

From mommy to career woman: putting your best high-heeled foot forward

BY WENDY ALTSCHULER For Sun-Times Media

The job market is fierce and it is especially so for stay-at-home moms who find themselves re-entering the workforce after a number of years of being off the job grid. Time spent with your children rather than on advancing your career doesn't have to be a nail in the proverbial coffin. The challenge exists in finding a way to successfully market yourself to potential employers, highlighting your skill set and value. Just ask Caroline Margolis, a Northbrook mother of two.

"My company tried it's best to give me some work life balance, but travel was required, which is hard to do with an attorney husband and a kid at home. So after many months of thought, I took the plunge and quit the job I truly loved," said Margolis. "My goal was to stay at home with my kids and consult, but I had no clue how to get started."

Margolis figured out some key moves to ensure that she will be a viable candidate when she returns to work full time. She maintained excellent work contacts, finished past jobs on healthy terms, stayed in touch with her previous colleagues and kept a solid line of communication with clients she had worked with in the past as well as contacts she met along the way. Margolis is also a strong networker and this has been an important tool for securing new clients.

"Whether it is just within the community, a professional conference, through my membership organization or through social networking sites, these have all helped me stay connected to colleagues or meet new ones," said Margolis. "I also always keep business cards on hand, you never know when you might need one. I feel like networking is so important if you want to stay connected in the industry you are in, to make sure people know that you are still around."

An excellent resource for navigating the job search abyss is 2nd Career Consulting, an Evanston company that offers coaching to moms as well as mapped out resume guidance, interview training, networking advice and job search strategies that will aid in a successful re-entry into the workforce.

"Reconnect with former managers, colleagues, vendors and clients," said **Mary Beth Barrett-Newman, president of 2nd Career Consulting**. "No matter how long you have been out of the workforce, these individuals will remember you as the great team player, responsive customer service representative or terrific problem solver you were, not the car pool, snack duty, soccer mom you may view yourself as today."

Barrett-Newman advises moms to stay informed of the current industry happenings and if moms are attracted to a different field they should make new connections, join professional forums, read pertinent literature and attend applicable workshops and conferences. It is worthwhile for moms to gain applicable volunteer experience as well and include this germane knowledge on their resume.

“Chaperoning children on field trips may not be relevant, but managing a volunteer force of 50 people and raising \$100,000 for the high school booster club is something to include on a resume,” said Barrett-Newman.

Barrett-Newman recommends staying up-to-date with fast advancing technology, making the job hunt process a priority and being optimistic through it all.

“When you are looking for a job, you are in a sales role. The product you are selling is you,” said Barrett-Newman. “The more you are networking and letting people know you’re looking for a position, the higher your probability of success. Be as specific as possible about the types of opportunities you are looking for when you network. People can’t help you if they don’t know what you’re looking for.”

Sometimes a classic approach is the best solution for getting the vocation results you’re looking for. The Lake Forest Graduate School of Management has a new program in place for moms that want to get an MBA to update their skills before going back to work.

“Inspired by the growing number of moms who have stepped out of the workforce and are now looking to confidently re-enter it, Lake Forest Graduate School of Management launched a specialized daytime MBA program,” said Manish Shah, dean of the daytime MBA program at Lake Forest Graduate School of Management. “This program was specifically designed to build the skills and confidence of career re-launchers, giving them access to the practical and premier business curriculum of the Lake Forest MBA with convenient scheduling, as well as special a la carte options, for individuals who have been on an intentional career break.”

Making graduates relevant and sought-after to prospective employers is the objective of this program. With an accelerated degree curriculum, opportune class times, a simplified admission process, coaching services and seminars, moms can assertively apply for a desirable job upon completion of the degree. “Career re-launchers typically have tremendous volunteer experience, self motivation to contribute their talents to future employers, and excellent personal networks, but often need the current business competencies to restart their careers,” said Shah. “The program has technology training, tutoring, business mentors, internships and a class designed by career re-launch experts, which helps students re-enter the workplace through the development of a strong strategy.”