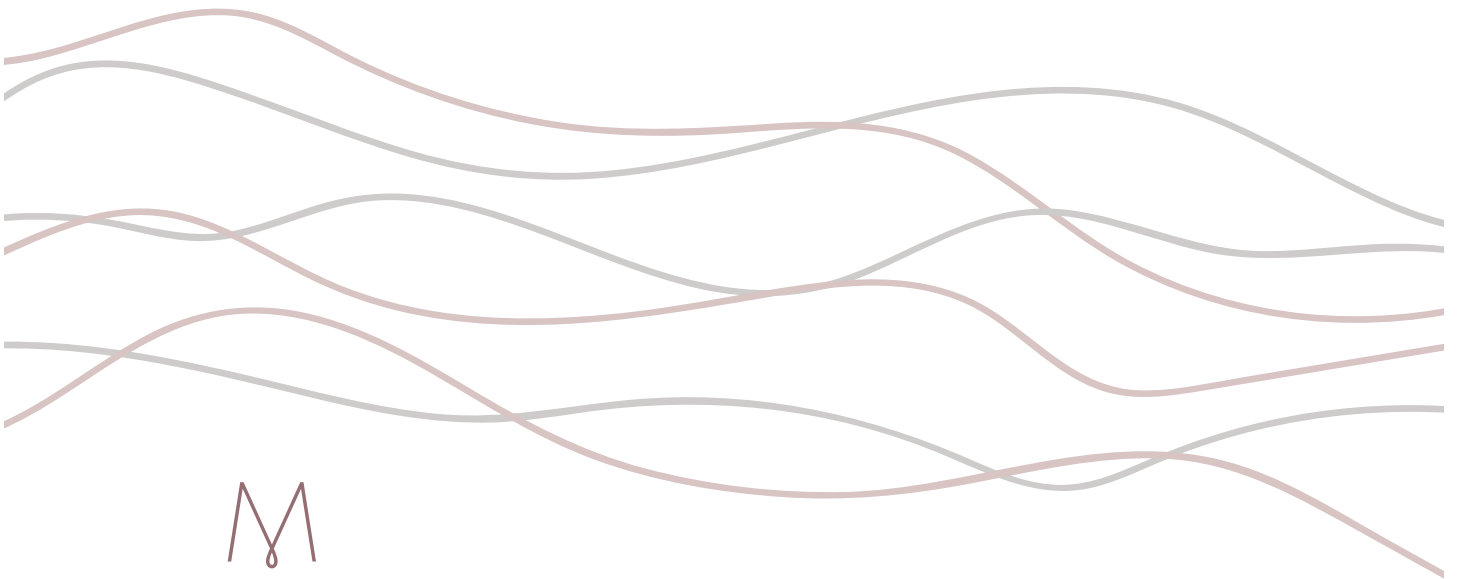


HOW TO KEEP YOUR FOOT IN THE BUSINESS DOOR WHILE KEEPING YOUR HEAD ABOVE WATER AT HOME

Five steps you can take now to land your dream job later

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Depending on where you are in your stay-at-home-mom journey, you may be months or years away from re-entering the paid work force. But no matter when you plan to re-enter the job market, *now* is the time to prepare for that moment.

If you map out your strategy now, you'll have the best chance of getting your dream job when the timing is right. It'll also help you more fully embrace the parenting season you are in now if you remind yourself that for better or worse, it won't last forever. Here are five steps to ensure your resume is fresh and competitive when you are ready to land the job of your dreams.

STEP 1: WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP?

*"Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue.
And the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true."*

- Yip Harburg, "Over the Rainbow, The Wizard of Oz"

Having kids changes, well, everything. Even if you loved the job you had before having kids, it's smart to take another look at what you want to be when you grow up, the second time around. Ask yourself the following questions to ensure you are heading in a direction that will be meaningful to you and pay for the awesome pair of shoes you've had your eye on.

What do YOU want to do?

This may sound like a folksy, unrealistic question, but sometimes we forget to ask the obvious: "What do I want to do?" Instead we get stuck in, "What should I do?" And as moms, we are even more likely to rank what's best for the family over what's best for us. But what if we don't have to make that choice? What if we can find a job we love *and* continue to take great care of our family?

I think there's a part of us that feels like our dream-chasing years are behind us. But keep in mind that even if you go back to work when you are 45, you may still have more than 20 years of working before you retire. Do you really want to spend 20 years doing something that just pays the bills? Prioritize your own happiness and well-being by finding a way to make money by doing what you love (or at least like!).

Dream with me for a minute. If you could write your ideal job description, what would it be? Use these prompts to get your creative juices flowing.

- What would you spend most of your days doing? Planning events? Organizing projects? Selling products or services? Programming software? Fixing computers? Calculating accounts? Working with your hands? Working with computers? Baking? Managing facilities? Teaching people how to exercise? Designing websites? Writing marketing copy? Fixing cars? Organizing closets? Teaching kids? Teaching adults?
- Where do you want to work, physically speaking? Do you like working indoors? Outdoors? With people? On your own? How much variety or regularity do you enjoy? Do you thrive when you get to be creative? Do you love solving problems?
- What would your work day look like? Are you up early getting a jump start on the day? Do you prefer doing your work late at night? What would an ideal work day rhythm look like for you?

The options are endless. But you will only find the job of your dreams if you seek it. Start dream chasing today.

What makes you exceptional?

You are truly never too old to learn about yourself. And if you've been a mom for a while, you may find that it's a bit tricky to even know what you want since you've spent a long time surviving by pushing your needs to the back of your mind. (I mean, who really needs to eat a warm meal in one sitting or sleep a continuous eight hours in a row?!) Well, now's the time to get to know yourself again. It'll be like catching up with an old friend, but it'll also help you figure out which jobs fit best with your unique strengths and preferences.

- Take another look at your strengths with the [Clifton Strengths Finder](#) test to figure out either your [Top 5 Clifton Strengths](#) or [Clifton Strengths 34](#).
- Use the [Myers-Briggs Type Indicator](#) to find jobs that best match with your unique preferences.
- Explore what motivates you by learning your [Enneagram type](#).

What are your personal must-haves and like-to-haves for your next paid job?

Just like when you are house hunting, it's smart to create your list of must-haves and like-to-haves for your dream job. If you wait to develop this list until after you have an opportunity, you may unconsciously adapt your requirements to fit the job. It's better to make your list *before* you go job hunting. And again, write it down or type it up.

- What balance do you want to strike between getting paid the most versus getting paid in job satisfaction, flexibility or the meaningfulness of the work?
- What values do you want the organization where you will work to have?
- How many hours per week do you want to work?
- Do you want to work at home or onsite? Both?
- How far are you willing to commute?

STEP 2: WHAT CERTIFICATION, EDUCATION, SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES MUST YOU HAVE TO LAND YOUR DREAM JOB?

"Your talent is God's gift to you. What you do with it is your gift back to God."

- Leo Buscaglia

Now that you have a dream job in mind, it's wise to create a plan for landing this job so you'll be equipped and competitive when the time is right. For this next part, the more thorough your research, the better your plan will be. You can find some of this information online, but be sure to confirm your findings and plans with people who already have the job you are seeking. Here are two questions to guide you:

What certifications or education do you need to have for this job?

It's important to answer this question early on as it may help you determine what your dream job is. If you are interested in becoming a certified counselor, for example, you may know about the master's degree you'll need. But did you know you may have to gain 3,000 hours of post-graduate experience before securing your license?

This step isn't meant to discourage you. If you really want the job and are willing to pay the necessary price in time, money and energy, then go for it! Four years of school may seem like a long time, but compare it to the 20 or 30 years you'll likely get to enjoy the job. YOLO, right?!

What skills and experiences are essential for this job, and which of these do you need?

Find several job postings for the specific type of job you want. Make sure you pull these from many types of organizations so you can get a really complete picture. Now take a close look at the job descriptions and make a list of the skills and experiences needed for most of the jobs.

Next, create your resume with the experience and skills you currently have. Which skills and experiences are missing? How long has it been since you've learned the skills or gained the experiences you did list? If it's been more than a year, it's important you find a way to practice those skills and gain more recent experience.

Connect with at least three people who currently have the type of job you want or people who hire employees for this type of job. Double check your list of required education, certifications, skills and experience with these people.

Don't be shy! Most people want to help others find happiness. But you'll need to invite them along on your journey and ask for help. I doubt I need to tell you this, but be sure to thank everyone who helps you. A well-written email will work, but a hand-written thank you note will set you apart from the crowd – now more than ever. Keep in mind that one of these people may be the very one to hire or recommend you one day!

STEP 3: GET THE EDUCATION YOU NEED

“The only impossible journey is the one you never begin.”

- Tony Robbins

At this point, you should have a specific description of your dream job and a confirmed list of education and certification requirements for the job you want. Now is the time to map out exactly how you are going to fill any gaps that exist between what you need and what you already have.

Get out the laptop and get specific. List every baby step required to achieve your goals. Consider which actions need to be done before another action can begin. It's also important to note if certain actions are time specific.

Next, make a list of all potential schools and track the pros and cons for each. What schools are the most highly regarded for the type of degree you need? Which are feasible from a commuting stand point? Do they offer online options? When do you need to apply for the degree program? How much do they cost? What financial aid is available? Is there a limit as to how quickly you need to finish the degree? Which schools offer the most support after graduation?

Did you know MOPS Members can save up to 30 percent on tuition with [Colorado Christian University's College for Adult and Graduate Studies](#)? They even offer 80 degrees 100 percent online so you can enroll from wherever you live and attend class during naptime.

Now is also a great time to take an educated guess as to when you may want to get back to paid work. You can keep this timeline to yourself if you want, but knowing it will help you set a realistic plan for getting a degree if you need one. Even if you are taking just one class a semester, you are moving toward your dream.

STEP 4: GAIN THE SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE YOU NEED TO BE SERIOUSLY COMPETITIVE

“Luck is a matter of preparation meeting opportunity.”

- Lucius Annaeus Seneca

What skills and experience do you still need, or which ones need freshening up? Take another look at the resume you built in Step 2 and make a list of what you need to accomplish to ensure you have a killer resume when you are ready to go back to work. Get creative! There are a multitude of ways you can build up your skills and job experience without working a traditional 8-to-5 job.

Volunteer

Now that you have your to-do list, consider ways in which you can accomplish each one. For most paid jobs, there is a volunteer equivalent. If you need experience in event planning, for example, find a non-profit who needs help planning events.

You may need to start by offering to do the dirty work, like moving supplies or cleaning up after events, but odds are high that you'll get offered bigger tasks if you prove you are capable of smaller ones. (This is even more impressive if you were in a senior position in your last paid job.)

Our [MOPS](#) groups offer moms a huge variety of projects they can own to keep their resume fresh. From managing the group's budget to organizing the group's speakers, moms can find ways to contribute to their MOPS group and practice paycheck-worthy skills.

One MOPS group built a semi-annual consignment sale that grossed more than \$90,000 annually. (Nothing against bake sales, but this was no bake sale.) The women in charge of this hugely successful event leveraged their experiences to launch them into professional success later.

The Side Hustle

Technically, [The Side Hustle](#) is something that will hopefully continue to work for you long after you invested the bulk of your energy into it. If you are a techie, for example, you can build an app and hopefully keep generating income even when you are playing at the park with your kids.

And then there are your more traditional dip-your-toe-in types of side-line jobs that you can do amidst changing diapers or running kids to and fro. Do you have a hobby that you can turn into this type of business like starting a photography business or drawing adorable pictures of people's pets? If you are crafty, create something awesome and sell it on [Etsy](#).

You can also try one of the many “just a few hours a week” types of jobs like driving for Uber, entering data on your computer during naptime, or showcasing espresso machines. There is even an Uber-type of business created to shuttle kids called [Hop Skip Drive](#). (Something tells me you are likely “Uber” qualified to do this job!) Offering tutoring services in your field of expertise is a great way to keep your resume fresh and bank a few dollars. [Tutor.com](#) even offers moms a chance to tutor from home.

Lastly, there are a plethora of things you can sell from home such as Thirty-One Gifts or Noonday Collection. If this sounds fun for you, it's a great way to keep your sales and marketing skills fresh and bring in a little vacation money. It also keeps your interpersonal skills sharp. Just tread lightly when it comes to selling to your friends. (Even I only need so many Thirty-One gifts bags.)

Returnship

You have heard of internships, but have you heard of [Returnships](#)? Yep, it's a thing, and it's built for moms who need a way back into the paid workforce after staying at home for a few years (or more). Although some forward-thinking companies are offering these, there aren't very many. But don't let that stop you.

Once you target the type of work you want to do and the types of organizations you'd like to work for, you can pitch a Returnship to these companies. If it's a smart organization, they'll quickly see how brilliant it is to utilize the skills of someone like yourself ... someone who needs a re-entry point, but brings loads to the table in talent, experience and courage.

STEP 5: STAY CONNECTED AND RELEVANT

"You will get all you want in life, if you help enough other people get what they want."

- Zig Ziglar

You've heard the saying, "It's not what you know, but who you know." While this is definitely cynical and mostly false as you won't get far if you aren't great at what you do, career experts agree that between 70 to 85 percent of people land a job thanks to "who they know" or what we all call [networking](#).

If you've been out of the job market for a while, the very idea of business networking may seem daunting. Although you know you've likely been working harder than those who get a paycheck, part of you might also worry about how to answer the loaded question: "What do you do?"

A vice president at a large corporation once told me, "Don't knock the relevance of being a mom! You are managing a complex project with demanding stakeholders." This is a great line (feel free to use it!) because it's true, but also funny. Embrace humor when you are networking. By hanging out with kids so much, you have a definite advantage over much of your professional competition. You still know how to have fun!

LinkedIn

Set yourself up for networking success by building a compelling [LinkedIn profile](#). Next, invite everyone you know to join your [LinkedIn](#) network. Don't get picky about who you invite, as long as they are people you respect. Expand your networking reach by connecting with people from as many industries and organizational types as possible. When you are getting closer to going back to work, consider paying for the premium service which allows you to privately message more new contacts and leverage other helpful features.

One-on-Ones

Connect at a meaningful level with contacts by setting up one-on-one visits with people who can share insights about your specific job or about the leading professionals and organizations in your line of work. If you are meeting for coffee or lunch, be sure to foot the bill. (Consider it an investment in your future well-being.)

Be bold. Most happy people want to help if they know how. (And if they aren't generally happy or content, don't reach out to them.) Get specific about how people can help you, such as "Who do you recommend I contact at XYZ organization to get my foot in the door? Will you introduce me?" Lastly, offer ways you can help connect these people into your network. It's the right thing to do and also demonstrates that you want to build a relationship that helps both of you.

Professional Association Gatherings

There are most likely groups of professionals in your job space who meet regularly for coffee, lunch or happy hour. Before attending one of these events, practice answering the first question below and then “bridging” your answer to the second question listed. To bridge, you briefly answer the question someone asks you, but then smoothly shift to answering the question you really want to focus on.

Let’s say someone asks you: “So, what do you do?” You can say: “Right now I mostly stay at home with my three kids, but I do help XYZ non-profit with graphic design here and there. I am planning to get back into full-time work in about a year and am actually looking for ways to get more current job experience. I am willing to work for free a couple days a week. Do you know of any organization who would like my help?”

Write down your 30-second spiel and practice, practice, practice until it just rolls off your tongue. It’ll feel silly practicing with your kids, husband or friends, but it’ll be well worth the awkwardness when you nail this question at your next business happy hour.

HAPPIER MOMS CREATE HAPPIER KIDS

Good for you for taking time to prioritize your well-being. Yes, I know your kids and/or husband are vying for your attention in almost every waking moment. (In fact, you may literally have kids pulling on you even as you read this!) But remind yourself often (maybe even write it on your mirror!) that a happier mom creates happier kids. By going after your dreams, you’ll be showing your kids how to go after theirs. **Way to go, Mom. You are killin’ it!**

Elizabeth Billups is on the marketing team at MOPS. She’s also the author and illustrator of *The Puddle Jumper’s Guide to Kicking Cancer* and other books. With three kids of her own, she’s got a heart for supporting moms and families. While staying at home with her kids, Elizabeth did chase her dream job. And she’s very thankful to share that at last she’s landed it. mops.org



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