was not easy. "Not only did the power dynamic in my marriage shift, but I didn't know how to be a stay-at-home mom," she says. "I found myself asking, 'What's a Swiffer?'" To fill her time, she

volunteered, helping to get a playground built and pitching in on a local government race.

Five years later, in 2006, Scrupski and her husband divorced, and she found herself scrambling to land paying work she found meaningful. Blindly applying to jobs didn't get her any interviews; she was contending with a substantial gap in her résumé and an outdated skill set. "It was scary," she says. "I hadn't done anything in tech in five years. I didn't even know what a blog was." So Scrupski vowed to get up to date. While doing research online, she noticed a field that not many people were talking about called the social-enterprise sector, an arena that focuses on new collaborative Web technologies. After teaching herself how to blog using WordPress, she began writing about the new kind of tech.

In a matter of months, blogging allowed her to connect with other thought leaders in her field and build a strong social network, bolstered by LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook. It was through that network in 2007 that she heard about a former business associate who was starting a company. After an e-mail exchange and an in-person interview, Scrupski was hired at the new company, nGenera.

Though she was laid off in 2009 when the recession hit, by then Scrupski had enough credibility to set herself up as a consultant. In 2010, when she was 51, *Fast Company* voted her one of the most influential women in tech, and today she runs a business called Change Agents Worldwide, a network of professionals whose aim is to help large enterprises embrace organizational and technological advances. "I'm happier now," she says. "I'm doing exactly what I want, and I'm making a difference."







## GAIL MORALES

YEARS OUT: 7

### WAY BACK IN: RETURNING TO PREVIOUS COMPANY

**AT JUST 31**, Gail Morales was on the executive fast track. A senior vice president for investment management at Bank of America in Atlanta, she was charged with running a \$100 million private portfolio. Then her husband was offered a job in London. So in 1997, Morales quit the bank and moved with him and their young son to England, where she had a second child. Two years later, Morales's husband took a new job, and the family moved back to Atlanta. "Because I didn't have children until later in life, I think part of my identity was always tied to my work," she says. "The challenge for me of being around kids all the time was the lack of intellectual stimulation."

In 2004, when her younger child entered school, she

decided to go back to work, knowing re-entry wouldn't be easy. Then Morales had an idea: Why not try to return to the company that already knew what she could do? She had left Bank of America as a top earner, and many of her peers were still there, now in senior roles.

Morales persuaded a former coworker—now a human resources executive at the bank—to float her résumé. "I didn't have to sell myself in the same way I would to a company that didn't know me," she says. "My reputation was that I was a team player and could get things done." Seven years after she left Bank of America, she accepted a job there as a senior vice president in supply-chain management.

More important, the bank didn't penalize her for taking time out. "I got a very competitive salary for the role that I took," she says. "I wasn't punished for having left the corporate environment." Returning at a high level opened new doors. In 2012 she took a position with SunTrust bank as the senior vice president of enterprise change management. "Your brain doesn't atrophy," Morales says. "But when companies see a break, they see a degradation in your ability. Several companies offered me less for taking a break. I wasn't going to work for less than I'm worth."

## CARRY A CARD

**CREATE A BUSINESS CARD** with your name, phone number and e-mail address (which should be professional, such as FirstName.LastName@gmail.com). Include the URL of your website if you have one and a link to your LinkedIn profile (personalize the link under the profile tab). "It levels the playing field when you can exchange a business card with somebody," Gewirtz says. Try a service such as Moo, GotPrint or VistaPrint (\$10 to \$40 for 100 cards).

## PAY FOR A REFRESHER

**IF THE GAP IN YOUR WORK LIFE** is significant and you don't have much in the way of volunteer experience, community involvement or continuing education to demonstrate that you've kept your skills fresh, a formal back-to-work program might be a good fit. Pace's New Directions for Attorneys offers five months of training for \$7,000, including skills refresher courses and career counseling. There's even a 12-week externship (basically a short-term internship). "We wanted the program to be very practical," says Gewirtz. "Not just theory but boots-on-the-ground experience, a new piece you could add to your résumé." Albany Medical College runs a 12-week re-entry program for doctors that costs \$6,500, and the Flatiron School in New York offers a 12-week immersive course in Web development for \$12,000. Many programs aren't as involved or expensive. Harvard Business School runs a two-day career-strategizing course for \$600 (anyone can apply, but space is limited). Find others at [irelaunch.com/CareerReentry](http://irelaunch.com/CareerReentry).

# 2.7 YEARS

AVERAGE LENGTH OF A CAREER BREAK

## NETWORK WITHOUT APOLOGY

**"THERE'S A REAL AWKWARDNESS** that women experience in translating personal relationships into professional ones," says workplace consultant Deborah Epstein Henry. Networking may be the ultimate key to your success, however, so stop the hand wringing and get on with it. One huge tool in your portfolio: LinkedIn.

**CHECK IN REGULARLY** Hiring managers are 10 times as likely to visit your LinkedIn profile if you share something at least once a week. When you see an industry-related item that you're interested in, add a sentence of thoughtful commentary, then post it. "One concern managers will have about your coming back into the workplace is that you won't be up to date," says Nicole Williams, LinkedIn's career expert. "You need to indicate that you know what's going on."

**MAINTAIN YOUR CONNECTIONS** Your connections on LinkedIn are virtually useless if you never reach out to them. Williams suggests scanning your LinkedIn news feed each morning to see what everyone is up to. An acquaintance got promoted? Send her a congratulatory note. Or endorse colleagues with whom you've worked directly. "It's keeping yourself in front of people," Williams says.

**FOLLOW COMPANIES** LinkedIn isn't only about connecting to individuals; you can also "follow" specific firms and see who's coming in and who's departing. If there's a big hiring push, you'll notice it. And don't forget to also follow a company's competitors.

**INCLUDE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE** If you're doing anything, even unpaid, that enhances or displays your professional talents, put it on your profile. Are you fund raising for a nonprofit? Did you design a website? Did you do someone's taxes as a favor? Add it.





## LAURIE-ELLEN SHUMAKER

YEARS OUT: **2**

WAY BACK IN:  
**ACCEPTING A CUT IN  
PAY AND TITLE**

**WITH MORE THAN TWO DECADES** of legal work under her belt, Laurie-Ellen Shumaker, 62, assumed she'd have no problem finding another position when she was laid off from her job as a commercial real estate attorney in February 2009. But months passed, and although she'd sent out hundreds of applications, chatted with several recruiters and attended numerous job fairs, not one offer materialized. "You never think that the situation is going to keep going on," she says. "When

the unemployment checks started coming in, I kind of ignored them, because the amount was so low. It was humiliating."

Shumaker, who had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis a year earlier, drained her 401(k) and savings, and sold her car to pay for expenses. Ten months later, facing homelessness, she moved into the second home of her daughter's friend.

Nearly every day for the next year, Shumaker applied for jobs from 6 in the morning until after midnight. "I revised, revamped, reworded, reslanted, re-re-re-everything I could think of to my résumé," she says. Though the lagging economy contributed to her failure to get hired, Shumaker guesses other factors came into play: her age and the perception that she'd want lots of money.

Finally, in late 2010, one of her daughter's friends

happened upon a listing for a job that she thought might interest Shumaker: lease administrator in the real estate department at the University of Pennsylvania. Shumaker applied. One of the things the hiring manager was looking for was knowledge of software that Shumaker had introduced to her former company; she made it a talking point during the interview.

Eventually, Shumaker was offered the job—at one third her previous salary. "I said, 'I'll take it!'" she says. "Even though I wasn't being paid to be a lawyer, I was still using the same skills. I thought, Maybe someday something will evolve that will let me expand more." Nearly three years later, Shumaker's job responsibilities have grown, and she's gotten a couple of raises. "I'm happy," she says. "Every single day I'm thankful for my job."

**22%** OF WOMEN RE-ENTERING HAD TO STEP DOWN TO A LOWER JOB TITLE



## HINA MCCREE

YEARS OUT: **9; 7.5**

WAY BACK IN:  
**TAKING CLASSES**

**HINA MCCREE'S** first time-out came in 1988, when she was pregnant with her first child. Then an engineer for a defense contractor, she quit her job to move to Atlanta from San Diego with her husband, who was pursuing his PhD at Georgia Tech. McCree stayed home for the next nine years, going

to school in the evenings to obtain a master's degree in electrical engineering. She relocated twice more for her husband's career, eventually landing in Dallas.

It was there that a former professor told her about an engineering job at a telecommunications company. With two kids now in school and a fresh set of credentials, McCree, then 36, landed the spot. Four years later, she was having second thoughts. "I didn't want to be so tired when my kids asked to have three friends spend the night," she says. "I needed more quality time with them." Her solution: a second hiatus.

This time, McCree stayed home for seven and a half years, during which her family relocated to Boston. In 2006,

as her kids neared college age, she decided to go back to work again. But a year and a half later, she was still jobless. "The changes in software development between 2001 and 2008 were huge," she says. "With the speed of tech, I was no longer up to date."

To catch up, McCree took a program-management workshop at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell and an online class in computer engineering. Then she reached out to her network. In 2008 her husband's colleague told her about a software engineer job at a technology firm. "At that point, I was extremely nervous because the first couple of interviews I'd gone on had been so bad," McCree, now 52, says. But this company was

## DEAL WITH A RÉSUMÉ GAP

If you haven't held a paid position in years, your résumé may contain a significant date jump. Here's how to get past it.

### START WITH A SUMMARY

"It's a chance to spin your experience in the direction that you want to focus on now," Rabin says.

### ORGANIZE YOUR RÉSUMÉ BY SKILLS, NOT DATES

If you have a break of a year or more, focus on the skills you have that will be useful to any employer. For example: management, market research or team leadership.

### ADD RELEVANT UNPAID EXPERIENCE

If you volunteered in the community in ways that used job-related skills, put it on your résumé.

### ACCOUNT FOR YOUR TIME

"Some people are listing the gap in work experience as their last entry, 'Career break, raising children,'" Rabin says.

**THINK AHEAD** Beef up your résumé now if you plan to jump back in later. Find a volunteer position or part-time work. Ask people who are doing the type of job you'd want, "What substantive knowledge am I missing?" Gewirtz says.



looking for a broader skill set than the previous ones were, and her computer class had prepared her well. She got the job.

Last year, McCree transferred within the company and relocated with her family to Baltimore. "In high-tech industries, the field changes so rapidly," she says. "Now that I'm the one hiring people, I'm happy when someone has updated their skills by taking a class or workshop." \*