

MUMPRENEURS PROFILES TC

Back in the game

Returning to the workforce after having a baby is a big step, one that might evoke some equally big feelings. **Emma Mclean** from Works for Everyone shares her tips on how to navigate this tricky time



The thought of returning to work after having a baby can fill your mind with a lot of questions. Can I still do my job? What does it mean if I don't love my job anymore? Can I be a good parent and a good employee? Will my baby adjust to daycare? How is this all going to work? It can feel exhausting and stressful to have all these thoughts running around your head. And you haven't even gone back to work yet!



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If you have similar thoughts in your head, take comfort in the knowledge that you're not alone. Having a baby and returning to work is a hugely transformational time in your life. It's like riding a rollercoaster – you'll have good days, even great days, and you'll also have days where the wheels just fall off. It's a time for you to dig deep into your self-compassion and keep moving forward.

PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS

If you find yourself having a confidence wobble when thinking about returning to work, the quickest way to move through that feeling is to play to your

strengths. Remind yourself of the things that you are both good at and enjoy doing, and make sure that your first few weeks are all about leaning into those skills. Have a think about what your strengths are and write them down in a journal. To stimulate your thinking, ask yourself:

- What do people at work compliment me on? This will give you big clues as to your strengths.
- Can I remember a time at work when I felt the most capable and like the best version of myself? What strengths were in play?
- What are things that I enjoy doing so much that they don't even feel like work?

SHARE THE LOAD

It's true that women can do anything but what's also true is that we can't do everything. If you have been the one running the daily operations of the home, that unpaid work does not go away when you go back to paid work. If you are parenting alone, this transition back to work is going to be a change that you'll need support with. Think about how you could share the load with friends and family. Are there ways to share pick-ups and drop-offs? How can you support each other?

Don't be afraid of asking for help and being specific about what would be helpful. As Brené Brown says, "Clear is kind, unclear is unkind." If you have a partner at home, take inspiration from the word 'partner' and share things equally. Going back to work is a great opportunity to talk about the unpaid work that happens at home and how this will be shared out amongst you both. Unpaid work that can be divided up includes: laundry, cooking, groceries, pick-ups and drop-offs at daycare, meal planning, dishes, cleaning, calendar organisation and other tasks.

Unpaid work is incredibly important work in a family but we don't talk about it enough. It is almost invisible and we need to make it visible through

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conversations. These conversations can be tricky but try to lean into them as otherwise you may start to resent feeling like you are the only one starting a second shift when you walk in the door with a crying baby at 5.30pm every night.

CHECK YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Through my work I have observed that the expectations that present problems for clients are the ones they have of themselves. Often women imagine that their manager has high expectations of them and they worry that they are not meeting them. But when you dig a bit deeper, these expectations are often coming from yourself.

If you are worried about expectations and whether you are doing a good job, the quickest way to solve this is to ask your manager. Schedule a catch up when you first get back to understand what their expectations are of you, what outcomes they need and how you can seek feedback on a regular basis. If you do still hear those internal doubts, it is good to remind yourself that some of the most productive, creative and fantastic people in the world are working mothers, so... you've got this!

THINGS TO DISCUSS WHEN TALKING WITH YOUR EMPLOYER ABOUT RETURNING TO WORK

1. Agree on the plan. Before you talk to your employer, figure out what your ideal scenario is in returning to work. It might be that you would like to finish your days early in the first week back, to give yourself time to settle into the daycare routine. You might want to suggest that for the first month you work reduced hours. Most workplaces today want to make this transition easier and are open to a conversation. After all, they want you to be happy as you will then be more engaged at work.
2. Gain an understanding of their flexible working policies. One of the good things about Covid-19 is that it has been a wrecking ball on the barriers to working from home. Employers have seen that this can be a productive way of working that has advantages for all. However, it is best practice to seek clarity on what flexible working looks like for your employer. Some employers may have policies that say that all employees need to be in the office on certain days of the week, some might require permission to be obtained before working from home and some might leave it up to employees to work out. The key thing here is to have a discussion with your manager so that you are clear on what is and isn't okay.
3. Discuss and agree what the 'Handback Plan' is. Before you went on parental leave, you may have written some kind of a 'Handover Plan' for the person or people taking on your work responsibilities. It is not uncommon for an employee to come back and find that the workplace has changed or that their work doesn't actually come back to them as they left it. Be proactive about this and ask for a 'Handback Plan' from your manager. It is their responsibility to ensure this happens.
4. Understand what support there is for working parents in the workplace. Discuss if there are parent rooms which have private spaces to express and store breast milk, find out if there are resources for working parents on the work intranet, and understand what returner workshops or coaching exist to help smooth the transitions for parents who are returning.

It is completely normal to feel anxious about going back to work. The important thing is to acknowledge that feeling, then take action on the things you can control. Be kind to yourself and keep moving forward - good advice for everything in life really. Good luck to all of those returning to work this year and the very best wishes for navigating a smooth transition. •

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