

GETTING HIRED AFTER A CAREER BREAK

Taking a career break is far more common than we perceive. There are several reasons why people take time off from their jobs. Maternity, childcare, caring for elders, traveling or just taking personal time off are some of the most common reasons why people have a gap in their resume. Taking a career break could prove to be a good thing as it helps people to reset and recharge, however, it's not a bed of roses because getting back to work after a career break can be intimidating. Trying to 'fill the blank' in your resume and justifying it can be a daunting task because although some employers may understand your situation and look beyond the break on your resume, many might be unsure about hiring you. It might seem like a gap on your resume can be a hindrance in finding your next big break, however, it is not always the case. It can be a great chance to upskill yourself, learn new skills, take that long holiday or just try and do something different. No matter what the reason is, it's always intimidating and challenging trying to get your foot in the door once you're ready to accept a new position. If you're in this situation, here are some effective tips to help increase your chances of getting hired following a career break:

1. **Assess your situation** – The first thing candidates instinctively tend to do is dive into a job portal, type some keywords and hit the search button. But it's time to take a step back and ask yourself – What am I looking for this time? What are my priorities as far as a new job goes? Is it flexi-hours? Is it higher pay? Or a bigger role? That will help you narrow down your search. It's also the right time to think if you want to do something different or put to use a certain skill that you acquired during your break. Keep an open mind about doing something different or something unique that interests you. Now's the time for a change!
2. **Make your availability known** – Invest time in reaching out to your friends, family, ex colleagues and the people in your professional network and let them know that you're actively looking for a new job. They may have great opportunities available in their companies or may be able to point you in the right direction. You can also write a post on social media sites like Facebook and LinkedIn announcing your decision to go back to work and mention the kind of job you're looking for and someone from your network may be able to help you with it.
3. **Work on your skills** – The reasons for a career gap could be many, but it's a time that should be used wisely. That way, not only are you upskilling but it also reflects positively on your resume. Several universities now offer online courses that are especially tailor-made for working professionals. These have a relaxed timeframe for completion and are great for those coming back from a career break. If you pick a course that's relevant to your field of work, it is an excellent way to fill the gaps in your resume. It also demonstrates to a potential employer that you're committed to learning and upskilling.

4. **Update your resume and cover letter** – Since you've been on a break, your resume needs to be updated with it. You would also need to add any new skills you've picked up, new technologies learned and a course/degree that you completed. These can be great selling points during the interview as well. Do not forget to proof-read your resume for any grammatical or factual errors before sending it out. If you need help with writing your resume and cover letter, you could consider seeking the help of a professional resume writing service.
5. **Prepare for your interview** – During the course of your interview, you will be asked questions about your career break and what you utilized the time for. It's always better to answer this question honestly. You can tailor your responses in a way that demonstrates how the time off was beneficial for you, how it proved to be a positive learning experience and how the skills gained will be beneficial for your new job. Think in advance about what apprehensions the interviewers might have and I them.
6. **Speak to your references** – Most employers ask for a few references from ex-managers, supervisors or colleagues and now is a good time to figure out who you would want to submit as a reference. It should be someone you closely worked with and can vouch for your work ethic and capabilities. A client or an immediate supervisor who can put in a good word for you will go a long way in establishing you as a solid contender for the job.
7. **Be confident** – Although getting back into the job market is very stressful and daunting, the crucial thing is that you stay confident in your talent and capabilities. Rejection is a part of the job hunt and you will, invariably, face it at some point. Do not let it shatter your confidence. If you need a morale boost, read some self-help books, watch inspirational videos or talk to someone who can instill a sense of confidence back in you.
8. **Be your own boss** – It is quite possible that despite your best efforts, you were unable to find a job that suits your requirements. Do not be disheartened! There are plenty of opportunities that would allow you to become a freelancer or start your own business. As they say, working your way up from the bottom of your own company will teach you things that no management degree ever will! If remuneration is not a constraint, you can also consider volunteering. The sense of fulfilment it offers is unparalleled.

Career breaks are quite common and it's fairly easy to pick up where you left off if you follow these tips. Everyone climbs up the corporate ladder as per their own pace and there are no rules about the methodology or timeframe to do it. Happiness, peace of mind and a sense of satisfaction in your professional life is what you should aim for.