

A photograph of a forest path during autumn. The path is covered in fallen leaves and leads into a dense forest. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a warm, golden glow. The trees have vibrant yellow and orange foliage. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

**The Way Back to the
Way Forward:
Restarter Journeys**

The Way Back to the Way Forward: Restarter Journeys

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Chroniced by Schonali Rebello,

JobsForHer

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Prologue

We look at the road ahead with eyes alight and hearts anticipating great things for the women of India. The women who chose family over career at some point in their lives and are now ready to reap the rewards of that choice.

In the first year of JobsForHer's existence, we have managed to fill positions in companies across the country with women who have returned to work after a career break. Now, we're ready to graduate to the next milestone in our journey; from where we once were to where we want to be. We are ready to upgrade our portal and escalate the way we work.

And we have many women to thank. Women who took a chance with us and trusted us to help them return to work. Women who saw us, allied with us, and jumped the cliff's edge with us, into a whole new world and a whole new way of affirming their lives - with second careers.

We salute these women and we have been acknowledging their strengths along our journey together by penning their personal career-restart stories on our blog page, as and when we place them or hear of them.

These are their stories...

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I. Introduction

It is often found that women's careers are fundamentally different from men's in that they are nonlinear and often circuitous. There are on-ramps and off-ramps and scenic-routes to a woman's career, and we navigate this highway – by virtue of society, or nature, or both – by adapting to different roles during different phases of our lives.



Women's careers are an amalgamation of not only our professional lives, but personal ones as well, several times coursecorrected because of marriage, motherhood, elderly care, or other personal reasons.

But women are resilient.

No matter the obstacles, we find a route around it and keep going.

Sometimes we might lose our way and feel that we will never reach the light at the end of the tunnel. But it is important that we keep persevering – even though it might not seem like this is how we had imagined our careers would play out.

The Way Back to the Way Forward: Restarter Journeys showcases the career paths of several women who took these scenic routes and continue

to win small victories every day, both in their professional as well as personal lives.

These are stories of women who placed the needs of others above theirs – their spouses, their children, their ailing elders – and still managed to reclaim their rightful spot in the workplace. These are stories of women who once wondered if they would ever get back to work but managed to pull themselves out of the mire of self-doubt and move forward. These are stories of women who are not only committed to their careers but also devoted to their families.

And for that, they are finally being rewarded, not penalized.

Through this series, we hope you will realize that re-entering the workforce might be difficult, but it is far from impossible. There are multitudes of women globally who take breaks in their careers and then get back to work as soon as their situations change. An article from the Harvard Business Review¹ citing a wealth of data and research on the subject, had this to say about off-ramping and on-ramping of American women in 2005 – which still holds true for the majority of professional women in India, today:



“Many women take an off-ramp at some point on their career highway... Of course, in the hurly-burly world of everyday life, most women are dealing with a combination of push and pull factors—and one often serves to intensify the other. Among women who take off-ramps, the overwhelming majority have every intention of returning to the workforce—and seemingly little idea of just how difficult that will prove... Many of these women find deep pleasure in their chosen careers and want to reconnect with something they love.”²

Our Restarter Journeys chronicle everyday Indian women, in today’s India. Women with hard-earned educations, hard-won industry accolades, and real-life issues. They are learning that there are on-ramps back to the highway of their careers to drive forward their dreams. Their professional lives have been and continue to be successful, but they are by no means effortless nor do they rise in a fixed, unwavering, straight line.

And that’s OK.

¹“*Off-Ramps and On-Ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success*” – Sylvia Ann Hewlett & Carolyn Buck Lue, *Harvard Business Review*, March 2005

²“*Off-Ramps and On-Ramps Revisited*” – Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Laura Sherbin & Diana Forster, *Harvard Business Review*, March 2010

2. The Art of Reinvention

**A person who never made
a mistake never tried
anything new
– Albert Einstein**

I graduated in 2003 and moved to Toronto with my parents and decided, on a lark, that I would wait tables for 6 months and see where it took me.



Being the middle-class, Catholically-moral Indian parents that they were, mine were horrified.

“We pulled out our lifesavings to send you to a really great school, to get a really great degree [I majored in Women’s Studies and Creative Writing, by the way], and you want to do what??!!”

Oh, and I moved out of their apartment to a miniscule 9-by-15 feet studio flat... in the Gay Village.

So I wrote them a letter about how I was going to find myself and make it work and they would see.

And I did.

And they did.

In 1999, I went to college to study writing because writing was what made me happy ever since I could remember. I wanted to be a world-news journalist because that is what I was told I should be by my family at the tender, know-nothing age of seventeen.

And then I took my first Women's Studies class and was introduced to the earth-shattering world of feminist thought. And then I discovered classes like African-American History, African-American Feminism, Philosophy, Modern Dance...and I did this while I was on the organizing committee for four cultural clubs and a member of six others, which taught me fundraising, event management and sales & marketing. Oh, and I held down four part-time jobs to earn enough money to fly back home every break, while maintaining a 3.6 GPA.

At graduation I had written a multiple award-winning short-story, and had been introduced to a legendary newsman from ABC News as one of the most promising students of my graduating class.

But, I wasn't ready to write as a career yet.

I felt too young, neon-green, lacking any experience of real life, and I wanted to go out into the world and find it. So, from waiting tables at a tiny Italian restaurant by night, to researching and sourcing rare and antique books for a bookstore by day, to moving to India to run a supper-club/whisky-bar in Bangalore, to moving back to Toronto and (re) starting from scratch [bartending, secretarial work, sales and then a dream job in marketing and fundraising for the classical performing arts across North America], to returning to India, getting married, working in real-estate and Nespresso coffee-planter events, and having a child... The world can be the best ride at the carnival, if you let it.

Would I change any of this? Never.

What I do now, today, is what I would have, should have, could have done all those years ago after graduation. I write about women-enablement to bring women in India back to the workforce after they take a break in their

careers for reasons like marriage/motherhood/elderly-care. But I could not do it in the way I do it now, if I had not experienced everything else I did before.

And I am working with a company that is truly making a difference in the lives of women, one by one, in a way that is countable and visible.

After a 5-year career break from the corporate workspace, I met the founder of JobsForHer when I applied for a Returnee Internship that they had featured on their newly launched portal. At the time, I didn't know if I should pursue writing as a career and Neha didn't know if they needed a writer. "But, I'm willing to give it a shot, if you are," she pushed. And that's how I began my restart journey – first as a part-time Returnee Intern, then as a part-time Content Developer, then a full-time Content Developer and today, I manage all the Creative Content at JobsForHer; all in the span of 1 year from when I decided to take the plunge.

This is how it was meant to happen.

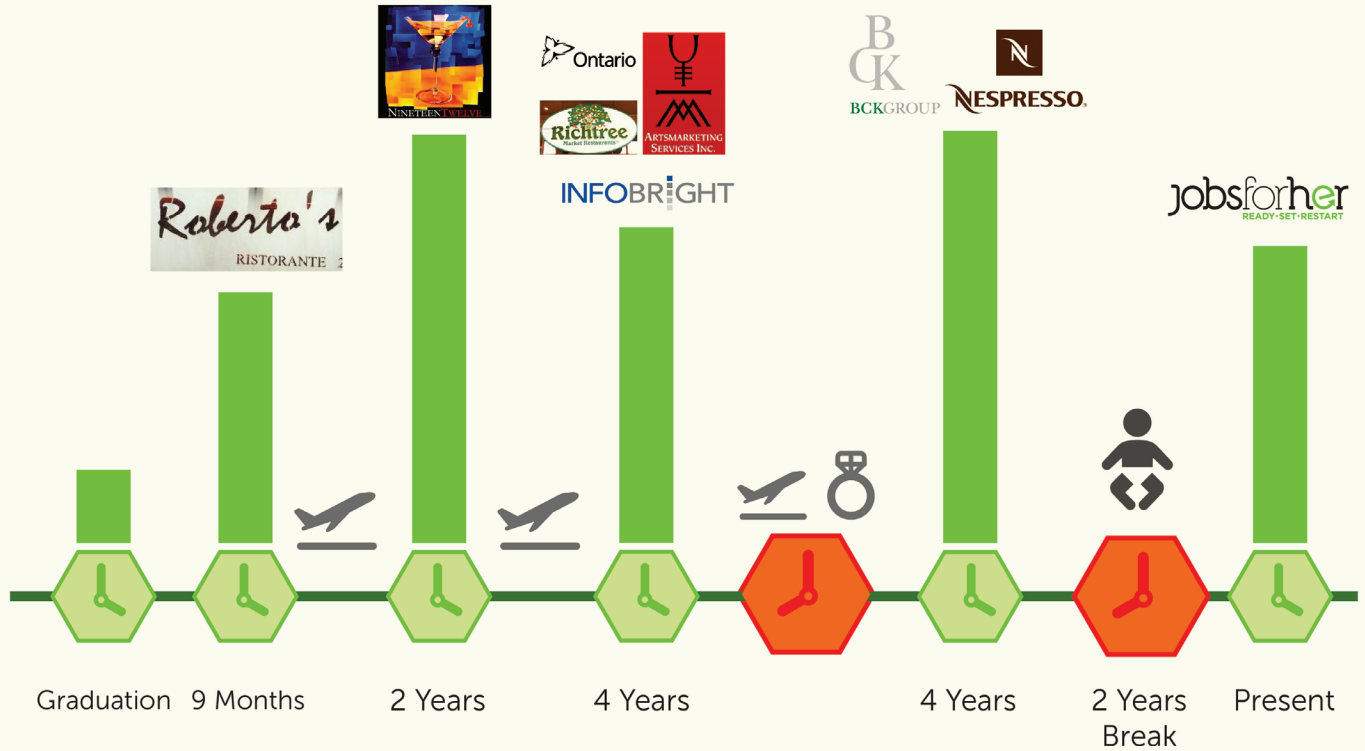
The art of reinvention is a creative, fun and immensely rewarding process, one that operates at your luxury when you choose to restart your career after a break. The most important thing to remember is that you are capable of anything that you put your mind to – you really can be anything that you want to be if you want it badly enough. The first step is thinking about it.

So go ahead – imagine everything.

*Now the Manager of Creative Content at JobsForHer, **Schonali Rebello** is a full-time mom to an athletic and bubbly 2+ year-old, and has worked in a smorgasbord of jobs – from executive-assistant to a tech-CEO to fundraising for the classical performing arts, from bartending in Toronto to conceptualizing events at a supper-club in Bangalore, from heading communications at a family-owned group of agricultural and real-estate companies to handling Nespresso events with coffee planters in Coorg. After all of this she is finally living her dream as a Creative Writing & Women's Studies graduate, writing and thinking about writing articles, blog-posts and reviews on women's issues in the Indian workplace.*



Schonali Rebello's Restarter Journey



3. Second Life, Second Career

“A second career is not the same as your first one. So the route to it must be different too.”

This was what **Uma Maheshwari** realized when she decided it was time to get back to work after a 5-year gap in her career.



Uma Maheshwari is not your run-of-the-mill Indian woman.

After working her way across the corporate jungle-gym for 18 years, with just two 3-month maternity leaves when she had her two sons, Uma had finally reached the level of AVP/Branch Head at HDFC Bank. The sky was the limit for her now and she was finally basking in the sunshine of her hard work, having started her career in telesales in a Chennai hospitality company and climbing her way up.

I worked till I almost delivered my second son at my desk, and no one could believe it. My boss kept asking me to start my mat-leave, and I kept asking him for one more week, because, what was I going to go sit at home and do? So, that's how I am.

However, her sons were now 8 and 11 years old and her extended hours

away from them had started bothering her. She realized that time flies doubly fast when children are growing up and before she knew it, they'd be gone. She felt that she would repent it forever if she didn't pause her career for a while, to be there full-time for her children and enjoy motherhood to its fullest.

Also, I had heard and realized that at my elder son's age – 11 – boys tended to go off track and become more rebellious, run away, get involved in unsavoury behaviour, etc. And when I looked at my career I had actually, without even realizing it, already reached where I'd envisioned I would go, so many years before that. The time had come to take a break, spend quality-time with my family, focus on my children and give them my undivided attention when they needed me most. I am so glad that I did. In those five years we took two vacations a year; we travelled to exotic places and created so many happy memories together. It was quite perfect.

Her well-wishers were shocked. “This is career suicide”, “Why are you throwing away all your hard work?”, “The kids will be just fine.” But Uma's mind was made up. She put in her papers with HDFC and said good-bye to her colleagues. She had new goals in her calendar now.

Uma spent the next 5 years as a full-time mom– cooking for her children, helping them with their homework and taking lots of vacations – something she hadn't ever managed to do owing to the conflicting schedules of her and her husband's jobs. But now was different, now was the time to create long-lasting memories and revel in the glory of being a mother.

Fast-forward to now. Uma's children grew up. They are now 13 and 16, independent in every way and busy in their own lives. Suddenly, Uma started getting that gnawing feeling again, that restlessness that she could do more. The desire to return to the career she loved.

And so Uma started her job-search again, trying the traditional job-hunting routes. Few months later, she came to the sad realization that the regular routes weren't working. Her resume got a gazillion hits on

traditional job portals, and she got scores of first interviews every week. However, when she did that telephone interview, they would hear about her break, and the job opening would seemingly evaporate into thin air. Even after a glorious career, Uma started doubting her abilities to be able to restart in her second career – had those naysayers been right? Would she never be able to get back to work just because she took some time away to be there for her children?

It was then that her eye fortuitously caught a newspaper article about JobsForHer – our portal connects career-break women with companies that want to rehire them, in spite of, and sometimes because of the break. So, she looked us up, created her profile, applied for jobs that suited her qualifications and experience... then sat back and waited.

In 3 days, Uma was interviewing with Kotak Mahindra Bank and was offered the job on the spot. She filed papers with HR that evening and was back at work the following Monday.

How did she manage that?

My interviewing boss said to me, “This role requires a lot of customer service and relationship management, and also a lot of sales expertise. Do you think you can handle that?”

So I said, “Sales? I’ve been selling something or the other every day of my life for the last 5 years. Whether it’s breakfast to my two sons, the purchase I thought was justified for the household to my husband, or my price for vegetables to the vegetable vendor, I was selling nonstop. Relationship management? If I could manage the relationships between myself and my mother-in-law, my husband, my children, my sister and her family, and my staff at home, I think I can manage most others.”

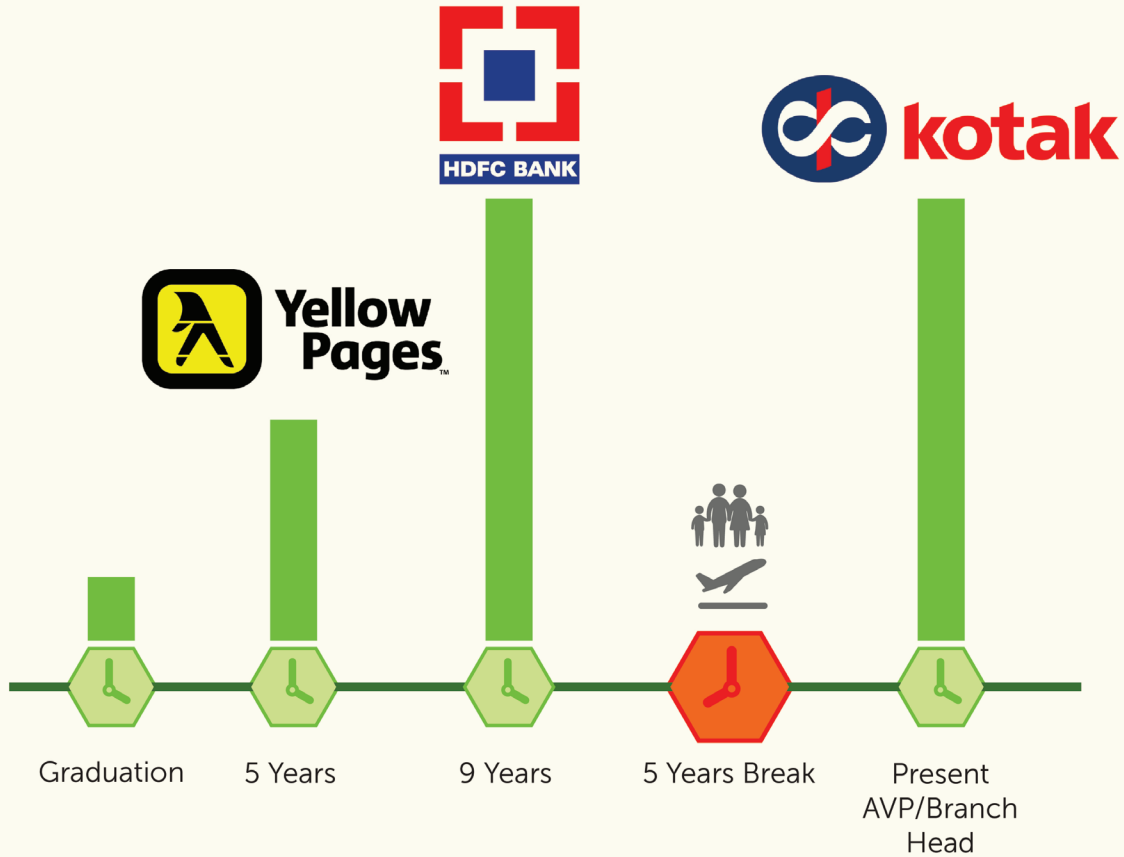
And then he said, “When can you start?”

Uma is now the Branch Head and Associate Vice President of Kotak's second largest branch in Karnataka, which is also their fastest growing one. She has returned to work with a force and gusto that not many people at her age can find within them.



And she wants to use her newfound serendipity to start hiring other women who are restarting their careers.

Uma Maheshwari's Restarter Journey



4. Time Brings us to Where we are Meant to Be

Sucharita was a golden girl wherever she chose to work before she took the big break in her career. From AXA to Reuters to Societe Generale, there wasn't a role in which she didn't excel or wasn't offered a promotion within a few months of joining the company.



Her time at AXA was a fun-filled journey of professional growth and discovery. She was the only Process Leader to clear the LEAD exam conducted by the company to remove biased promotion practices. She travelled to the UK for 3 months and migrated more than twenty-five processes with a large team of colleagues. She sailed through the British English Communication exam. When the company moved site, she decided to make a switch to Reuters to try her hand in Finance & Accounts, which were her subjects of choice in college.

Reuters became a second home to her when she was recognized not just for being a whizz in her field – promoted within 9 months to the Payments team where she handled employee and vendor processes for their worldwide operations – but for her sporting and social flair in table tennis, badminton, throwball, Fun Friday Games, and even hosting the annual company party. She was their Business Continuity Planning (BCP) contact, where she helped train new hires, handled audit queries, did quality checks, and processed monthly reports of her team's performance.

Leaving Reuters was bittersweet as she was moving on to bigger, managerial dreams at prestigious banking lion, Societe Generale, long considered one of the world's most admired companies in which to work. There she moved into their HR Accounting Process department and went on a roller-coaster ride of challenges, learning and achievements, which all became milestones of celebration in her career.

Tragedy comes knocking when we least expect it and for Sucharita her world shattered when her grandmother was diagnosed with critical-stage breast cancer.

Sucharita had a tough choice to make and she made the one that most fulfilled her – to stay at home and help her parents care for her grandmother in her last remaining days with their family. She tended to her open wound post-surgery, taxied the doctor and nurse daily to and from the hospital to her house, and spent precious time with a woman she had loved since she was born, until that woman closed her eyes for the last time. She poured her body and soul into making sure that her grandmother was treated like the queen that she was to her, in life and in death, and didn't think about restarting her career until all the rituals were performed.

She had been away from the world of finance and number-crunching for quite a short time, 6 months. But, once Sucharita decided to restart her career, she was surprised to find that many companies were wary of hiring a woman who had taken a career-break.

They heralded it as a sure omen of a liberal attitude towards sabbaticals for marriage, children or family-members' health.

Her repeated, resounding and consistent successes in her work-life till the break bore no weight in this truculent fight to return to the ring. However, being the get-back-up girl that she was she wasted no time in finding an avenue to whet her intellect.

Her father's business needed her – his office assistant and his secretary had both given their notice to handle their own family emergencies – so she stepped up to balance the books and handle payments and taxes. Before he knew it, he was completely dependent on her for her expertise and financial acumen. Of course, her mother was also enjoying having her around the house to help with the cooking and housework.

During this layover in her professional life, Sucharita never wavered in her confidence and optimism that what she wanted she would eventually receive, at the right time with the right conditions, for her.

And then she met Neha Bagaria, founder of JobsForHer, at a networking event and she knew she had found her gondolier.

Here was someone who understood exactly what she had done, why she had done it, and why it had not affected her work-ethic or work capabilities.

Neha resounded her inner belief: She was no less qualified than when she had stepped away. She had, in fact, only augmented her skills and expertise in the time that she had been away by commandeering diverse and demanding roles to adapt to the shape-shifting environment into which she had been thrown.

Sucharita created her profile with JobsForHer the next day and applied to many job postings, one of which was with SmartOwner, a pioneering company that created a platform to enable people globally to access high-value assets in amounts as flexible as their portfolios, in India.

Sucharita passed their assessment tests with banners flying and joined them within a week of being shortlisted. Once again she triumphed in her dexterous reinvention of what the job called for – as a Manager of Sales. She hit the ground sprinting by closing a high-value sale in her first week, breaking all records.

In addition, SmartOwner flexed her timings to accommodate her wish to continue helping her dad with his accounting, which has made her parents and her very happy.

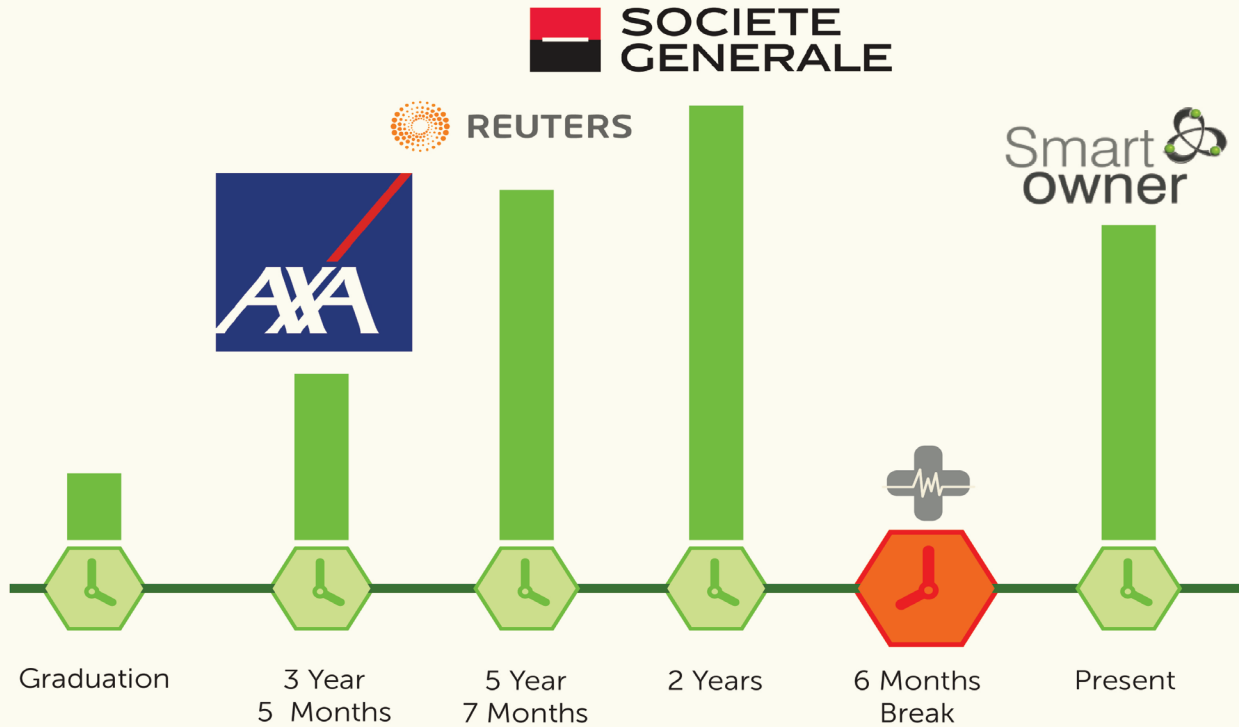
Sucharita's story has many finish lines in sight and she will be victorious in all of them because that's the kind of woman she is. And, she has this to say to any woman despairing right now that she's been away for too long, that time has been a grim reaper for her career:



“Never lose confidence. Never lose hope. There is always a job waiting that can be done best by you, and it is just a matter of time before you find it. Keep looking for opportunities and believe that you deserve to get back; believing in yourself is crucial if you want others to believe in you.”

Her only regret? “I don’t find time to play badminton these days.”

Sucharita Raju's Restarter Journey



5. Raise Your Hand... If Your Family has Your Back

To put it in Sheryl Sandberg's words, my professional journey has been a jungle gym. I have moved laterally, stayed put in the same position, moved down the ladder, done something totally different and sometimes moved up. At critical junctures in my personal life, I either stayed put or deviated from the course.



I took two breaks. The first one was about seven months after my marriage because my job was too hectic. It had affected our marital peace. But I did not stop working. I decided to teach in a college for two years. The second break was when my younger daughter was about a year old. It was becoming tough for my in-laws to manage two kids with a gap of just two and half years. Also, I felt my elder daughter was feeling neglected, and was becoming hyperactive and inattentive. My husband was very busy with a new assignment, which required too much travel. So, I stayed at home for a year.

The biggest challenge that I faced as a restarter was answering the question, "Why did you take a break?" during the interviews. Getting called for interviews was not very difficult. During my break I coached my elder daughter as to why I needed to work, why she and her sister had to be at day-care, how much I depend on her to behave well and so on. I had even taken her to the day-care where I planned to put them. When I got

the job, my mother-in-law was more than happy for the kids to be at day-care. Everything else just fell in place.

Soon, it seemed as though I had never stopped working.

Working on challenging issues has stood me in good stead. Now, I have good equity in the organisation and I feel that my career is finally set to take off.

I feel free to raise my hand for all challenges.

Looking back, I wish I knew before that I can't do everything, be perfect at everything, please everyone all the time. I wish I knew that it's ok if sometimes work isn't done perfectly, or if sometimes people are upset with you, it's ok to delegate, it's ok to fail.

To me, to achieve a successful career as a woman, one has to possess a balanced personality and be clear of one's priorities. We cannot do everything – whether at the office or at home. So it is important to be able to pick out the important things and not get tied up with the small stuff.

My advice to other women who wish to restart their careers is to write down your doubts and then write down your answers. Get a buy-in from your family – this is important.

Then, just go for it.

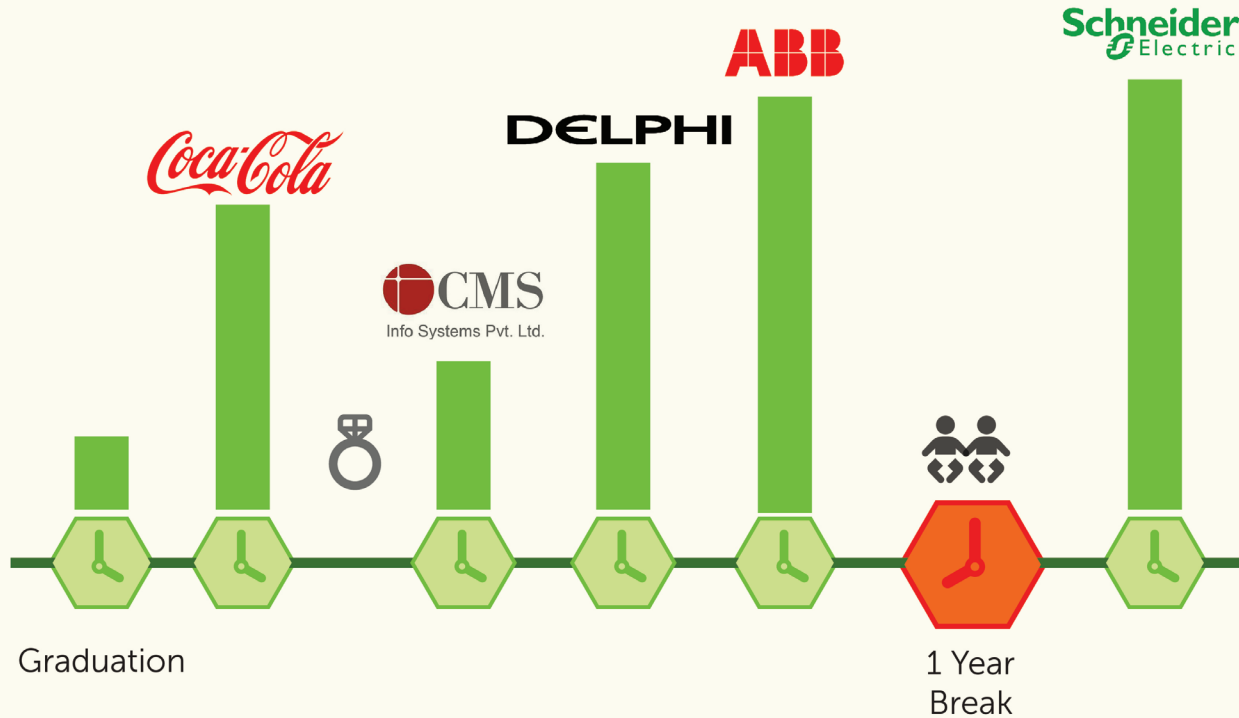
I am a list-maker. I make a to-do list for everything – whether home or work. I also make target lists – short-term and long-term, and assess my progress regularly. I try to do a course-correction, sometimes I shift my targets. I credit this as a habit that has led to my professional successes.

I always do something that I am passionate about. I keep experimenting with myself till I find activities that I feel very involved with. But passion is the key – without it nothing works.

Bhashari Chakraborti is married with 2 daughters. She has an MBA in Finance from Gauhati University, and has been working since 1999 in Finance. She enjoyed different roles in the span of her career, from working at plants, to financial shared services, to corporate offices, with an array of companies under her belt – Coca Cola, Delphi, ABB, and Schneider. She has also worked as a lecturer in Business Finance for 2 years at CMS. She now heads Financial Planning & Analysis for a cluster of 6 Schneider plants across India. She loves reading as her primary hobby. Apart from that she loves the performing arts, i.e. music, dance and drama!



Bhashari Chakraborti's Restarter Journey



6. “There Can be Miracles, When You Believe!” How a Mum of 2 Approached her Career Restart

When Manisha left the work scene 8 years ago, it was to enjoy the perks of being married, which fortunately for her, the circumstances allowed. That then led to her break being extended, to have her two children.

Manisha did not approach her career-restart by looking for a job. She

only wanted to explore if she was ready to test the waters again, although she was also aware of her own inhibitions; whether she was willing to put herself out there again, what if she was going to be refused on grounds of being outdated after that long a break. But, soon, she was ready – after a 10 month course during which she combated those very inhibitions.



Today, through JobsForHer, Manisha Dasappa has found her place at Pink Lemonade, a firm that specializes in visual and written communication across various spectrums.

As luck would have it, her family and she were on the same page. Her husband was nothing short of extremely supportive, and so proud of her for resurfacing. Her kids, she says, have accommodated the change the best! Her 5-year-old even took a cut-out of an ad she'd recently worked on to show it off at school! The elders of the family didn't really voice their skepticism but took a while to get around the idea of her return to the work front.

But, with happiness in her tone, Manisha says she keeps too busy to dwell on any negativity around her. Her words of advice to all women restarting their careers is, “Give it some time and everything and everyone will fall into place!”

Manisha Dasappa is currently in Client Servicing at Pink Lemonade. She holds a BA in Advertising Management and is a mother to a 5-year-old and a 3-year-old. Under her belt of experience, she carries a clothing line she ran for two years in the name of DaRa and being a wedding planner with The Leela Palace Hotel, Bangalore.



“We would love to hire more people like Manisha to grow our team. We love that she is older and more mature, as part of our Client Servicing team!”

Tina Garg, CEO – Pink Lemonade

Manisha Dasappa's Restarter Journey



7. Microbiology, my Work, my Passion

Shubhangi, who fulfilled a Returnee Internship role at Biocon, shares her story as a Restarter who took a career-break for over a year and never lost hope that the job that was right for her was out there. She ploughed through a deluge of job offers to find it and is now enjoying her ease-back into the workforce after this position with Biocon.



I am a Microbiologist by profession, and I've worked in the domain of molecular biology. The decision to commit to a profession in the area of research and development (R&D) stemmed from my passion for science. Biology always intrigued me, ever since my school-days. I was amazed by the sheer scope of the subject. Everything that constitutes life can be studied under it and what fascinates me most is that the fundamentals that define life are fluid yet have remained so entrenched in certain basic facts. I worked with the Leibniz Institute, Germany as a research fellow for about 18 months and after returning to India I joined the Jaypee Group as a microbiologist. I personally believe in doing what you love; I am passionate about my work and I enjoy it immensely.

My break happened for personal reasons. Quite a lot was happening in my life and I decided to take one thing at a time. Getting married and settling into a new life, moving to a different city, took more time than I

anticipated! My break lasted 1 year and 3 months.

I would say that the major challenge after my career-break was finding the right job. I received decent offers but none in the domain that I wanted. I am an R&D person, with a focus on Molecular Biology. It was not easy to find a job with so much specificity! But thanks to JobsForHer, I finally managed to find the job I was looking for at my dream company – Biocon.

My husband is really happy that I have finally re-started my professional life. He is my pillar of strength and has gone out of his way to make sure that I get the job that I love. From staying up late with me for interview preparations, to always keeping me motivated– he has done it all! And my parents are extremely happy that I have resumed work.

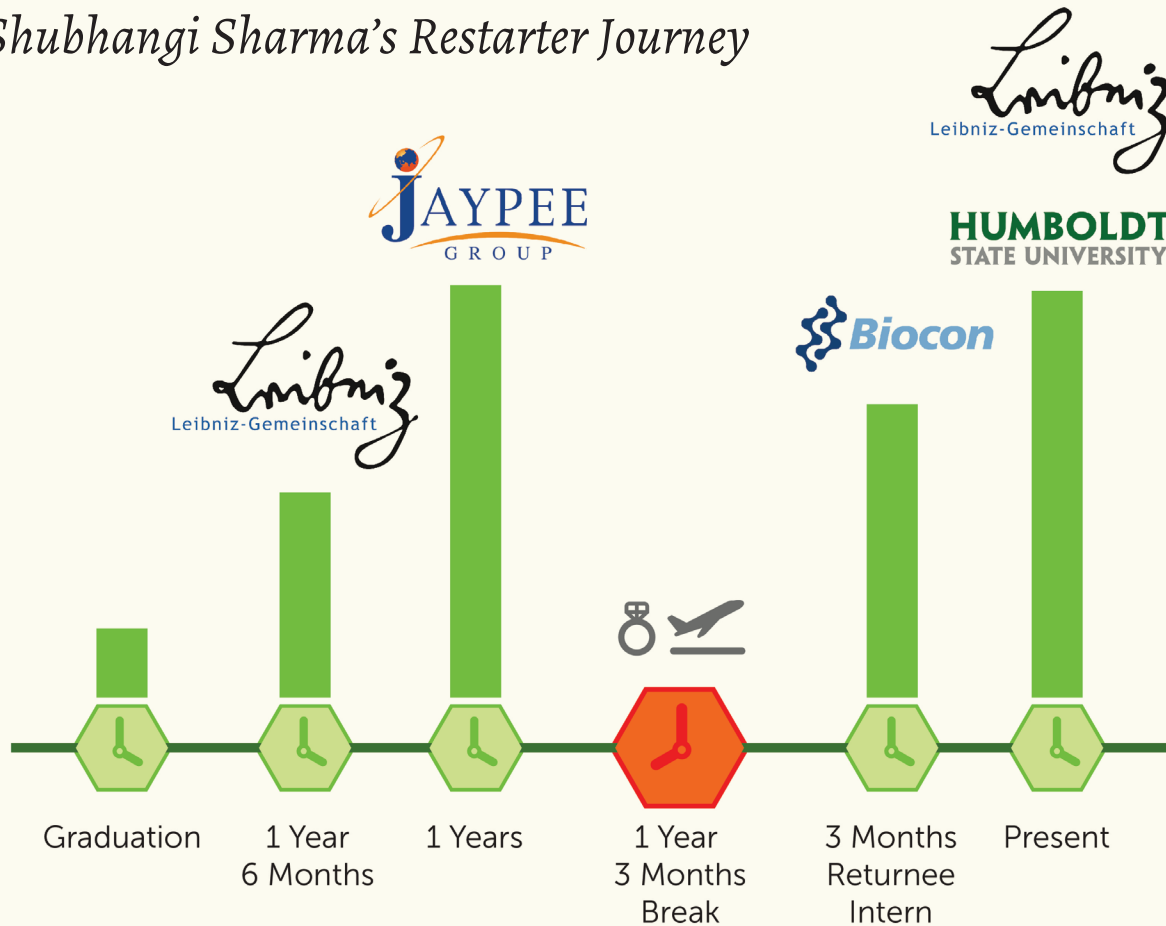
My advice to other women on their career-breaks is to just believe in yourself and give it time. Don't "settle" for a job because you don't see any other options coming your way. Trust me, nothing is more frustrating than being in a job that you hate. Personally, I took many online courses on Coursera; they kept me occupied and added value to my skills. Focus on the positive and don't beat yourself up if things don't go your way. Talk to people who have a positive influence on your life. It's all about having a good attitude while waiting, because the best things come to those who never give up!

As Shubhangi found at Biocon, Returnee Internships are a fantastic way to restart your career because they give you a jumpstart from where you left off.

A paid internship – just like you may have done back in college – has all kinds of pros that go with it. Flexible hours, a short-term contract, exciting and meaningful projects that challenge your intelligence and test your skills, without exceeding your stress-limits and exhausting your patience. You get to straddle the best of both worlds for a little while and take time to figure it out for your particular circumstances.



Shubhangi Sharma's Restarter Journey



8. The Laws by which this Woman Approached her Career Restart

Gayathri Vivek

stepped down from the work world for 11 years. That was in 2001. Today, she is an established lawyer with a humble heart.

Gayatri began her career as a Personality Development Trainer with Career Plan and then went on to become a Customer Relations Officer with Diadem Softech, both roles in Coimbatore. In no time, marriage came calling and she had to relocate. Even after treading the path of such flourishing careers, Gayatri says, she became complacent in her happy bubble of role-play as wife, and shortly after as a mother of two, instead of pursuing professional success.

But with certifications as noteworthy as hers, it was only a matter of time before Gayatri felt the need to bounce back. And she did. Keeping current work scenarios in mind, she chose wisely to refurbish her stagnant skill sets before returning to the work arena. That's when she decided to pursue her degree in Law.

Finding it difficult to enter the world of Law after a 11-year career break, Gayathri first found her way back into the workforce as an External Educational Consultant with Shilp Enterprises. However, the founder of Shilp Enterprises was so impressed with her capabilities, that he decided to refer her to Doraswamy Law Chambers (DLC) so that she could pursue



her dream career of working as a lawyer.

So far, with her flexi-work hours, everything is running like a well-oiled machine. However, the road ahead will soon begin its uphill ascent, when she decides to practice individually and build her own firm. But then, we've already witnessed Gayatri's potential, haven't we?

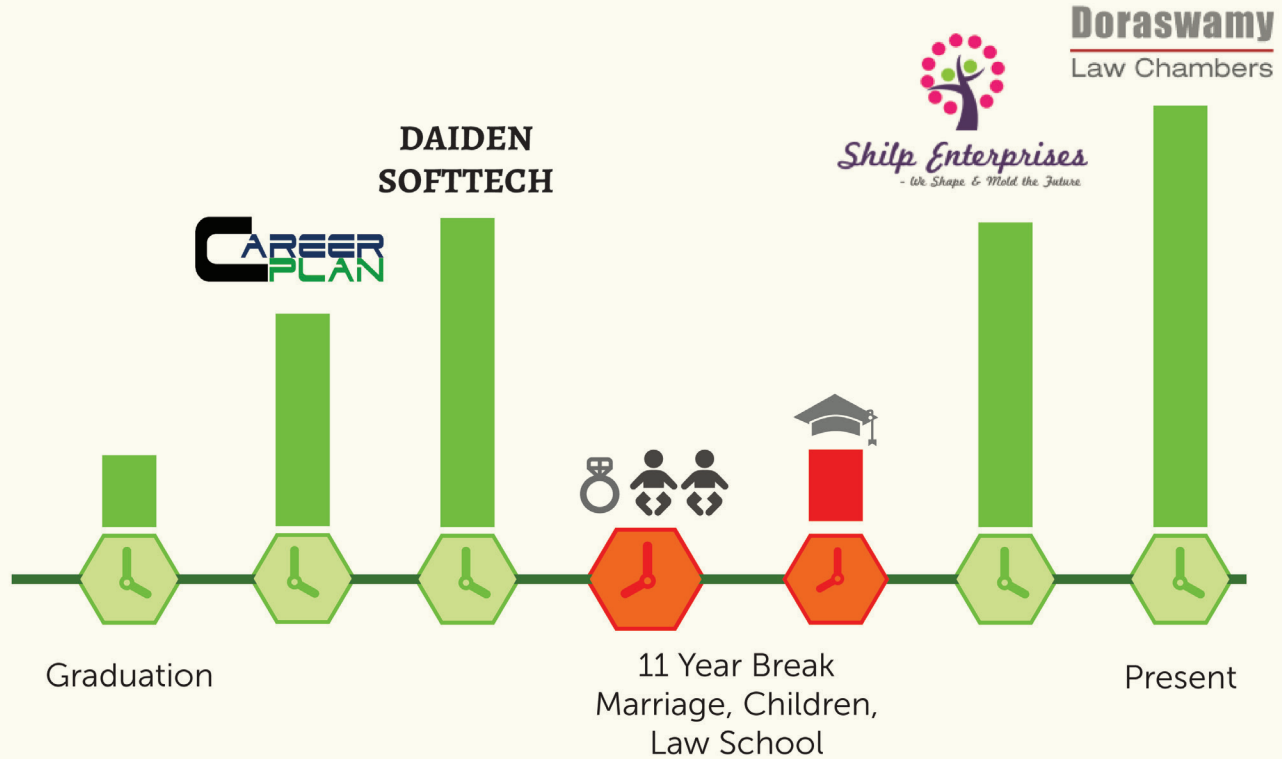
This is what she had to say to all the career break women out there who want to restart:

"I started my career search on the JobsForHer portal when I wasn't really sure about getting back to work. It was only after meeting their team of motivated women that I got inspired to compete with the young and fresh workforce. It felt more like interacting with long lost friends, which is what sets JobsForHer apart from other portals. Every placement at JFH is a PERSONAL SUCCESS to them as opposed to being a mere 'escalated placement statistic' elsewhere. Thanks to Neha and the JFH team, I not only found the RIGHT job but also my mentor in the legal field. Ladies, get out and reach for your dreams. They're a lot closer and easier than you imagine them to be!"

Gayathri Vivek (BBM. MBA. LLB, PGDIPR) is a mother of two children. Apart from her practice as a lawyer, she does legal drafting and documentation as well. She is interested in writing, singing and socio-political circumstances and consequences.



Gayathri Vivek's Restarter Journey



9. Determination was the Key to her Restart Story

There was one attribute that stood out in **Sajita Sivadasan's** career restart story: her candidness. It was so defenseless, so honest...

Today, Sajita has found her place with Inflexionpoint. But, her journey getting there wasn't easy. She started her career as a Content Writer and a PR Officer with a company in Delhi, after which she joined the BPO unit at Wipro as a Process Executive.



In the next 6 years that she worked with Wipro, Sajita's growth knew no bounds. She moved from Quality Analyst to Process Trainer to Assistant Manager! New opportunities were knocking at her door, and her career graph was peaking. One can only imagine how much further Sajita may have climbed, had she stayed on the career path.

But, as fate would have it, Sajita found her life partner then, and decided to go the family way. Having a baby changed Sajita's perspective and priorities completely. She suddenly felt that there was nothing more important than being with her little one and thus began her journey as a full-time mommy...

After 6 years, Sajita knew she was ready – to restart, to reinvent. To do whatever it took to get back.

Amongst other personal hurdles she was faced with, the most enormous ones were her own lack of self-confidence and the extreme dependence that her daughter had on her. And the professional challenges weren't too far behind, either. She found it almost daunting to convince companies she applied to that 'the GAP' in a woman's career does not necessarily mean a decline in skill sets. On the contrary, raising a child and being a homemaker only added to skills such as 'time management, planning, and continuous learning,' the kind which are otherwise studied and learned in institutes!

Luckily, the companies she interviewed with through JobsForHer were different. They seemed to evaluate her on the basis of her qualifications and capabilities, not on the basis of her gap. These companies understood that just because her daughter was important to her, did not mean her job wasn't. When she mentioned that she would like to work-from-home, they didn't balk.

Today, Sajita says, returning to the work arena has been the best thing that's happened to her and her folks. It did make life a bit more chaotic, but it was all worth it because it brought back the punch and pizzazz she had been craving! To familiarize herself with current trends Sajita wisely chose a 'Weekend Executive Program' so that her transition back would be smooth and effortless. Today, not only is Sajita's daughter seeing a bubbly and effervescent mommy at home, but is also turning into a self-sufficient girl, herself!

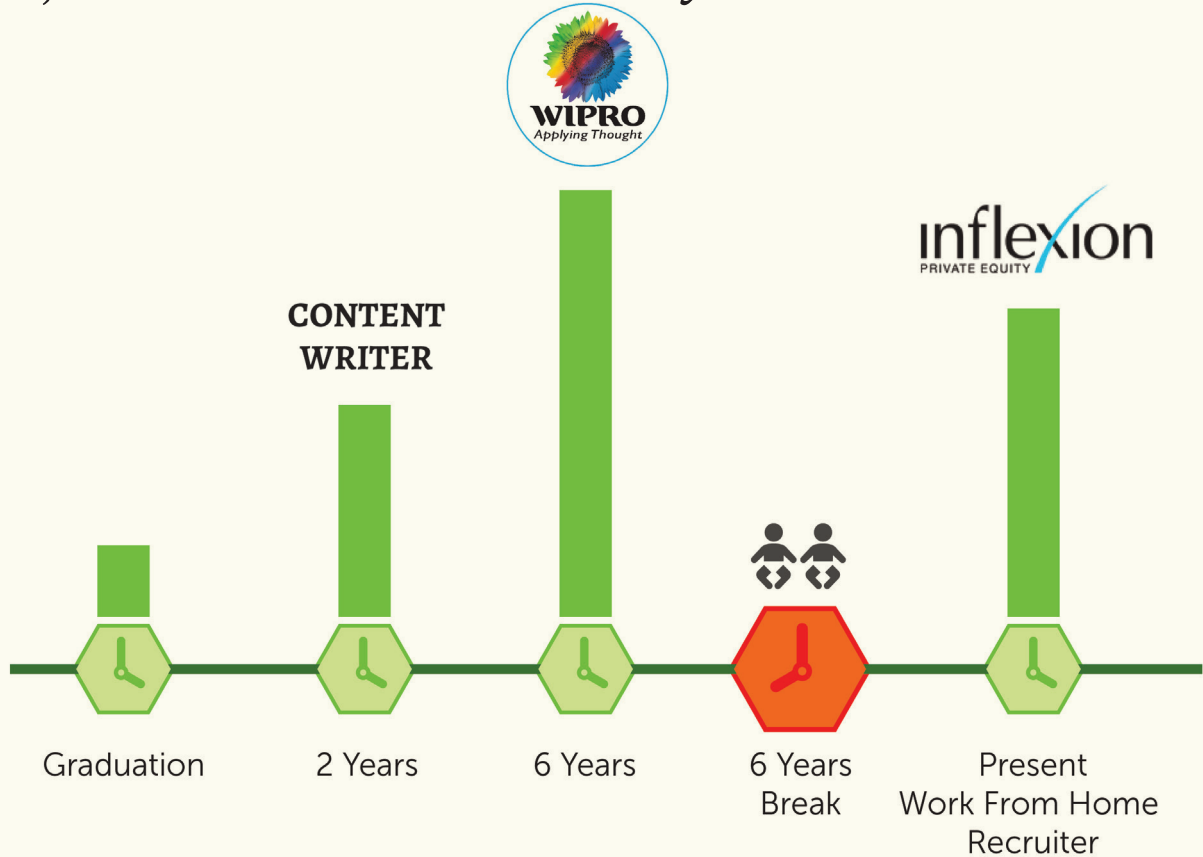
When JobsForHer asked Sajita what advice she would have for other women restarting their careers, this is what she had to say:

"I would suggest that everyone on a career break should acquaint themselves with the current happenings in their field of choice and then do whatever it takes to make their dreams come true every single day. They have to learn to respect themselves, their choices and decisions, and then live guilt-free."

Sajita Sivadasan is a commerce graduate from the Delhi University. She holds a postgraduate degree in Advertising, Marketing and PR from Polytechnic in Delhi, and she has 8 years of work experience in those fields. Today, Sajita has a lovely 8 year old daughter and presently, she has an awesome work-from-home job with Inflexon Point as a Recruiter, which allows her the flexibility of working and being around to tend to her daughter.



Sajita Sivadasan's Restarter Journey



10. This Mum of a Toddler was Wired to Work

When **Vidya** stepped down from her career 3 years ago, she did so for the sake of her pregnancy, and an innate need to be there for her newborn. So, when she decided to get back to work after that break, bearing in mind her educational and professional backing, she thought it would be a cakewalk.



But, as apparent as it was to her – she was in for a surprise!

Not only were corporates hesitant to hire her due to ‘the gap’, but her self-confidence started to dwindle as well. Was she going to be able to strike a balance between work and home? And, do justice to both?

One thing she knew without a doubt – she was ready to restart. And eager, too!

Vidya says she has always known herself to be career-oriented, and would never have been content with only being a homemaker. She needed to return to the working world to feel complete and at peace with herself. So, when her daughter turned 2, she knew it was time.

That’s when she crossed paths with JobsForHer, which she found to be “a truly noble initiative.”

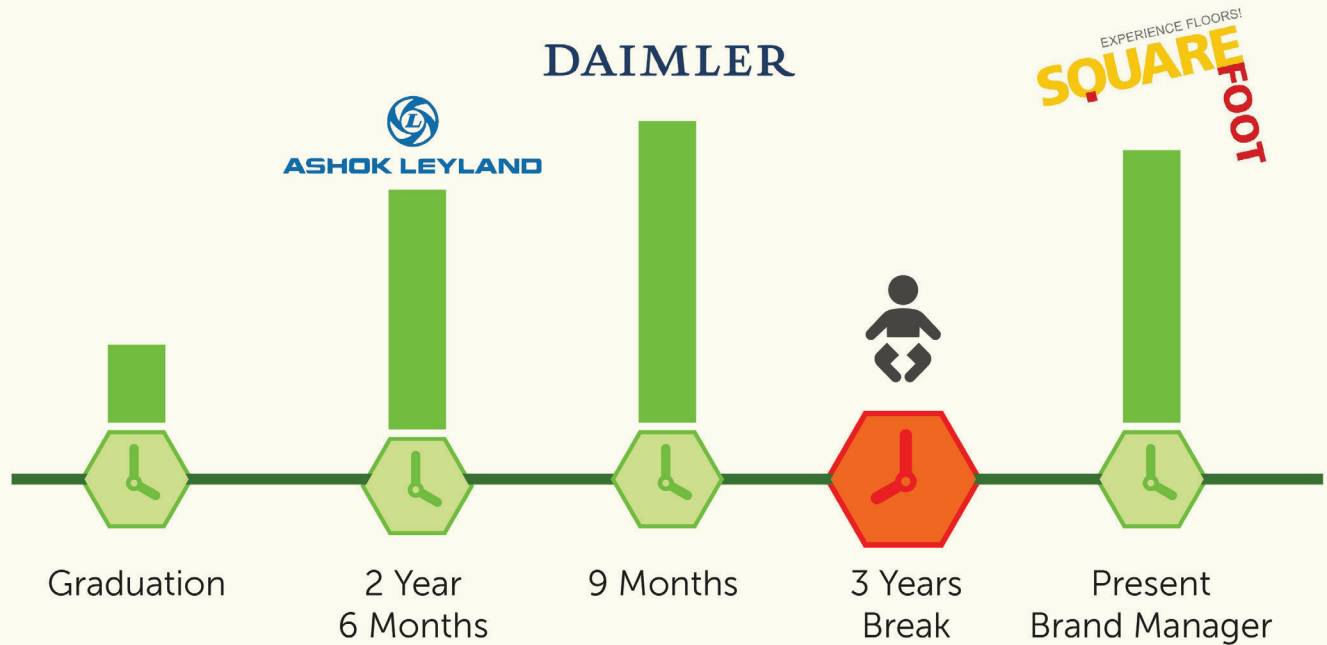
As fate would have it, Vidya chanced upon her dream job at SquareFoot, in their Marketing department! Today, not only does she bask in financial independence, but also in the emotional fulfilment of being able to put her skills to their best possible use.

Humbly, Vidya says, “Even though I’m no one to advise someone else, I would urge other women who are planning to restart their careers, to hone their skill sets (if need be) and not lose confidence. Surely, you will find a job that’s just right for you.”

***Vidya Shenoy** is married, with a 3-year-old daughter. An M.B.A. grad from the Kirloskar Inst. of Advanced Mgmt. Studies, her career started at Ashok Leyland as a Marketing Communications Manager. Then the Brand Manager at Daimler India Commercial Vehicles Ltd., she took a 3-year break, during which she ran her own venture - Sanskriti Fashion. SquareFoot Flooring rehired her to be their Brand Manager in Sep. 2015 and she’s loving her new launch back into the workforce with them!*



Vidya Shenoy's Restarter Journey



11. Standing Tall Through Her 10-Year Gap

My mother was my role model who inspired me tremendously since my childhood. She would wake up early, do all the household work and cooking and still manage to reach office on time. In the evening, after a long day at work she would come home with this big smile on her face and ask me and my brothers our preference for dinner... Imagine that!



I never once thought then what a difficult task that may have been, till the day I was faced with the same situation of balancing both my family-life and work-life.

I took a career break when I gave birth to my son because I believed that he needed my attention more than anything; more than my ambition and a fancy job, more than my individuality. At the time, even though I was handling a very promising role in Tata Consultancy Services, I quit my job to be there for him, and my family.

After 10 years of being a homemaker it was my mother-in-law who said to me one day, “Why don’t you try getting back to work and see how that turns out?”

Even though that had always been the future I’d silently intended and

foreseen, her push catalyzed the process. Fortunately for me, unlike many other women, I didn't face any major hurdles in restarting my career, as my very first interview was with JobsForHer. That made life easy in the otherwise uphill task of 'job hunting after a career break'.

In time everything fell into place. My son, of course, misses me incredibly when I'm away, but at the same time he's been proudly announcing to his friends, "My mom is a super multitasker. She can manage home as well as do great things at work!"

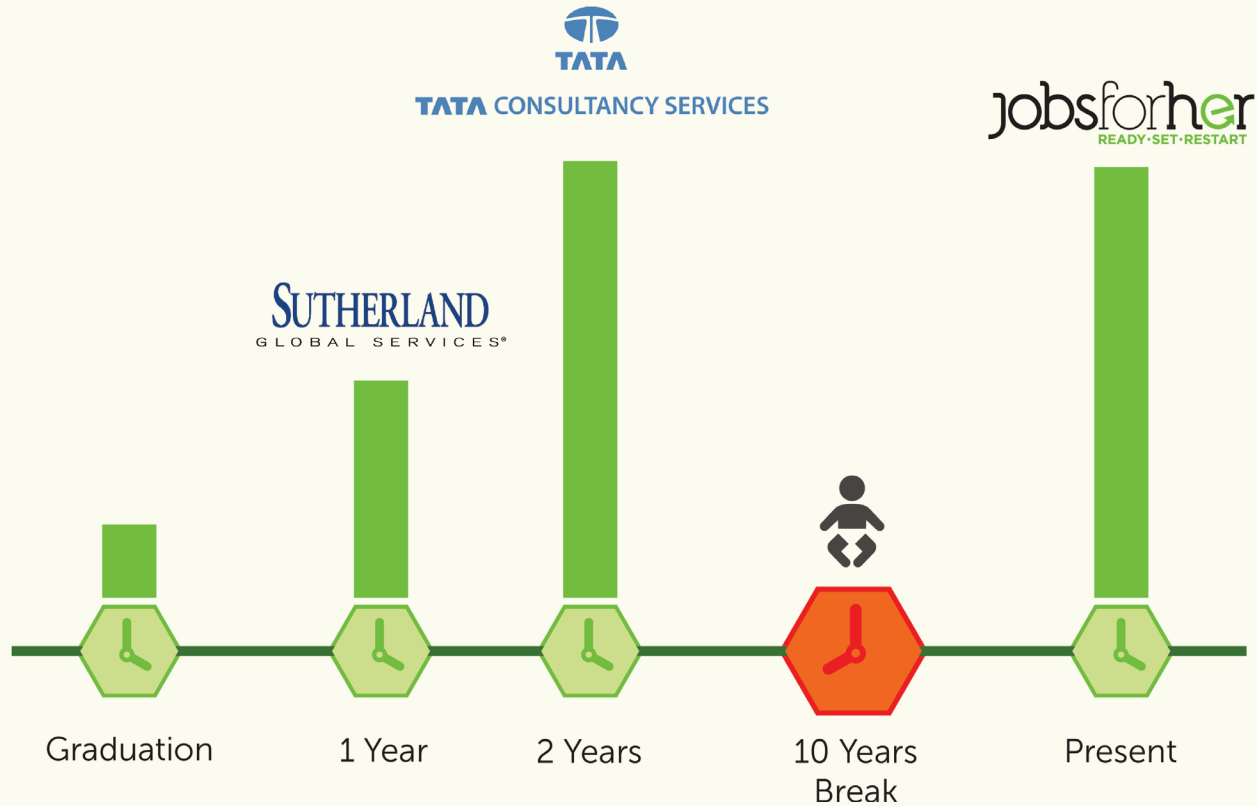
My words of advice to all women restarting their career would be:

"Don't lose hope. Keep trying and you will succeed. Make your family realize that you can manage both work and family, and prove to them that multitasking is among your innate strengths."

***Priya Shekhar** is a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and has done her IGNIIT course from NIIT. She started her career as an Operations Executive at Sutherland Technologies after which she joined the Delivery Support Team at Tata Consultancy Services. Priya later went on to take over the team as their Team Manager. Today, Priya is a sporting mum to a 10 year old and a committed employee of JobsForHer.*



Priya Shekar's Restarter Journey



12. She Unraveled her Passion only After her Career Break

I always had a way with words, and simply loved drafting speeches, solving crosswords or anything that required getting my grey cells in action. Soon after my post-grad, the job hunt started. With a major in Computer Applications, I was trained to write code for programs, but I would take a really long time to draw a circle using computer codes. However, when it came to drafting a speech, I would take all of five minutes!



I still remember the day I had appeared for an interview for the post of a teacher. I kept asking myself “What am I doing here?!” I had a decent score on the English and Verbal Aptitude Test. That I didn’t get selected for the post is a different story. ‘Teaching’, someone said is an easy job. Seriously? With all the hours of talking to teens, and their I-know-everything attitude?

My intuition told me that I still wasn’t where I would’ve hoped to have been.

It was only in the year 2015 when by sheer luck I chanced upon JobsForHer, and the site opened up an ocean of opportunities for me! Shortly after, I received a call from Tekinroads. Since then, the journey has continued (oh so wonderfully), and I’m doing what I have always wanted

to do... Write!

I took a break in the year 2012 on account of marriage, almost until 2015. 2012 was also special to me for several reasons. I graduated from college and got married a few months later. It was such a new phase for me. As fate would have it, I had to relocate to the city of Mysore. At the very same time, my inbox was flooding with exciting job offers! I slapped my forehead wondering: Where were all these jobs when I was hunting for them? One seldom receives that which they are looking for at the time they are looking for it. And being the quaint town that Mysore is, it didn't have too many opportunities that suited my qualifications or liking.

At the cost of not sounding stereotyped, I would say family commitments were the reason for my break. There's always something for the new bride to get busy with – meet and greet visitors, attend ceremonies and functions...it was as if everything was arranged to be so after my wedding. Also due to geographical constraints, I knew finding a job that matched my qualification would be difficult in the place I lived. Plus, there were other family beliefs that nowhere matched my way of thinking.

A cursory glance at JobsForHer made me realize that I was inching towards my goal. Things took a 180 degree turn after I started working. I would look forward to each day! Special mention here about the day I received my first pay cheque! There were challenges along the way, accompanied by a whole new learning experience. Not to forget the immense satisfaction and the financial freedom that came with it. The smiles on the faces of my loved ones! (I still remember my mom's joy when I gifted her a present!) Some moments are just so priceless.

To women who are restarting their careers, I'd say:
It's never too late to restart your career. Whether you took a break for your family or any other personal reasons, an independent, career-oriented woman is a sure sign of a developing society. It all starts in your mind. Make up your mind right now to gear up for a new phase of life, and you will never regret it.

**Thank you JobsForHer and Tekinroads for waving your
magic wand over me!!**

Clarice Susan completed her post graduation in Masters of Computer Applications from Mount Carmel College. Even though she has had 6 months of teaching experience, Clarice says her career only took off after Tekinroads. She is presently doing what she loves, and absolutely loves what she's doing!



Clarice Susan's Restarter Journey



13. Three Men, and Then a Lady....

How this 4th Generation Lawyer Restarted Her Career after a 6 Year Break

Kamala Naganand comes from a family of lawyers and grew up with discussions on the law. So, it was natural progression for her to make it her course of study. She read law at University Law College, Bangalore University, and went on to do her Masters in Intellectual Property from the George Washington University Law School, in Washington D.C. She was debating working in New York versus returning home to join the family practice, when she met her husband, Shreyas. They both decided that they wanted to be India-based international lawyers; so, they returned to Bangalore, got married, and started working in the family law firm.



This is her restarter journey...

When I realised that I was pregnant with my first baby, I decided to step back and take a break. I also realised that it would not really make a difference if I took time off, because in the larger scheme of things, what are a few years in the entire journey of the law? I did not want to miss out on anything to do with our babies; we had 3 kids in 5 years! During this time I did not go back to practice and enjoyed being with our kids.

I took 6 years off, in total. And I don't regret it for a second.

We started Aarna Law in September 2013, and it was hard. To begin with, it was just my husband and me, and we had to set up from scratch. There were long hours and tiring days. But I did know that if I really needed to take time off – when the kids get sick or have school holidays – I could. Also, I loved the challenge. I think that after 6 years of baby talk it was fantastic to get out and have interesting conversations, and meet new people.

Time-management is something with which I have really had to tussle – making time for a break and not feeling guilty about it.

As women we are multi-armed goddesses, and multi-tasking comes naturally to us.

But, in all that, we tend to put ourselves last on the list. We should all realise that only if we are happy can we make the people around us happy and content individuals.

These are the 3 things that I live by:

1. Work is a part of my life and not my life
2. Do what you love so you love what you do
3. There is no short-cut to hard work

At Aarna Law, we are very happy being a boutique practice, doing disputes and corporate advisory. I believe that our success is our team, who, in large part, have been women. I love the range of work that we are getting to do.

Watching my father – Mr. S. S. Naganand – practice law, I saw how hard work and dedication was the only way forward. The law is a very demanding profession. It comprises long hours, and tight deadlines. It is people coming to you with their problems, and you trying to help them in the best way possible. Even today, my father is extremely focused and dedicated, and has long hours. So, my father and grandfather have been a

colossal inspiration to me.

Shreyas – my partner in the practice, and my husband – has helped open my mind to so many new areas through his extensive library. I love letting the books find me. Reading truly broadens one's mind and sets it free.

My advice to women who are considering restarting their careers is that having taken a break if you needed to, does not make any difference in the long run of an otherwise long and successful career.

Believe in yourself. You may think you have forgotten, but it will all come back to you. Don't forget yourself.

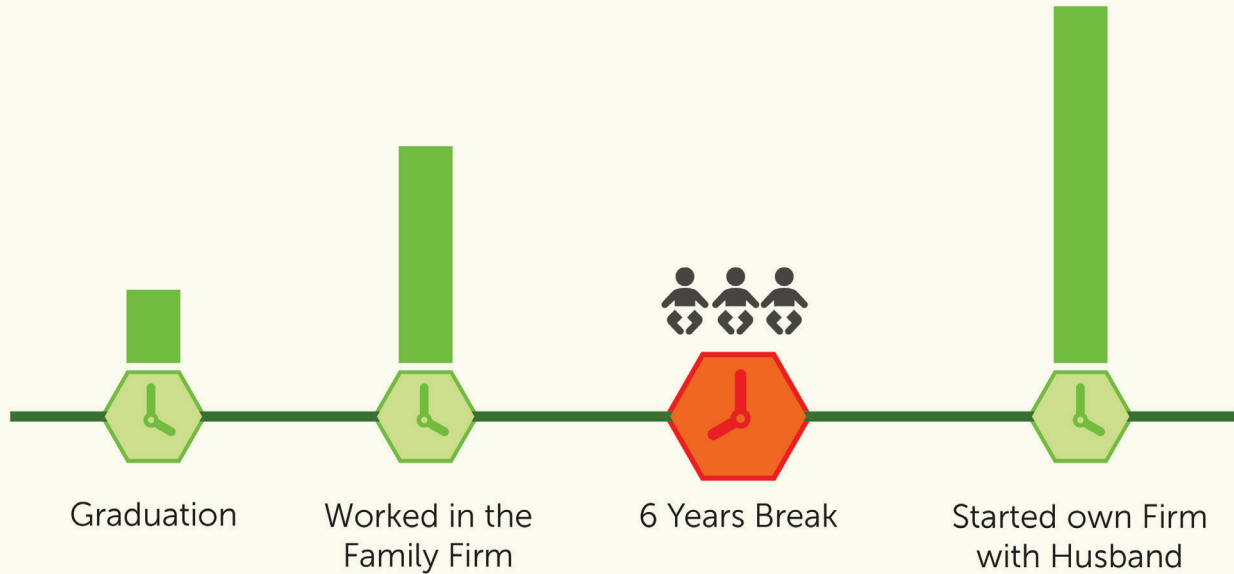
If you are not happy from within, the people around you can feel it, and they won't be happy, either. Especially kids. So, if you feel that you want to get back to work, do it, but make sure that you know how to do it on your terms.

My advice to women who are getting back to work is that hard work and perseverance are the only way forward. There is a mysterious plan for all of us, so go with the flow and enjoy the ride on the way!



Aarna Law is now hiring women returnees on the JobsForHer portal and we would love to welcome you back as you foray into your second career.

Kamala Naganand's Restarter Journey



14. How She Switched Careers and Got it Right

I took a break for about 7 months. It was a break to test and figure out a new career for myself, and a period to try new avenues to see what role would be a perfect fit for me.

The challenges were manifold – I did unpaid internships in a couple of start-ups, I was living on my savings, sometimes the industry itself wasn't what I was looking forward to working in the long term.



I had decided that I was not going to waste time in trying to 'like' a job.

Another important aspect while starting on a new career path is that you're at the bottom and you have to make use of old skills, experiences, and connections to succeed at the job you pick instead of letting your ego get in the way. This is hard sometimes but everything is worth it when you find a job that you love to do!

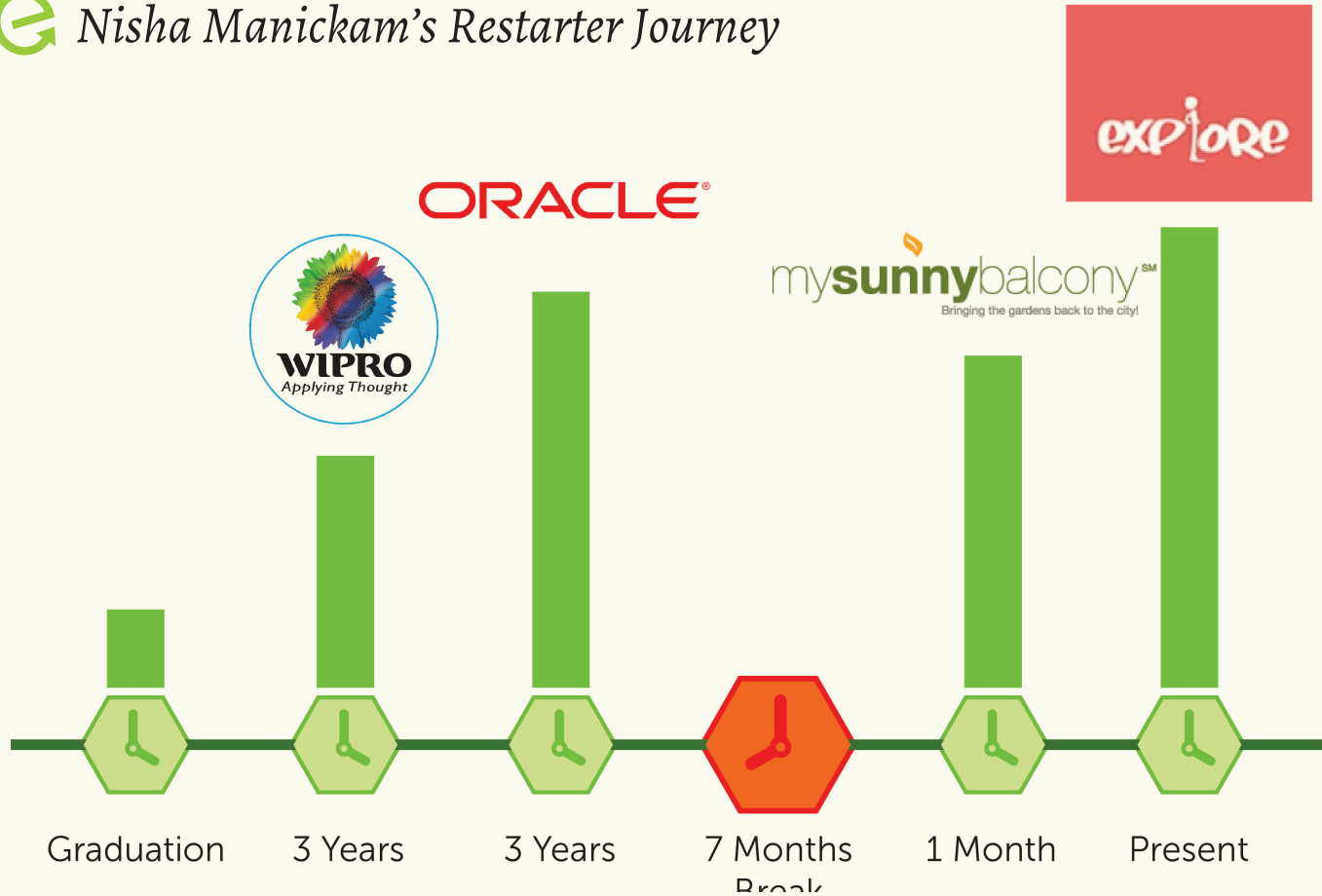
I applied for two jobs on JobsForHer, and surprisingly to me, both responded. Trust me, I have struggled to even get a response while changing my career path in other job portals. The jobs featured are all verified ones, so I feel that as an applicant I didn't have to waste time writing covers and applying to expired ads.

My advice to other women who wish to restart their careers is that it's never too late to follow your dreams and passions. Believe in the process as it takes more than just effort and time!

Nisha Manickam started her career as a software developer and after a long stint with Oracle moved out to pursue new career options. She now works with Explore Life Travelling – a job that she was offered after applying through JobsForHer. She is passionate about entrepreneurship and small businesses as they are the best schools in which to learn about life.



Nisha Manickam's Restarter Journey



15. Be Willing to Experiment, and the World Could Be your Oyster!

I took a break firstly for personal reasons as we were trying to immigrate. When that did not work out, before I could search for another job, I found out I was pregnant so I decided to wait till my baby was at an age when I could stay away from her. Once she was 15-months-old, I decided that it was a good time to get back to work.



However, for almost 6 months I faced rejections, and the only reason I heard was “You have taken a break of 3+ years, so we cannot hire you”. It was very depressing and made me question myself if I was even capable of searching for a job. This was why I started to look for work-from-home roles instead of full-time jobs.

When I heard about JobsForHer, I created my profile on their website and initially applied for work-from-home roles. It was through such a role that I actually landed my present role with Silver Crest Clothing! I applied for a fashion blogger role, despite not having any experience in this, and when I was called for an interview, it turned out that I fit their requirement for a full-time role much more than that of a blogger. The next thing I knew, I had an offer letter from them for a full-time role!

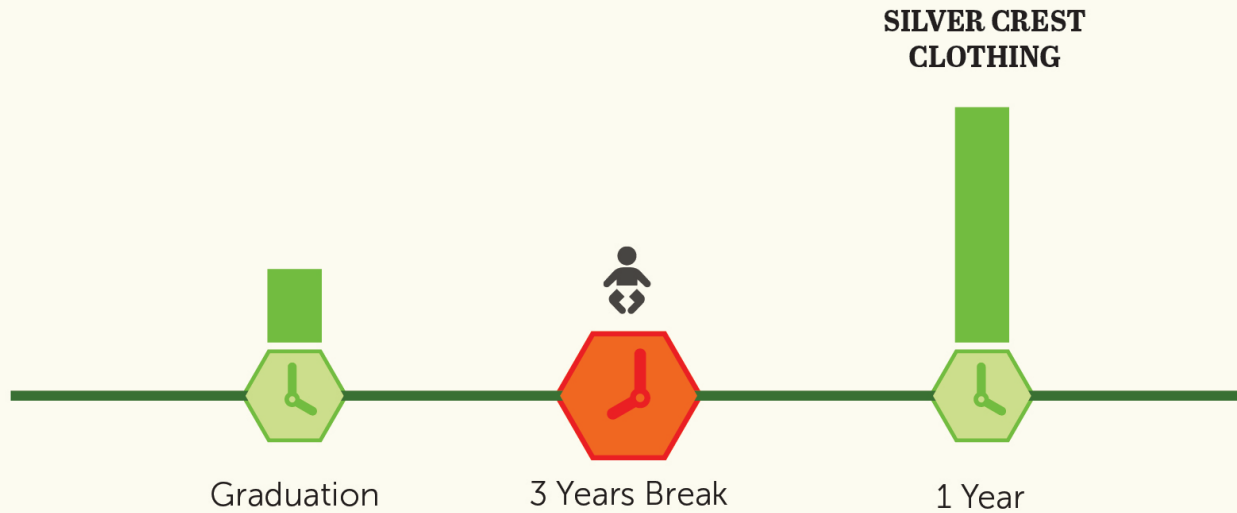
My advice to other women who wish to restart their careers would be to

take your time, figure out if you are willing to experiment, and apply for lots of jobs! One of them will certainly work out the way it did for me.

Madhavi Kulkarni – *I am a 15-month old mother to a beautiful daughter who has taught me much more than a corporate job ever will! I am experiencing a wonderful period where every single thing brings excitement and happiness to us!*



Madhavi Kulkarni's Restarter Journey



16. Captain of Her Restart Ship

Shweta is a Java professional with over 7 years of work experience. In those 7 years, she had to step down from her career 3 times to relocate to international countries because of her and her husband's job postings. Fortuitously, they always found jobs in the same city, even though one relocated on account of the other's

transfer. Her first two career breaks didn't really call for the kind of gearing up Shweta had to do for her third one.



Her third career break, the longest of the 3, was for almost 3 years.

But, when Shweta returned, this time, she could no longer relate to the shape-shifting work scenarios of the modern world. Her skill sets, despite being so vast, fell short of striking a match with new companies and employers. She knew then that it would be a while before anything lucrative would pan out for her. But, she wasn't going to buckle under.

She started by taking some career up-skilling courses to land her the dream job she knew she was worth. But, she had a feeling that she could be “updating” almost endlessly. So, she bravely chose to put herself out there and get a feel of what it was like, soon after. Within a week of posting her resume, Shweta was called for an interview at a leading bank. Even though she cleared their technical and aptitude test online, she couldn't do justice

to her face-to-face (F2F) round with the interviewer. But the experience only endorsed the fact that she had to polish up her interviewing skills. She left feeling proud for having cleared the online test, and counted it as her achievement of the day! Atta-girl!

This line of events repeated itself over the next few interviews that Shweta attended. She would clear the online rounds but not the F2F ones.

There were times when, even though she wasn't nervous, the interviewer continually asked her if she was, and this would slowly break down her confidence and instill tremendous self-doubt. So much so, that she once abandoned an interview in the second half of her day.

But in all this time, Shweta was noting down observations about herself, like never before! She realized that when questions in an interview caught her unaware, she would clarify how she's worked on the area but not extensively. Then, the interviewer would lose interest and move on, thus denying Shweta the chance to spell out her expertise if any, in those fields.

Soon after, Shweta escaped to her hometown for a short haul; far away from the world of interviews and further studies. Upon her return, it took her a long time to muster up the courage to face the brutalities of her 'gap'.

Although her previous failures were weighing her down, Shweta picked up the books again. She began focusing on her weak areas and worked hard to strengthen them. She researched all the 'mandatory know-how' of her field, and made sure that she knew her way around this time. In a couple of months, she began applying for jobs again. Although she wasn't clearing all her interviews, she could sense her confidence rising.

Gradually, she started clearing first rounds.

When her well-wishers were suggesting career courses, she took it upon herself to work through this. She knew that her break wasn't going to be easy on her, but she had resolved that she wasn't going to be easy on her

break, either! All she was setting her eye on were high ambitions and a diehard dedication.

Within a month, Shweta had 3 offers, all from industry giants! Her joy knew no bounds. She was overwhelmed with happiness, anxiety, excitement, and surprise, all rolled into one.

Shweta was lucky to have a circle of encouraging friends, who emphasized how she should always showcase herself. In the 10+ interviews that Shweta recalls, either her guilt or lack of knowledge would get the better of her. She used to trace those back to her career gap, and then word it that way too. But that's not how it should've been.

She says: *“Forget emphasizing, you should never even mention your career gap. We didn't commit a crime! It was mandatory at that point of time, and that's why we did it. So stop mentioning it in your introduction or your interview. Instead, sell yourself in the best ways possible!”*

Prior to this realization, Shweta used to make a plain Jane introduction of herself, mentioning her education, past work experience, and her career gap. But this soon changed.

“An introduction can't be anything short of impressive. You must talk about yourself, your achievements and your efforts, if any, to stay the course of a career. This steers the interviewer towards your attributes - self-worth, knowledge-bank, your constant efforts to keep yourself updated, and your willingness to work without expecting leniency.”

This is exactly what Shweta did.

She spoke of her certifications, her past companies, her efforts to stay in touch with current day work trends, and her future goals in terms of a vision for herself and further certifications.

She had also learned that if she won the interviewer over within the first set of questions, what followed didn't matter much. Eventually, she wouldn't provide answers that were exactly on point. She'd deliver some background information first, along with the advantages and disadvantages (if any), sometimes she'd quote generic examples of her application with the

information at hand, in projects she handled. The interviewers would be bowled over by such confidence and easily trust her knowledge of the role in question. The rest, she says, is all up to the poise you maintain from the moment you enter the room. If your body language exudes a calm composure throughout – consider the battle half won!

“If the interviewee is uncomfortable and serious, the environment turns grim, and so does the interview. Be sure to smile through and don’t sound or look tensed or anxious. I would even suggest that you picture the interviewer as your colleague with whom you’d naturally speak in a casual tone. This won’t make you anxious or serious and believe me, the interviewer becomes friendly too. Try it.”

Shweta revamped her interviewing skills and enhanced her knowledge base as per the market trends. Hard work always pays off, and so it did for Shweta. She now works with great enthusiasm and pleasure at a CMMI Level 5 organization. Restarting her career has brought back her long lost independence, happiness, and above all, her self-confidence. Her husband and family have been unquestionably supportive, and are elated to see her return to her professional life.

Shweta wanted to share her story with all the women looking at restarting their careers, because who better than her could identify with the challenges of a career restart.

“I would urge you to not lose hope, and not to surrender like I did at an early stage in this phase. Keep going. Remember, success is now one step closer.”

Shweta is a B.E (Computer Engineering) and worked with Syntel, Sapient and IBM before her career-break. Her gap was almost 3 years long, due to relocation abroad for her husband’s job. She is now working with Cognizant (Pune) as a Senior Associate - Projects.

17. How I Chose to be Financially Independent

I grew up watching my mother work and always knew I'd follow in her footsteps.

After my graduation, I got to live on my own in Mumbai for a while to finish my studies. It taught me to manage myself in an unknown yet familiar city.



I then moved to Bangalore to look for my first job. My fiancé and I had decided that we would get married as soon as I was financially independent. I also remember telling my manager during my interview that if I got selected, I would need 3 weeks off for my wedding. We got married 3 months after I was offered my first job.

For the first few years, work was the centre of our lives. I was happy taking on projects beyond my years of experience, and delivering them well. Recognition, and a bigger/better portfolio all came with time. At this stage, I was nominated for an IIM program from my organization, which I found very fulfilling. We were soon blessed with a baby boy.

I went back to work after my maternity break with a support structure intact at home. I had a nanny to take care of my son, with whom I had spent time during my maternity break, and my mother would visit me often.

But, I took a break in the 6th year of my career for one year, because my

support system collapsed when my nanny left without any notice. I did not expect my mother to come and stay for extended periods, and so I needed to make a tough decision to leave work until I found a replacement with whom I was comfortable, and who I trusted completely.

My organization offered me flexibility, but I was torn between a job that needed me to be “present at work”, and my son – and I wasn’t able to juggle both.

So, I thought that I should take a break and focus my energies in one space at a time, or I would not have been at peace with myself. It was tough, but it was the right decision for us all, and one that I look back on with a lot of fondness.

When I was ready, I came back to a role of leading a function, which I had not done earlier. The hiring manager was a lady who had spent more than 20 years in that organization and represented what the organization stood for. We connected very well and I chanced upon a wonderful support system at work, too. My career switch opened up another aspect of myself. I got a chance to directly touch the lives of people via my professional work, and I found it very fulfilling. I saw scope for advancement and yearned to extend myself and take on more. So I did!

On the personal front, we had our second baby come to us – a lovely little girl – so it was double the fun! My husband and I have always been a balance for each other.

We are hands-on parents and truly co-parent, not assuming that any one of us has a specific role in our children’s lives. We both are mum and dad when the time comes.

More than anything, or anybody else, it was my self-doubt – whether or not I’d be able to manage things, would my son understand why I was away, and a general wavering in my self-confidence – that I had to deal with when restarting my career. My husband was a huge support who told me to believe in myself and that together we would adjust to the “new

normal”.

All this time I was trying to hire someone on whom I could rely. It was a very difficult time because I am essentially a working girl who had to make peace with the break. Once I hired someone I trusted, and of course, trained and tested, I was ready to get back to work.

In the beginning, I had started off by assessing what I should do, and decided that I should go back to my core competence, but unfortunately I hadn't kept in touch with many people, and so my network had disappeared.

I had gone into a cocoon during that year away from work.

I reached out to a few organizations, but when they heard that I was not working, their obvious questions focused on how confident I was of my situation, and whether it was sustainable. I was clear that I needed flexibility and sometimes that was a put-off.

During this time I also learned how to drive, and I loved the independence that it provided! I was then asked to come for an interview to head a sub-function, and met the lady who headed HR at that company with more than 20 years in the organization.

I remember her asking me a question, “How would you describe yourself?”

And my prompt reply was :

“I am a mother first and then a professional.”

And then, of course, I went on to talk about my achievements in my previous roles, and how I could add to the present organization. I realized later that I had spoken to my true potential because I was very comfortable in that crucial conversation. It's so important to create that.

Restarting my career was, I think, more than anything a sense of re-validation for me. I was beaming on my drive back home, I remember, with loud music! The best part about it was that they did not use my “off time” in my offer or designation. They ensured that I was treated with respect and gave me my due. I felt very excited and happy that I’d be going back to a “me” space.

The changes I saw in myself were wonderful. I was less irritable, I was spending quality time with my baby now, and if I look back, it was then that I started reading bedtime stories to him, which established a wonderful habit!

I also kept talking to our son’s nanny and empowering her with some decisions, guiding her on how to tackle things when I was not there. A lot of online grocery shopping helped as well! My husband and I started to plan weekends better with activities for ourselves and our son. I was definitely calmer, and internally I had a sense of achievement again.

The first pay-cheque after my restart felt almost the same as my first pay-cheque had!

My advice to other women who are contemplating restarting their careers is:

1. We need to be easy on ourselves, and not overly critical.
2. Give ourselves time to ease back in.
3. We should also not expect the first interview after our break to result in a job offer!
4. Keep the network alive, and keep in touch – that’s so important.

When I look back on that period, even though going through it was tough, I feel that I definitely grew as a person. I slowed down, which we so often don’t get an opportunity to do. I learned so many things about myself. I dabbled with things that I would never had got the time to try before. So, enjoy the time.

Creating a support system is also very important, and allowing that system

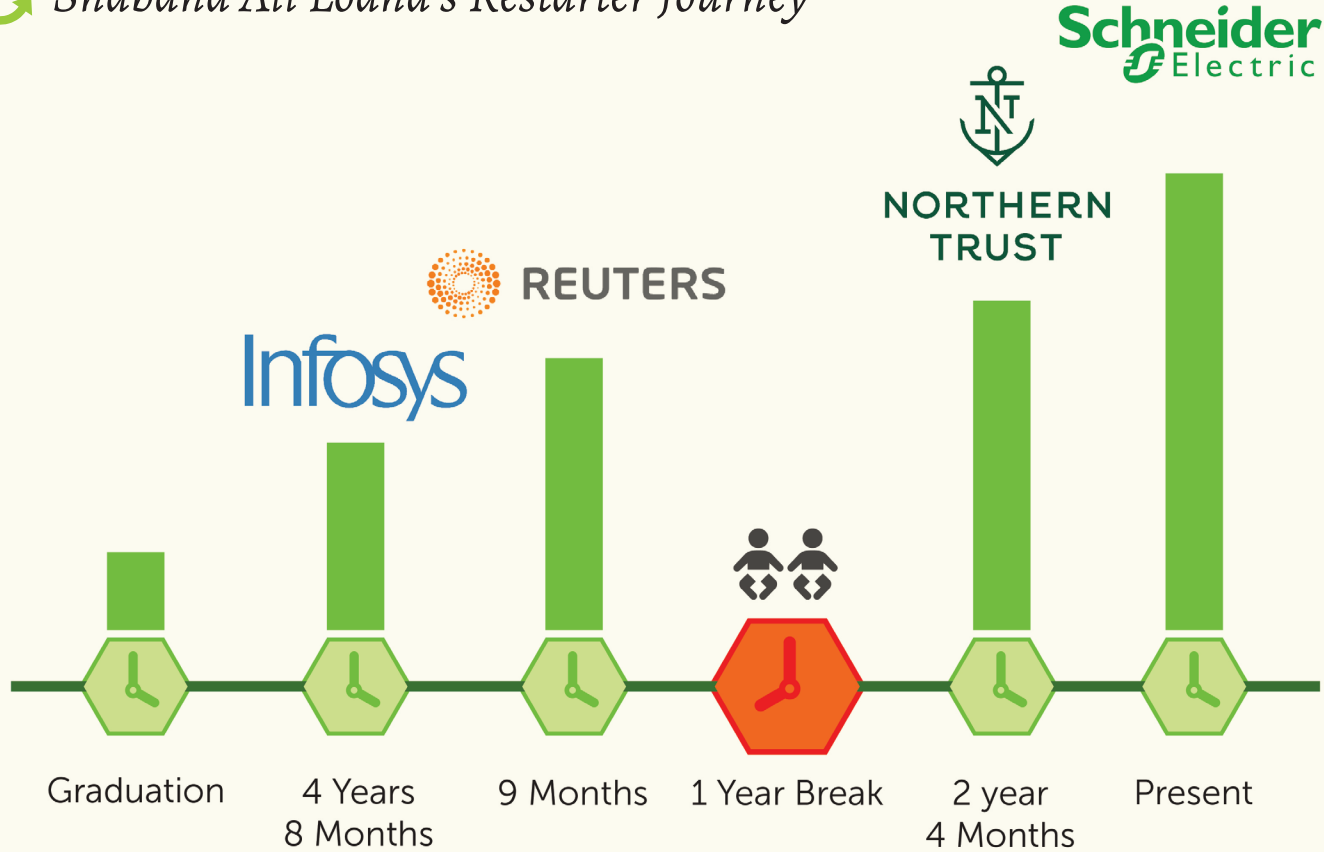
to work and flow is essential.

It's important to let go because we really can't do everything!

***Shabana Ali Lodha** is a Post-Grad in Management with over 10 years of experience in Human Resources across organizations like Infosys, Thomson Reuters, Northern Trust, and Schneider Electric, essaying multiple roles. When not working, she has her life full with two kids, and a third one who happens to be a puppy, topping the list. She loves road trips, and gardening, and recently started focusing on her health via yoga.*



Shabana Ali Lodha's Restarter Journey



18. Thank God We Have an Option!

I was a big believer of having it all; doing it all. Motherhood did not instantly change that core belief. If I had managed a full-time job, with a part-time MBA and a new house, how hard could it be to manage mommyhood?! What I didn't realize was that being a perfectionist and being a mother do not always go well together.



Things occasionally got out of control, both at work and at home. Over time, I became snappy and irritated, while trying to make ends meet, unsuccessfully. So much so that my mother, during one of my frantic annual visits to her mentioned, “Is this really you? What has happened to my smiling, bubbly daughter? Where has that smile gone?” At that moment I realized that something had to give. There was no way to put mommyhood on the backburner! The only choice I really had was to hit the brakes on my career.

The days leading up to D-day were torturous. I had to tussle with many issues and emotions to put an end to a promising career, one I had worked so hard to build.

But a break was what I needed. And I am glad I made that choice!

I didn't have to feel guilty now, nursing my child out of his (seemingly

perennial) hypoallergenic bouts. I watched him read his first book, taught him swimming, talked to my parents (for hours), shopped, partied, and travelled. Basically, I brought that smile back to my face.

Weeks turned into years. My baby is no longer a baby! They grow up, you know? He's a 7 year old and by God's grace, behaves like a young adult. He goes to "big school" now with long hours. He has friends, he has classes; he has a life of his own. And where does that leave me? In an empty house for the most part of the day. I find myself asking the same existential questions again.

A lot of the reasons why I made the decision to quit work no longer seem true. I'm glad I was there when my baby needed me the most. Or maybe I needed the break the most! But now, shouldn't I wake up to my new reality? I'd be lying to myself if I hadn't fantasized about being in that meeting room again making important decisions – not just about what should be made for dinner tonight but about business and budgets and technology stacks.

Didn't I owe this to myself, and to the world, to give back the experience and the expertise that I had painfully gained during the long years of my professional career?

Just like I had the option then to prioritize my personal life over my professional one, I have an option now. In fact, aren't you glad that as a woman you have such an option?! I made the decision to go back to work. It's not going to be easy. I will have to be patient. I will have to make adjustments, and so will my family, and my son. But I know it will be worth it – for everyone.

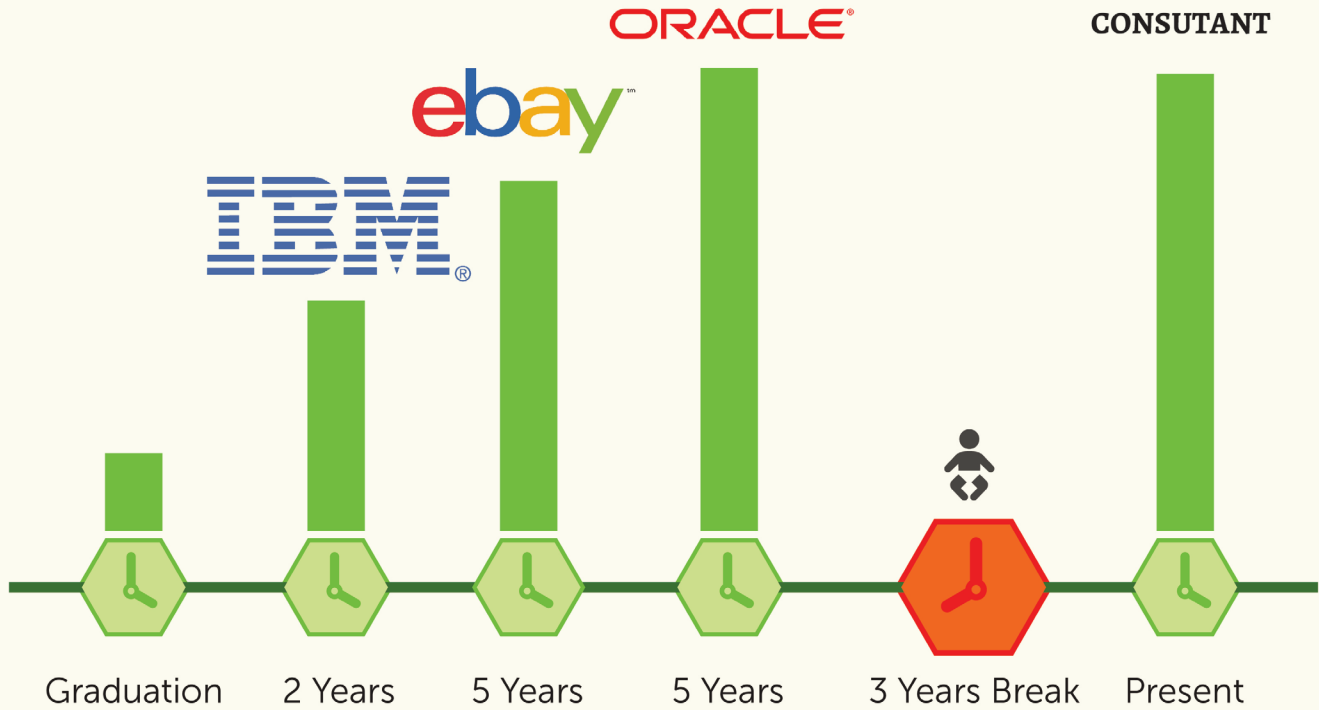
And, as they say, if you want something badly enough, the world conspires to get it for you. So, for all the women who may be in a similar situation, I say, "We do have an option!"

JobsForHer.com is one such option. A new world, a renewed identity, might be just waiting for you...

Preeti Somani is a vivacious and goal-oriented woman with 15 years of experience in the software industry and diverse management roles under her belt, at multinational hi-tech companies such as IBM, eBay, and Oracle. She took a 3 year hiatus from her corporate career after her son was born and has restarted her career as a Product and Digital Marketing Consultant, helping startups and SMBs execute on their product and marketing strategies.



Preeti Somani's Restarter Journey



19. Have What it Takes, Will Sell

Pritha is a bubbly and effervescent young woman who stockpiled 6 years of sales & marketing experience in different B2B and media industries before she got married.

Her launchpad at graduation was a startup in Bangalore that taught her the A-B-C mantras of her trade, threw her into road-shows and nurtured her fledgling talents in what was to become her passion and ammo for a lifetime of successes.

However, she knew that this was the kiddy-pool – the Bangalore market was fairly easy to navigate, it operated professionally, and her SME and corporate clients were reasonable negotiators. So, early in her career she moved to Delhi to be close to family and dive head-on into a cutthroat syndicate to work with goliaths like IndiaMart, Alibaba and TimesJobs who fine-tuned her skills in choppy waters. The knavish negotiation field was a tough place to cut her teeth, but the incentives were well worth the sweat.

She truly enjoyed her work in acquisition and retention of clients from diverse local backgrounds, often the polar-opposite of what she had known and learned in Bangalore, which made the rewards even sweeter when they came.



And then her engagement to her fiancé brought her back to Bangalore from where it had all begun. The relocation got her to switch fields – the veritable adventuress – and apply her talents to the hitherto unknown territory of media, for a while. There she handled corporate sales exclusively, selling a revolutionary geo-marketing technology to various retail clients for different TV-channels and learned how to tailor packages for them in the byzantine maze of advertising.

After her wedding, she decided to slow down to focus on her move to Bangalore and her new life with her husband and in-laws. Her father-in-law had been suffering with paralysis for 3 years and Pritha was determined to do her part to help. Since she had worked in a host of companies on a clearly defined sales & marketing trajectory till then, she could apply those skills to her in-laws' business when they needed all hands on deck.

She spun her web deftly and swiftly; coordinating with existing clients, raking in orders, keeping tabs on deliverables and tracking payments assiduously. She found that she still had hours to spare in this warren of work and took on two more projects to constructively pass her time – freelancing as a recruiter, and also as a project manager with a TV channel that was launching their online presence.

As luck would have it, she developed a debilitating case of back spasms, which required complete rest and no computer-time. So, after a 6-year career as a field sales agent, Pritha spent the remainder of her first year of marriage focusing on taking care of her ailing father-in-law, her own health, and adjusting to her new city.

And just like that, the year was done and she saw the writing on the wall if she didn't restart her career pronto.

With her resume she was confident of finding a role in a company seeking her well-honed skills and get-the-sale spirit. But she didn't want the rat-race just yet. She was ready to work, but not ready to give up the close-knit

life she had created with her new family. Her in-laws were growing old, her husband had restarted his own career, and she wanted to be available for them by creating herself a flexible arena of work-life harmony.

She heard about JobsForHer, a portal for women like her who wished to get back to work, and knew she had found her match. Ever since then, Pritha has been responsible for finding a plethora of job opportunities for other women like her who wish to restart their careers.

Her hope is that all women have the confidence and spirit to restart their careers at whatever point in their lives that they think they're ready, because it was the best thing that happened to her.

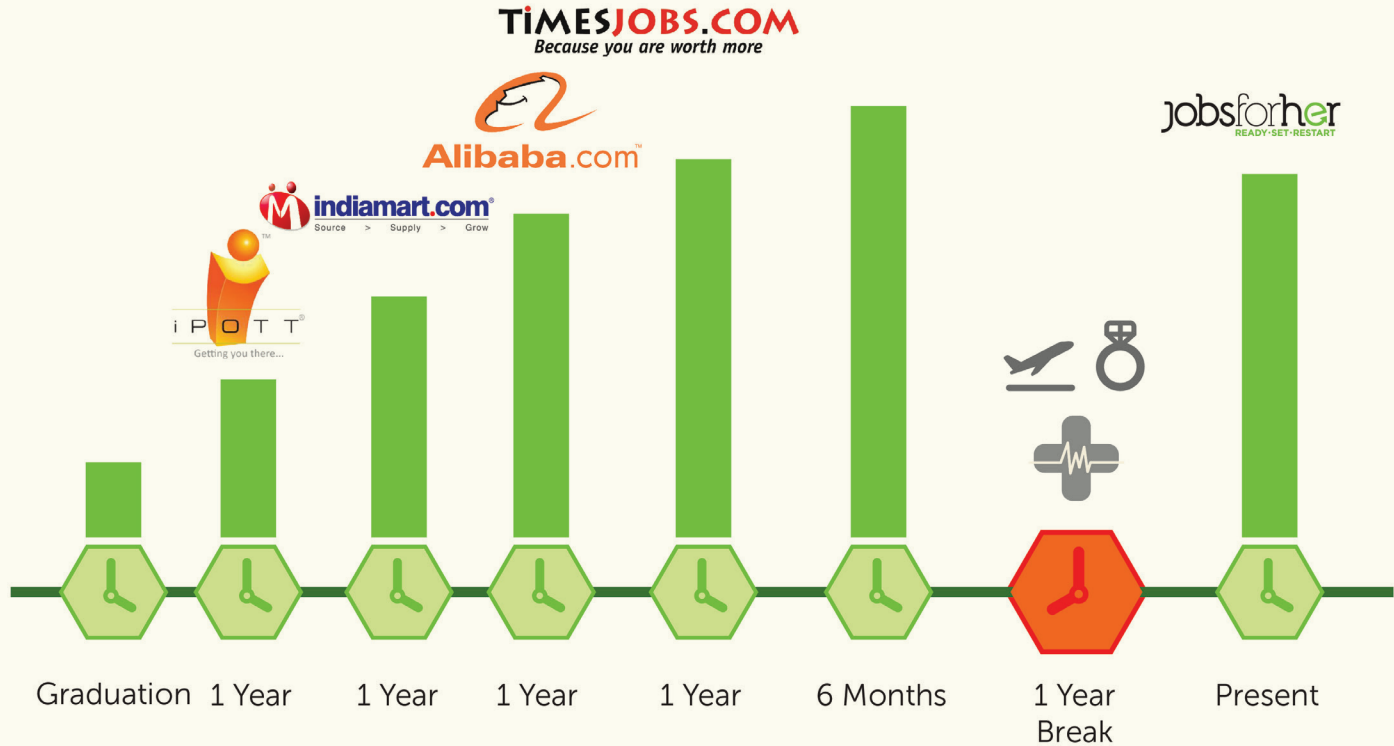
Heading out that door each morning to apply her mind and talent once again has given Pritha a renewed sense of responsibility, energy, and self-awareness. She is enjoying the harmony of work and life and takes pride in the fact that she was proactive in seeking it out and tailoring it to her life and what it needed. Her husband is enjoying his revitalized wife with whom he now spends quality-time after both their work-days are done.

She is learning something new every day, exploring and upgrading her capabilities on the job and at home. She no longer feels unfulfilled and crabby when evening rolls around because she has spent her day pursuing clients who almost always sign on the dotted line after her well-versed, professionally informed and light-hearted approach to her job. She enjoys her weekends exploring the city with her new family and sleeps soundly every night, happy in sweet exhaustion from a day well-spent.



Her mother always told her that “the best day was one which you don’t know how it passed” – and now Pritha agrees.

Pritha Nagpal's Restarter Journey



20. What Guts & Glory Can Do for a Mom on a 13 Year Career Break

Payal* had always been the kind of woman and mom who simply could not 'sit at home'. After a long morning's work, when most moms would look forward to an afternoon siesta, she would get dressed to make the best of hot deals at a sale!



Today, even though she's totally rocking her job as an Office Manager, her journey getting there has been anything but easy.

Payal left the work scene almost 13 years ago when her first child arrived. At the time, she took a solemn oath within, "No matter what, I will return to work." She gave herself a time-frame of approximately a year, but her little one developed multiple health issues with the infamous 'lactose intolerance', a rare case in babies. It was close to 3 years when Payal, with her flame burning bright as ever, looked at restarting her career. Even though her husband was supportive of her choice, he suggested that it may be time for a second one! And though Payal wasn't keen, being that person who tries to keep everyone happy, she was receptive of his choice.

Sure enough, their second one arrived shortly after. While she relished the happiness of being a mum again, she was also quietly dismayed about the stalling of her plans to reenter the working world, yet again, for a now unknown period of time. But, she wasn't going to let that get in the way of her 'never say die' attitude.

*Name changed

One fine day, out of the blue, when her younger one was about 6 years old, Payal decided to get out of the house and make it happen! She was done waiting.

She researched all possible job sites, filled out various profile and resume requirements, and even received numerous emails from them, but couldn't really make sense of the roles she was being offered. However, since she had decided to put herself out there, she attended a few of the interviews that came her way.

She had expected to land a job almost instantly. Not once had she imagined that the working world would be as harsh as it turned out. Companies were unwilling to let go of her 'gap', and were unsure if she would adapt to present-day work scenarios after a break as long as hers had been.

It was then that a good friend told her of Neha Bagaria, founder of JobsForHer. After Payal met Neha, she decided to join JobsForHer's **Volunteer Program**. She started coming to the office each day with a renewed, insatiable zest to learn! She wanted to learn and know everything possible about the working world that had evolved during her absence from it. "How do I use PowerPoint? How do I frame a Word Doc? How do I...? Is this the way...? What are you doing with that...? How can I fix this?" She wasn't embarrassed in the least to ask about anything she didn't know and wanted to learn. The JFH team was floored by her determination and her respect quotient grew exponentially during her time among them.

During this period, Payal's in-laws were travelling. In her family, a career-woman wasn't really a welcome concept. But with her grit, Payal knew there were no two ways about it! The day they returned, she announced her new job, and how the very next day was her first! Mind you, she did this when she had no tangible, paying job in hand! All she had was a volunteering position, and luckily, as she says 'a place to go to' (Thank God) for the hours that she claimed she'd be away! The reason she

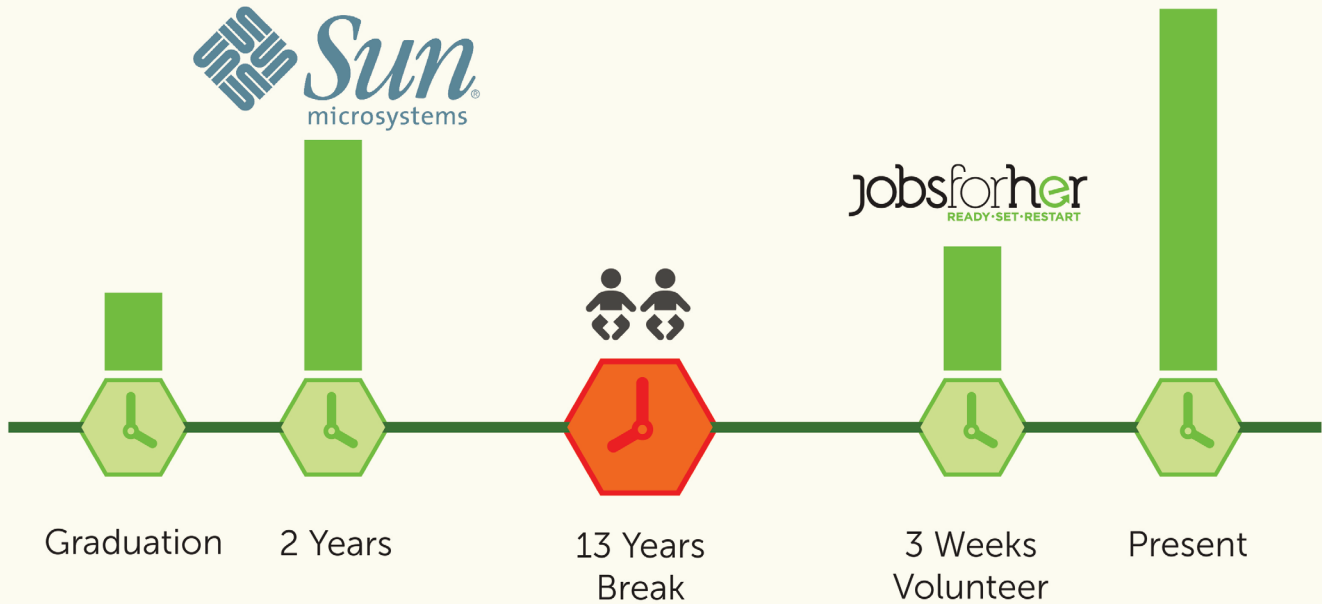
did this was so that her family – in-laws, children, and husband – would start acquainting themselves a little with her absence.

Fortune favours the brave. Within her first week of volunteering, Payal heard about positions at BTS – a world-leading strategy implementation firm – from another JFH volunteer. See, that'show we do 'Women for Women'! With her renewed confidence and upgraded skills from her volunteering role at JobsForHer, Payal attended 7-8 interviews at companies listed on the JFH portal and managed to land 2 job offers! At BTS, she breezed through the 5 tedious rounds of interviews, their regular route of recruitment, and decided to accept the job.

Today, Payal is over-the-moon happy with her newfound career, which has already taken her across the globe on two international trips! She speaks highly of her workmates who are extremely helpful and very patient with her novelty in the field. The most amazing coincidence is that her present office is in exactly the same building that housed Sun Micro Systems – her first workplace 14 years ago!

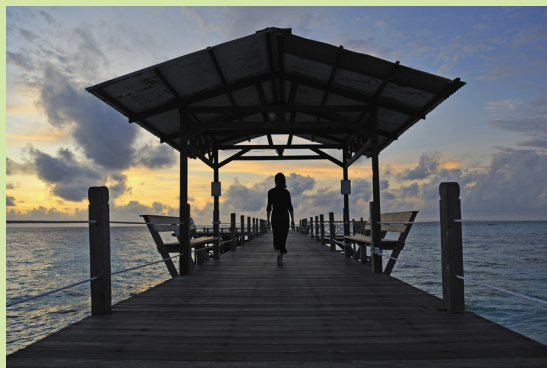
Or, this was Destiny saying “We’ve brought you back.”

Payal's Restarter Journey



21. Where it All Began: The Restart Journey of Neha Bagaria, Founder - JobsForHer

In May 2013, I found myself on a beach with a toddler and an infant in tow, attending yet another wedding. My older son was 3 ½ years old then and the younger one was all of six months. They were both down with colds, cranky and behaving like anything but the model children I had planned to raise. My reaction didn't help. I was blowing the entire situation out of proportion because I viewed their behaviour as the end result of the last three years of my life. It was then that I realised that I was placing the burden of my lofty ambitions on the little shoulders of my children. I realised that it was about time I got back to being the person I used to be: it was time to restart my career.



I am the first-born to my parents which meant they always pushed me to excel in everything I pursued. True to their expectations, I stood second in Maharashtra in the 10th grade I.C.S.E. exams, graduated with honours from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, and decided to bring the Advanced Placement Program to India, founding my first venture Paragon right after I graduated and becoming the College Board representative of India.

Marriage then moved me to Bangalore and resulted in the untimely closing

down of Paragon. I then joined Kemwell, a leading contract manufacturer of bio/pharmaceuticals, where I became involved in Finance, Marketing and HR. Work and I remained inextricably interconnected, and I couldn't imagine a day when we could be separated.

That's when my first-born came along and a baby gave birth to a mother. For the first time, I became aware of the differences between a man and a woman. Suddenly, I became the primary caretaker of this tiny precious life and I was overwhelmed. The same dedication and zeal that I had centred around my studies and work up until then, I now centred upon my baby.

My baby became the focus of my being and I decided I wanted a sabbatical from everything else.

My sabbatical extended from months to years, during which I gave birth to my second son. Each new life changes the lives of those around him or her and suddenly, my entire perspective changed. The second time around, motherhood seemed like a piece of cake. I realised I could do more and I wanted to do more.

I realised I had become a person I didn't recognise anymore. I realised it was time to get back to work.

I restarted my career at Kemwell and started regaining my confidence and saw that I could hit the ground running even after the three-year career break. As my responsibilities at work increased, so did the quality of time I spent with my children, husband, family, friends. I was no longer in a brain fog, no longer needy and emotional, no longer sweating the small stuff. I became a happier and more fulfilled person, which translated into becoming a happier mother and happier wife. Additionally, my renewed passion and intention to prove myself again, helped me contribute at work with greater dedication and commitment.

This personal journey opened my eyes to the accomplished and qualified women around me who stopped working for personal reasons such as marriage, motherhood or elderly care, and then never returned to

the workforce.

I started delving into the reasons behind this female brain drain and it became clear that there are many re-entry challenges that need to be addressed in India. These range from requiring flexibility, regaining confidence, retraining, overcoming biases and changing mindsets. It made me determined to enable other women to restart their careers and connect them with whatever they require to do so.

**And so I founded JobsForHer on
International Women's Day, March 2015.**

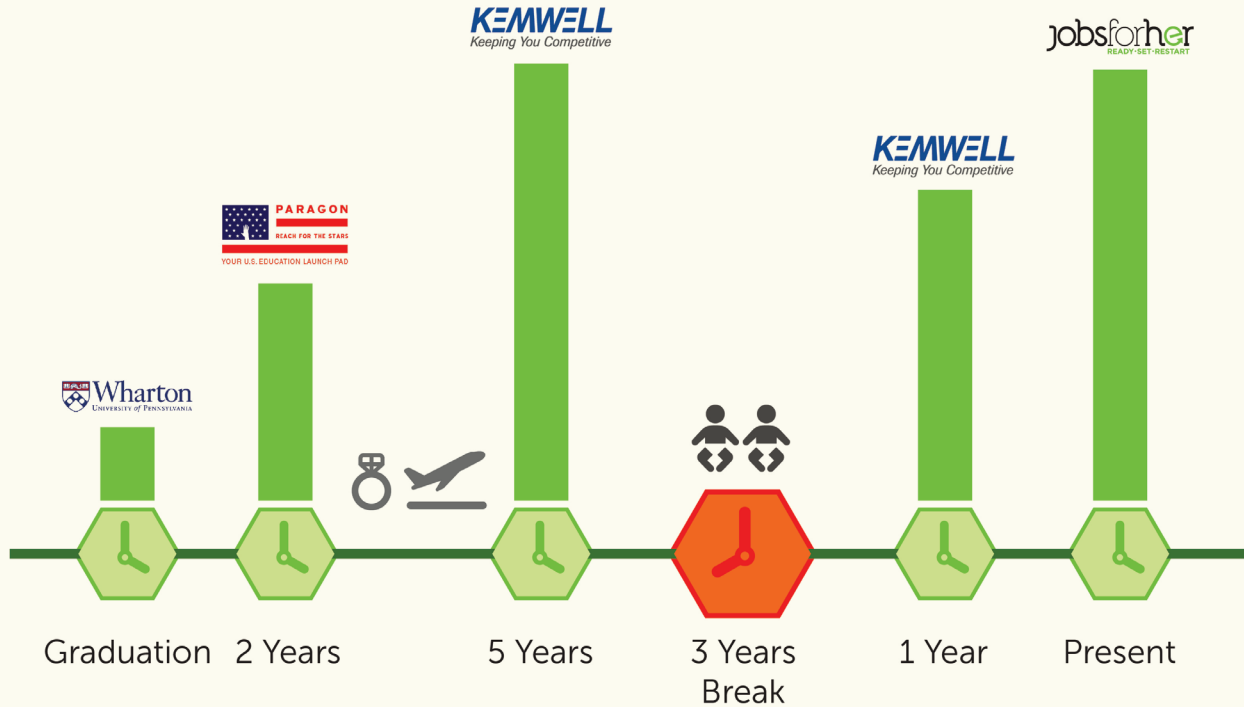
The mission of JobsForHer is simple: to enable women to get back to work and achieve their full potential.

We do so by connecting women who want to restart post motherhood/marriage/elderly-care to companies looking for such experienced female talent available at no notice period. The jobs on our portal range from full-time, part-time and work-from-home engagements to project-based assignments, and we also work with companies to offer Returnee Programs, which are internships for women getting back to work.

JobsForHer has been founded by a woman who restarted her career, and built by a team of highly capable women who are also restarting their own careers. Together, we will enable all of India's women to get back to work, one resume at a time!



Neha Bagaria's Restarter Journey



Epilogue

JobsForHer is an online portal to connect women who have been on a career-break with companies looking for experienced and/or female talent. Come create your own Restarter Journey by submitting your resume or job opening on our brand-new portal, JobsForHer.com.

We can't wait to have you join us on this exciting ride.