

A FIVE STEP GOING-BACK-TO-WORK PROCESS FOR EXPAT MUMS

BY REBECCA WELLS

In over 80% of cases, expatriates are accompanied overseas by their spouses and families. The majority of accompanying spouses are women who either leave jobs behind them and need to start afresh or who are considering going back to work in their host countries. Either way finding a new job, as an expat mum, brings with it a host of new challenges.

Below are 5 top tips to help you divide your going-back-to-work process into three manageable chunks:

Prepare: steps 1-2
Apply: step 3
Excel: steps 4-5

PREPARE

1. BE AWARE OF THE MANY ROLES YOU PLAY

Most of the tasks you do, which define your many 'roles', are done subconsciously and if you're performing too many simultaneously it can become overwhelming. Take a piece of paper and write down all of your roles – they might be: mother; wife; friend; sister; legal secretary; postman; entertainer; cleaner; singer; confidant. List as many as you can and prioritise them with the most important numbered '1'.

You may be surprised how many roles there are on your list and it's possible there are some you *don't want* to be playing. You may decide to put some boundaries in place and say 'no' when 'asked' to perform certain roles again.

Focus on your top 3-5 roles and allow the others to take a back seat. You'll be surprised how much more time you have to concentrate on the roles that you deem most important in your life, helping you become more productive and more effective in all that you do.

2. USE YOUR RESOURCEFUL STATES TO BUILD CONFIDENCE

Going back to work, having had some time out, can be nerve wracking but magnified if you're also trying to adapt to a new cultural environment. Expat mums, particularly those who moved within the last year or two, may still be dealing with culture shock; loneliness; feeling out of touch or 'lost'; trying to make friends and develop new support networks. Feeling out of your depth can be horribly crippling, often leading to self-confidence issues and lethargy.

A great technique for helping you overcome self doubt is to review your most resourceful states. On a piece of paper, list eight states where you thrive. These are states when you're at your most productive and most exhilarated. For example you might be a brilliant organiser or communicator. You might be friendly or find you're most on the ball first thing in the morning.

Now write down the area where you're lacking a bit of confidence. Take each of your resourceful states in turn and ask yourself, "If I were in state X (i.e. being a brilliant organiser) how would I approach this problem?" You'll end up with a list of at least eight different ways to overcome the particular challenge.

APPLY

3. REFRAME YOUR CV

Some mums going back to work have concerns that their CV lacks substance if they have taken valuable time out of work to raise their children. Arguably it is a question of perspective: there are many different ways to look at a picture and it's for you to decide which perspective to take.

Reframe the aspects on your CV that you have some concerns about by focusing on your strengths. For example over the last few years, have you done voluntary work? If so this might illustrate your *commitment*, *communication* and *personable skills*. The fact that you've emigrated demonstrates your *open mindedness*, *desire for challenge*, *resilience* and *adaptability*. The time you've spent with your children might show you have *strong values*, *are a good listener* and *team player*.

Strengthen your CV by littering it with your strengths!

EXCEL

4. MAINTAIN HEALTHY ROUTINES

Moving to a new country means routines can easily be misplaced as your priorities and focus both change. Try to get into routines as quickly as possible; once you start work your many roles will multiply and so it is important to spend time in your day where you *want* to.

If you feel you're being pushed around and your balance goes out of kilter, set some boundaries and stick to them. Are you taking work home for example? Are you working late? Are you getting time in the day to eat? Are you able to get some exercise? Have you got time to make new friends?

If you're unhappy with the imbalance, note down in your diary where and how you are spending your time. Be very specific e.g. Breakfast 7.45am - 8am; walk the dog 8am - 8.20am; drive to work 8.30am - 9am etc. At the end of your week decide where changes need to be made and choose how and when tasks will be better performed to suit you.

5. PLAN YOUR DIRECTION

It is important to be intentional about how you lead your life so that you can be fulfilled and raise a healthy and happy family whilst also ensuring that you have a rewarding job or career. To be truly effective means setting objectives for how you want your life and career to be like. Write down 3, 6 and 12 month objectives for both your personal and professional lives. Ask yourself:

"What needs to happen for me to obtain these objectives?"

"What sort of person do I need to become to achieve them?"

"What would my life be like if I successfully attained my objectives?"

Decide on your actions and review your progress regularly. To fit everything you want into your life requires you to be focused and intentional about how you lead it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Rebecca Wells is a life coach, helping her clients understand where they are now, where they want to be and how to overcome the barriers to their success. She specialises in working with expatriates, helping newcomers to settle in to their host countries more quickly and supporting more established expatriates towards the attainment of their personal and professional development goals. Rebecca was raised as an expatriate child herself, growing up in Hong Kong and has lived in both UK and Australia. Prior to her coaching career, Rebecca worked in the London advertising industry for many years developing communication strategies and campaigns for a number of international organisations. Contact her if you have any questions or visit her website for more information www.clearhorizoncoaching.com