



BACK TO WORK?

Many of you may be contemplating your return to work. Others may be planning it a bit further down the road but want to beef up those resumes in the meantime. We caught up with Dr. Lorie Ann Hildreth, an expert in Career Counselling, for her advice on putting your best foot forward!

Q: How can I explain my long term absence from work?

DH: Explain “work gaps” after much thought and careful consideration. Your right to disclose or not disclose is up to you. On the one hand disclosing offers explanations for perhaps obvious gaps in your work history, but disclosure may also mean needing to explain yourself when you really do not want to. Think carefully how you will explain everything positively or in your best interest.

Q: I want to return to work now. What can I do to strengthen my resume?

DH: If you have been out of the field for over 3 months, try volunteering to beef up your resume. Volunteer at a place you love gets you into the swing of the employment realm, gets your inertia or momentum going, and give you purpose in your career path.

Q: I won't be returning to work for a while. What can I do in the meantime to help my resume?

DH: See above. Even if you volunteer a few hours every week somewhere you are beefing

Tip:

-Have you had a long time off work? Use a “Functional Resume” instead of a chronological one which focuses on skills instead of work history. Google it to find a template.

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Tip:

-Start volunteering or working Part-time only. It's hard for anyone to go back to work full time after a lengthy time off. Don't take on more than you can handle or burn yourself out!

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Q: Should I address my memory/attention problems with a potential employer?

DH: You could choose to disclose. If you do make sure that follow it by suggesting how you have overcome some obstacles with memory issues. If you have compensated well with memory techniques, you may choose not to disclose.

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Q: What if when I start a job, I realize I wasn't ready to go back to work?

DH: Explain to your employer right away so as not to burn this bridge. Many people get into a job that they may not be able to handle but did not realize it until they get into it. The rule of thumb is: If you have to leave, leave well.

Q: What steps should I take to prepare myself for work?

DH: Stamina is the first thing to work on. Pulling an 8 hour day does not happen overnight. It takes time to build that kind of stamina. Work out a schedule through occupational therapy or on your own where you build up your stamina little by little. Also, begin to prep you resume and interviewing skills.

Q: How can I find out about flexible jobs?

DH: Use the term "job sharing" "flexible hours" or "flexible positions." For this you may need to call and ask around.

Q: Should I return to my previous employer? What would I say?

DH: If you enjoyed your previous employment and it was acceptable to both parties that you return, I do not see why you could not. You and the previous employer may sit together to discuss the job requirements again, what has change since you've been gone, and if you both think it's a good idea for you to come back.

Q: I can't have the same type of job that I used to. How will I find job satisfaction?

DH: In many ways, losing an occupation is a grieving process. What we know about grief is that it takes some time to accept losing what we love (our old occupation) and accept a new attachment (a new occupation).

Q: How do you know when it's time to find a job?

DH: Usually you feel ready, though be careful not to let fear and anxiety keep you out of the work force forever. Build up stamina and your work force skills to insure the likelihood of your success.

Q: What if we are afraid....if we think we can't find a job? Or if we feel we just can't do it?

DH: See above.... weigh the fears versus the desire to go back to work. Make sure that your first attempt is met with some success. Hire a life coach, ask for a job coach, build up your workforce skills BEFORE you go back.

Q: What do you put on your resume? Everything we knew before the ABI is not really applicable anymore. So how can we find a job without a resume?

DH: Build a "new" resume with volunteering, school and community outreach. As you discover your life as it is now keep the focus going forward.

Q: Some of us feel we have went from graduating high school and college, to going back in time to feeling we are in grade 6 or so....What can we do to get our old life back? And then that would give us confidence to go out in the world and find a job.

DH: Ah...yes...so a regression of sorts. Yes. What I have known from folks is that there can be a keen and determined sense of "never giving up." So, for example when others around you may suggest that you wouldn't be able to do something (i.e. go back to work/school) keep trying. Your pace will not be as fast as you want it to be, but be patient with yourself. The confidence comes with building yourself up with tools little by little to gain small successes. Also a solid support system of friends that you meet with regularly. Counselling for self esteem can do wonders also.

Q: Who can help us?

DH: Well...first and foremost the answer is you. You are still in charge of your life and who you are as a person. Even if you feel, behave or think differently you are still in control of who you are and who you want to be. The next set of people are, supportive friends, counsellors, doctors and family members.

Q: How do we get out of a rut?

DH: Little by little. Think of it like a car stuck in a rut. If you are sitting there gunning the gas pedal to whip it out of the gutter you will over steer, spin your wheels, and maybe tip the car. It may be tricky but sit there a moment and think, "How can I do this?" You may call for help to get a tow, steer the car out slowly and carefully, or get out and dig

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around in the mud or snow a little to loosen the car. Perhaps without realizing it, just ahead there is a place in the road where the rut is more shallow and if you travel along further you can just ease the car out.

Tip:

-add courses/training that you underwent during rehab (thing rehab centres) to fill out spaces in your resume. OR perhaps you underwent informal training with an RSW at home. This could be incorporated as well

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