



'Mom's point of view' benefits women returning to work

By [Marie Wilson](#)

With parenthood come decisions. What to name the baby. How to take care of his or her needs. Which values to instill as the child ages.

Job search tips for moms: Invest time, money for success

Landing a job can take up to a year for mothers looking to re-enter the workforce, says **Mary Beth Barrett-Newman**, president of **2nd Career Consulting** in Evanston. But following these tips can help the search be a success:

- Connect with former co-workers and people who remember you as a colleague, not as a mom.
- Build a LinkedIn profile; familiarize yourself with Twitter and Instagram.
- List volunteer work on your resume if it highlights relevant job skills; this can minimize employment gaps.
- Take classes in Word, Excel, PowerPoint or other software programs relevant to your field.
- Invest in your job search. "Too often, stay-at-home moms are more than willing to pay \$1,500 for a son or daughter to play on a traveling soccer team, but when faced with spending \$200 to attend a conference or workshop, will decide against it as it's 'too expensive,'" Barrett-Newman said.
- Prioritize your job search; delegate household chores such as laundry and dishes so you have time to devote to seeking employment.
- Focus on what you liked about previous jobs, not what you'll miss out on while working.

And what to do about work.

For mothers who opt out of the workforce, the way back in is not always clear. Time passes, interests change and technology advances. Once-appealing jobs now might seem too time-consuming, demanding or inconvenient. And then there's that resume gap, and how to explain away the time spent raising children, volunteering in their schools and fundraising for their activities.

"When you look at my resume, I have a ton of volunteer work -- and not just baking cookies for the PTA," said Cathy Piehl, an Aurora mother of three who is trying to return to full-time employment as a school social worker. "It's been significant work."

Despite all the uncertainties, some women who recently rejoined the workforce say they have been surprised to find widespread acceptance of their choices.

"I think there's a respect for us that we were in the workforce and made a decision to stay home and now are trying to get back," said Monica Sampias of Naperville, who returned to work eight months ago after leaving a career in public relations when she had triplets in 2002. "I've been really surprised at how supportive people have been."

The return-to-work stories of Sampias -- and women from Naperville to Lombard to Libertyville -- show an element of satisfaction with the process of returning to the job, surprise at the relative ease of proving their worth as a mother in the world of work and optimism for others trying to accomplish the same feat. But there also lies an element of anxiety, of struggle, of diminished confidence from time spent out of the loop.

"I was very, very worried after having been out of the workforce for 12 years that no one was going to hire me," said Sampias, 41, who now works as an office assistant at Fieldglass, a vendor management system provider in Naperville. "My company seems to like somebody who is more mature, has more life experience, knows how to communicate. ... It was a

benefit to me that I was the age I was and that I had more life experience and some of that mom point of view."

Societal acceptance of mothers' choices -- either to remain home with children or to work outside the home -- has been growing as people realize neither option is permanent, said **Mary Beth Barrett-Newman**, a Mount Prospect native who is president of **2nd Career Consulting** in Evanston.

"Years ago it was like either you were a mom who stayed at home or you were a mom who worked," she said. "Now it's not a forever choice. I might be today a mom who stays home, but a couple of years from now I might be a mom who works."

In this post-recession environment, career experts say mothers can begin the job search trusting that some employer out there will value their skills -- even if they haven't come from climbing the corporate ladder or building on-the-job experience.

"Since the downturn, there has been a lot of people that realize that they need two incomes to make it," said Kimberly White, executive director of the Community Career Center in Naperville. "I would encourage all employers to look at women re-entering the workforce because I think they have a lot to offer."

Not all about money

Women returning to the workforce actually are bucking a slight trend -- statistics show more mothers are choosing to stay at home, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of the most recent government data. It shows 71 percent of mothers nationwide worked outside the home in 2012, down from 74 percent at the peak of the recession in 2008.

While economic struggles might have forced women into jobs a few years ago, many who are returning now say they made the choice for reasons beyond money.

"I had more time on my hands than I was feeling I was utilizing to my best ability. I knew I wanted to go back to work, but I was afraid," said Mary Nee, a 52-year-old Libertyville mother of three who began working part time last spring in a Vernon Hills dental office. There, she shares 60 hours a week with two other Libertyville moms.

"I wanted to show my girls I could overcome that and go outside my boundaries and comfort zone," she said. "That was the most important reason I went for it."

The desire for a cushion against economic instability still factors into the equation for some new working moms, as could the loss of a husband's job, the youngest child's enrollment in school all day, the financial reality of an upcoming divorce or the desire for meaningful adult interaction and the ability to operate outside of "mom mode."

"What I have enjoyed is going back to finding the independent side of me, not the mom side," said Sampias, whose pending divorce was the reason she looked for a job last summer. "I actually do enjoy getting up in the morning and getting dressed and putting on a little bit of makeup, where when I was home I used to spend a lot of time in yoga pants.

"It's been nice ... spending some time basically with other adults in conversation about something other than school or kids."

The road back

Career search experts say there is no one magic formula for mothers to re-enter the workforce; several variations on the themes of networking, willingness to start in entry-level positions, gaining educational credentials or pursuing new passions can prove successful.

"A number of things are really important when women get back into the workforce," career consultant **Barrett-Newman** said. "A lot of it is reconnecting with people you used to work with. To them, we're frozen in time, and they remember us as the colleague that helped them get that project done or

stayed late to meet a deadline. We're not the carpool mom or the Girl Scout cookie collector mom or all those other roles that we have in our life."

Yet when women choose to stay home, they often do take on volunteer roles other than caring for their own families. These roles can work to a job-seeking mom's benefit -- if she plays her cards right and sells her volunteer experience as relevant to skills she will use on the job, experts say.

"I think a lot of times women, especially moms who are returning to work, will come in and say things like, 'Well, I just stayed home with the kids.' But when you put it down on paper, you find out they ran a six-figure PTA or were instrumental in putting together a fundraiser for their child's school or a foundation," said White, of the Naperville career center. "They don't realize the things that they've done and can put on a resume that provide value."

While employers value the motherhood skills, such as organization, time management and multi-tasking, Renee Lavery, a Lombard mother of 12, says she's having trouble finding a job. A 51-year-old former flight attendant, Lavery says she struggles even to get an interview, and she hated the few retail gigs she has landed.

"Moms are probably the most organized people you'll meet, especially with 12 kids," said Lavery, who said her family grew so large because she likes babies too much. "I want somebody to just give me a chance."

So she's going back to school, studying photography at College of DuPage, and hoping a fresh degree will cause more potential employers to give her a look so she can join the roughly 71 percent of American mothers who work outside the home.

"We need income; that's why I thought going back to school at least might give me a chance to get a better job that pays a little more money," said Lavery, whose children range in age from 27 to 6. "If I'm going to be doing something for the next 20 years, I want it to be something I enjoy."

Mom skills valuable

Among mothers returning to work, those who always planned on rejoining the labor force might have a slight advantage. They might keep in more frequent touch with career contacts, more closely follow technological advances in their field or keep their professional certifications up to date, experts say.

But even those who had no specific return plans are finding fate can lend a helping hand. When Jen Byers of Naperville was home with her daughters after quitting her teaching job, a friend called and asked if Byers would arrange flowers for her wedding. Soon Byers was distributing business cards and launching [Flowers by Jen](#).

"I never thought I would start my own business; it just kind of happened," said Byers, a 37-year-old who worked her way through college in a flower shop. She now involves her 6- and 4-year-old daughters in the business by teaching them to help remove dead petals while she makes arrangements. "It was almost like fate had brought me to the flower arranging, which is nice because I can offer all that and still be a full-time mom," she said.

Women who are making the decision to begin balancing work with their family lives say they relish their freedom of choice and the greater societal acceptance of mothers -- whether they be in the workforce, in the home or in the volunteer arena.

"I never dreamed that I would be able to step out of the workforce for so long and be able to step back in and have it be like I haven't missed anything and kind of make up for lost time," said 48-year-old Susan Crotty of Naperville, who volunteered and networked her way into a job at the [National Safety Council](#) in Itasca after taking 14 years off to raise her kids. Her advice to moms turned jobseekers?

"Have confidence in the skills that you gained being a mom. Because they are very valuable in the workplace."