



careers advice pack

2. Choosing your next career step



Choosing your next career step

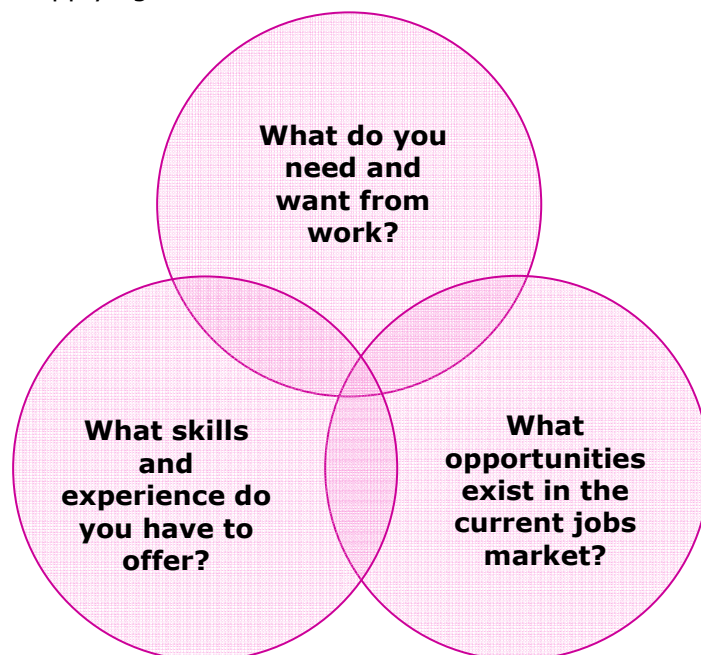
There are times in our working lives when we need to take a step back and have a good look at our career as a whole before we decide what we do next.

Looking for a new job after a career break is one of those times, and this Advice Pack is written mainly for women in this situation. However, several sections of the pack will also be helpful if you are miserable in your current job and want a change; or if you've been made redundant and aren't sure what to do next.

We'll give you some ideas for what you need to think about, and some coffee break career coaching exercises to get you started. You can do these on your own or with a (supportive) friend.

Before you start your job search

So, you've decided you want to look for a new job. There are three things you need to be clear about before you start applying for roles.



Your perfect job lies in the area where all three factors overlap with each other. Is it achievable? Let's take a look at each of the areas in turn...



What do you need and want from work

What would your ideal job look like? Applying for jobs can be time consuming. As you will see from our CV Advice Pack, you'll need to tailor your CV and cover letter for each application you make. It's better to make 10 really good applications than send your CV off for 100 roles you're not even sure you want.

Think about the following questions:

- How many hours would you like to work a week?
- How much do you need / want to earn?
- How important is it to you to work locally?
- Do you want to use your existing skills or learn new ones?
- What sort of tasks would you like to spend most of your day doing?
- What sort of organisation do you want to work for?
- What sort of colleagues would you like to work with?

Try the coffee break exercise on the next page to set down your thoughts.



Coffee break exercise: **MY IDEAL JOB**

This exercise is a useful starting point for anyone who is thinking about a big change in their career. It will help you sift through your priorities.

What to do

Which ingredients would make up your ideal job? Consider as many factors as you can, such as content of the role, practicalities (e.g. location and hours worked), reward (e.g. pay and other benefits), colleagues, values, type of organisation etc.

Step 1.

Put each of the ingredients of your ideal role into the table below. Put anything you know you wish to avoid in the final column (but don't get too distracted by this!).

Essential	Nice to have	Definitely don't want

Step 2.

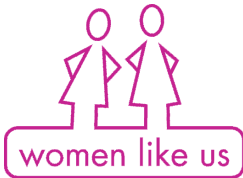
Think about where you have placed each ingredient. Can anything be moved (e.g. from the 'Essential' to 'Nice to have' column)? What are you prepared to give in order to get what you want? Review your thoughts with a friend.



What skills and experience do you have to offer?

If you've been out of the workplace for several years you might feel that you're starting your career all over again. Some women feel a bit like they did when they first left school or university. In fact you're in a totally different position. You have skills and experience to offer an employer and you have valuable knowledge about *you* in the workplace. You know something about how you behave at work, what you're good at, how you like to be managed, how you manage others, the kind of tasks you really enjoy.

The next two coffee break exercises are designed to prompt your thoughts about what skills and experience you have to offer an employer, and what skills and experience you really want to use in your next role. They may also give you an idea about what skills you might want to develop through training.



Coffee break exercise: **IDENTIFYING MY SKILLS**

When you're looking for inspiration for your next career move, it's helpful to have a really comprehensive list of your skills.

We all underestimate our potential. We forget that skills that might be a little out of date can be updated. We think only of skills gained in the workplace and forget those we've learned at home, through voluntary roles or even through our leisure activities. This exercise will help you gather your thoughts. Because we often underestimate our skills it can be helpful to complete the exercise with a friend.

What to do

Step 1.

Make a list, in the first column of the table on the next page, of all the 'jobs' you have ever done. Include jobs from your main career path, but also those outside of paid employment (e.g. I organised a charity pantomime ... was PTA Secretary ... helped out at a day care centre for the elderly... created the tennis club website).

Step 2.

In the second column, note down the skills you used in each job. The words below may help.

Communication	Business development	Creativity
Influencing and persuading	Relationship management	Project management
Coaching and developing others	Administration	Financial management
People management	IT and systems	Marketing
Selling	Crisis management	Strategy



careers advice pack

Step 3.

Make a note in the final column of any skills you'd like to use again or develop further - perhaps by taking a training course.

Jobs	Skills used	Skills I want to use/ develop



Coffee break exercise: **WHEN I'M AT MY BEST**

This exercise is designed to help you understand what's involved when you are 'at your best' at work. You can use the results to help you think about what you need to look for in a role / organisation / training course.

What to do:

Step 1.

Think of a time in your life when things were going really well for you, when you felt you were 'at your best'. It doesn't have to be a time when you were in a paid job - it could be a voluntary role or a training course you did, or some other activity. If it helps, think about an achievement you are particularly proud of.

Step 2.

Note down your recollections under the following headings:

I was at my best when _____

What was the environment like? (e.g were you outside, inside, in a busy office, working at home, what were your colleagues like?...)

How did I feel? (energised, relaxed, excited, curious, nervous)



careers advice pack

What would others have noticed about me?

What was going on around me?

What skills was I using? (listening, organising, bringing people together, coming up with new ideas.....)

What tasks was I doing?

What work values were being met? (e.g. were you being challenged, making a difference, caring for others, being well rewarded financially?)

Is there anything else? What else do you know about what you need to be at your best?



What opportunities are there in the current job market?

If you're hoping to find a part time or flexible role that will fit around your family, you need to understand what the current part time jobs market looks like. You need to know what sort of employer is recruiting for what sort of roles, and what skills and experience they want.

If you're thinking of re-training, make sure you know what sort of job a qualification will lead to, before you invest time and money in taking a course.

You'll need to research opportunities. Here are some ideas for how you could go about this:

- Look at our part time job site www.timewisejobs.co.uk, or other job sites, and see what employers are recruiting for what roles.
- Read job adverts and job descriptions to see what skills, experience and qualifications employers are looking for.
- Contact ex colleagues (try LinkedIn or Facebook if you've lost touch). Find out what they are doing now and how they're using their skills and experience.
- Take part in online forums such as the 'Conversation' section of the Women Like Us website, or the Guardian Careers section.
- Take a look at the job profiles section of the National Careers service. This gives information about training, salaries and current job market data.
<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk>
- Look at the websites of professional bodies to find out about recognised qualifications.
- Find out what's happening locally. Read the local press, look at your local authority website, join local online forums and networking groups.
- Start talking to people you know about part time opportunities. Do you know any other mums who've got part time jobs? What are they doing and how did they find their job?