

# CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

## Pointers for Re-entering the Work Force



By Russ Jones

Daunting, intimidating, unnerving, discouraging, frightening, overwhelming, scary – all words describing the feelings so many have when contemplating a return

to the workforce.

At one time, most considered this returning population to be primarily stay-at-home parents – and mostly women. But today, with gas prices and healthcare costs rising while pension plans and retirement savings slip, we are seeing an increased number of population segments seeking to be re-employed.

Others returning to the workforce include those recovered from an illness or injury, or those who have cared for a sick relative, experienced a long period of unemployment, recently returned from a military assignment, or have gone through a divorce.

Over the next 10 years, according to AARP, the number of labor force participants older than 55 will increase by 46 percent. Many of these individuals will have left the work force and are now returning. Why? Our changing demographics, personal reasons, the need to support retirement income precipitated by stock market losses, concerns about the stability of Social Security or realizing that they didn't save enough, are pushing retirees back to work. And with our population living longer, the nest egg simply isn't enough.

No matter the circumstance that leads an individual back to the workplace, the advice that follows can shorten the search and reduce anxiety.

**Take Inventory:** Before you begin your search, take the time to consider your skills, abilities and accomplishments. Think about the positions previously held, as well as the knowledge and skills attained while being away. Consider the volunteer roles you have held.

**Consider the Possibilities:** Think about how your skills can be marketed to a variety of employers. Evaluate your activities, interests, hobbies, etc. Determine if an avocation may become a vocation.

**Be Realistic:** Finding a new position takes time, whether or not you have been away for a while. So, be patient. Work at it every day for an allocated time frame. Don't anticipate returning to the same position or salary, as you may have to earn back the responsibilities and level of compensation by contributing at your new place of employment.

**Do Your Homework:** To avoid the appearance of being "late of the art," spend time with those familiar with what is necessary to be successful in the field you wish to enter. Learn as much as possible about the type of position you wish to attain. If you need training or refresher courses, enroll early and consider donating some of your time to gain new experiences. Having new "stories" to tell helps to bridge the employment gap. Consider job shadowing with a friend to learn more about becoming current and about particular positions or professions.

**You Can't Network Enough:** It may seem that it is all we hear about, but in today's market, more than 70 percent of job seekers' success comes from networking. Networking is about seeking advice, counsel and coaching while being able to discuss your interests without asking for a job. Good dialogue will create opportunities. Join job clubs, attend business and professional meetings and attend job fairs.

**Don't Apologize:** Be prepared to answer the top question on an interviewer's mind – "What have you been doing for the past few years?" Describe why you left the work force, what you did in the interim and what you have done to prepare yourself to return.

**Rely on Your Friends:** Ask a trusted professional friend to be your support and confidante during this process. We all need a "cheerleader" to maintain our spirits during difficult times.

Set goals and have a plan. Establish a daily routine, and reward yourself for your small successes. Each day you will be closer to attaining your ultimate objective – re-entering the work force.

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