

Those Gap Years

All of us through this difficult phase and *Shalinee Bhardwaj* tells us how to use these years wisely

For every woman, there will be a time when she has to make a choice, be it for the family or for herself – when she has to let go of her career dreams, for a while or over a longer period. To use these years positively is the challenge that we have to take upon us.

Every individual goes through these moments of indecision when choices have to be made and the future path chalked. Whether it is a young mother's dilemma of working versus nurturing her child or a senior professional cherishing for serenity and self-possession, important decisions about careers need to be made consciously and wisely.

Why women leave the workforce:

Women at different levels of their professional career opt for a homely life due to reasons both explicit and implicit.

- Family issues: Birth and rearing of children, taking care of old/sick in the family, husband moving to another country for a job. These seem to be the most obvious reasons for leaving jobs but interestingly for women who have been out of work list others factors to be the decisive ones:
- Inflexibility of the work environment: For today's educated women who take on multi roles, inflexible working hours are a major deterrent.

- A change in the organisational climate so that her position is no longer positive and she finds it best to off ramp for a while.
- Last but not the least – taking time off to 'defuse' and rethink the next chapter.

A friend once stated that you get a good job only while you are in a good job. A career gap is every job seeker's worst nightmare. And for on ramping women it is no different.


The most important task so as to minimise the glaring gap in your CV is to keep yourself engaged and involved in productive activities throughout the time you are off.

A resume-writing consultant suggests that for a gap of more than a year you should be confident enough of convincing your interviewer of the fruitful ways in which you had utilised it. Even if it is for taking care of your family/children, keep yourself involved in some industrious activities or further studies.

Reasons for leaving jobs may differ so do the ways in which women react to them.

The underlining fact remains the same – women who have stood apart maintaining their identity are the ones who have kept alive the spirit of work and achievement, prioritising and balancing, adapting and attaining contentment.

Woman Today talked to a few women who have gone through this lean phase but maintained their identity while being involved in productive activities.



“You are on your own.
And you know what
you know. And You are
the one who will decide
where to go.”

Dr Suess

What you can do while you are off ramping:

- **Teach and learn:** Consider teaching a class at a community college, continuing education programme, or university. Employers value people who teach because it shows that you have expertise and that you can communicate your knowledge to others – an invaluable skill. Not only that, but it is a great way to network. If you are off for a while, employers will naturally worry that your skills have become outdated, especially if you work in a highly technical environment. By taking a course or even pursuing an advanced degree, you are then in a great position to demonstrate that you have remained engaged in your field.
- **Freelance:** Being unemployed presents you with a great opportunity to do freelance work or set yourself up as consultant. Even landing small jobs will allow you to supplement your knowledge and your income, while compelling you to stay current. Quite often, a consulting gig will lead to a full time position. And again, potential employers will be delighted to see that your time off was used constructively.
- **Volunteer:** While you've got the time, why not give something back to the community? You'll feel better about

how you are spending your time off, and volunteer work will reflect favourably on you in the eyes of any potential employer.

- **Travel and read:** Now that you are on the sidewalk, see the world and meet people across the globe. Read about different cultures, countries and customs. Explore areas for which you otherwise won't have any time. Broaden your mind and strengthen your personality.
- **Polish your productive skills:** This can be a good time to build upon your hobby and acquiring technical skills to supplement it. Take a plunge into entrepreneurship and rediscover yourself!

During the course of her lifetime all women acquire several roles that need multitasking and change in lifestyle. The difference lies in keeping your spirit and identity alive and chalking your own path; or succumbing to the mundane routine and losing yourself. The gap years can become an asset if used wisely. The key to avoid feelings of hopelessness and disappointment is to keep yourself involved in career oriented or self-image building actions. You might even discover a personality in you, which you never knew existed, during this endeavour.



Simi Paul, mother of two: Left her job when her first child was born as there was no family to cushion the demands of a hectic living. She started working again only after her second child was born.



Sawsan Mazboudi, mother of one: With 17 years of successful career in advertising behind her, an employment she enjoyed and which was her life, Sawsan prioritised kids over it. She left her job when her son started schooling and his involvement in various activities increased. This demanded her constant availability for the needs of her son. She utilised the gap in her career by perfecting

her existing skills in arts and crafts and participating in various exhibitions, bazaars with her hand made exclusive decoration items. She even set up a workshop at home and with a shop in Souq Waqif, is all set to take it up as a professional enterprise.

Flexible working hours allow her to balance work and family and she is absolutely satisfied and contented in what she's doing.



Magida Nakouzi, mother of two: Worked for 12 years in the banking sector before leaving her job when her husband moved to Qatar. She could not continue working because:

- Being a nuclear family there is no support system to take good care of kids and share household responsibilities.
- The school timings don't coincide with the office time so it is impossible to

manage both together.

With a year's gap for settling down in Doha, Magida has converted her hobby into a profession - catering homemade sweets and doing well at it. The flexible work from home arrangement allows her to balance the needs of her kids and her own desire to work and have a productive lifestyle. She may get back to banking once her kids become more self-dependent.