

## DESPERATE HOUSEWIFE OR CFO (CHIEF *FAMILY* OFFICER)? HOW WOMEN CAN PLAN FOR PROFESSIONAL RE-ENTRY

Scores of high achieving women are choosing to take a 'time out' from their business careers to stay home and raise a family. Politically incorrect or not, this is one of the rights that feminists fought for many years ago – the right to choose. And while it makes a compelling piece on 60 minutes or 20/20, raising a family does *not* mean you have opted out of work (have *you* ever tried to stay home and raise kids?).

Consider the fact that today's average college graduate can expect 3 - 5 *careers* in his or her lifetime, with an average of 10-12 years in each. Don't kid yourself – being a full time Mother is one of those careers. It requires the functional skills and interpersonal finesse of an adroit chief corporate officer. This is not the world of June Cleaver.

Most stay-at-home Moms plan to return to traditional work in years ahead. So a more relevant question than "have they opted out of work?" is "how can they plan for re-entry when/if they decide to go back to a traditional career?" And then consider what's the best way to prepare for that re-entry? Are there things these women can do to position themselves appropriately, discuss 8-12 years of child rearing in a way that is professional and compelling to a hiring manager, discuss salary, compete with other job applicants. **Will they be perceived as desperate housewives or as highly skilled Chief Family Officers?**

If *you* were a hiring manager, you'd want employees that are:

- committed to the job even when the going gets tough;
- flexible to focus on a task but also change direction when necessary;
- comfortable living with uncertainty;
- able to make decisions with insufficient information;
- able to fake enthusiasm as needed!

Does this sound like a job description for a career as a mother? You bet! Women must stop apologizing for their decision, and learn to present themselves with pride and professionalism. Consider the following tips:

### **1. Self-assess to actively plan your future**

It's your future – you may as well be deliberate about it. Don't wait until the month before you want to go back to work to think about your options. To get clear, do an assessment with a career professional. It will help you get clear about what you *can* do, what you *want* to do, and where you might *fit*.

### **2. Stay involved and keep current:**

Knowing yourself is good, but you need to understand what is happening in your industry and where you might belong:

- Research your field. Explore the websites of your industry associations. Check out recent conferences and look at what was discussed and who presented.
- Read trade journals and magazines.
- Use a google alert to surf the internet and bring industry news right to your computer.
- Take an online or e-learning class to upgrade your skills.

### **s3. Maintain relationships:**

Many working mothers don't stay connected to their contacts from work. They don't know what to talk about. If you do your research, you will have *plenty* to discuss. Just by reading clipping services, you might even know more about the industry than *they* do. Talk about the changes you see and ask how it mirrors their own experiences. You can be viewed as a value-added resource before the kids are even out of diapers.

### **4. Be your own advocate**

You know how tough your job is. But don't expect that others will figure it out. Just like people in traditional workplaces, you need to tell stories that provide evidence of your accomplishments. Offer specific examples that demonstrate the skills you want others to be aware of. Make a list of the areas in which you are involved:

- at home,
- at school,
- in the neighborhood,

Now think about how you have made a difference in any of those venues. You will find that there are many ways that you demonstrate your uniqueness and your value. After all, what you *do* is a reflection of who you are. If you were a sales person, odds are you are *still* negotiating and closing. If you were in operations, you are undoubtedly running some aspect of your home that is evidence of your skills and natural talents. Look at your life as an expression of who you are *fundamentally*, and you will find plenty of stories to share.

### **5. Go for market value, and know what it is**

Salary is the very last thing you discuss when exploring jobs. First understand the position, the value that you bring, the market rates...and *then* discuss compensation. If you have done your research and maintained your contacts, it will be that much easier for you to negotiate when the time is right.

### **6. Stay in touch with your ex-employer and leverage the Boomerang Effect**

It can be easier to gain traction with the employer that benefited the most from your professional skill and acumen. They know your work, and your history ensures a faster time to productivity. Rehiring ex-employees is known as the Boomerang effect. The flip side however (there's always a flip side) is that you risk being type-cast in your old role and salary.

### **7. Go out on your own**

If you can't find or create the position you want inside an existing corporation, consider starting your own. More and more women are throwing their hat into the entrepreneurial ring and no-where is this more evident than with women who want to rekindle their professional lives without the bureaucratic and rigid structure of the typical corporation.

### **8. Be who you are!**

Your role as a mother can be an asset or liability – desperate housewife or Chief Family Officer. So take deliberate and purposeful control over your future, while enjoying the choices you make today.