



Returners

**How to build career
confidence after
a break**

Returners

Returning to work after a break can be daunting.

Whether you've taken time away for family, health, travel, or personal reasons, coming back to work brings a mix of excitement and uncertainty.

Things are likely to feel different – work will have changed and what you want might have changed too. This career stage is an opportunity for you to rethink the what, how and when of your work so you can feel confident about your impact and in control of your choices.

This guide, supports our podcast episode [Squiggly Career Returners](#), and brings together practical advice, expert insights, and useful tools to help you regain and build your career confidence after a break.

In this guide you'll find:

- 🔗 [Insights](#) from the Squiggly Careers Returners podcast episode.
- 🔗 [Coach yourself questions](#) to reflect on your experiences and gain insight.
- 🔗 A [tool to try out](#) and cage your confidence gremlin.
- 🔗 [Expert advice](#) on how to make the most of this squiggly career stage.
- 🔗 [Recommended resources](#) to read, watch, listen and learn from.

Episode insights



In this episode, Helen and Sarah are joined by Julianne Miles MBE, CEO and Co-Founder of Career Returners, and Mila Fadeeva, who returned to her career in strategy and operational excellence after a 10 year break.

Together they discuss the emotional, practical, and professional challenges of returning to work and how to navigate them with confidence.

How to:

- 🌀 Change the narrative on career breaks
- 🌀 Overcome the 'career break penalty'
- 🌀 Re-build your self-belief
- 🌀 Reconnect with your strengths
- 🌀 Reach out to your network
- 🌀 Upskill and refresh your knowledge

Coach yourself questions

'Coach yourself questions' are designed to create clarity. They help you to press pause and think things through so you can make more informed choices about where and what you spend your time on. Here are 3 questions to help you return to work with confidence.

What excites me most about returning to work?



What has changed since I was last at work?



What does work-life fit look like for me now?



"There is a vital difference between managing time and managing work: work is infinite; time is finite. The key question to ask yourself is not 'what am I going to do?' but 'how am I going to spend my time?'"

Jim Collins

Tool to try out

Cage your confidence gremlins

Gremlins are the beliefs that hold you back. They are the doubts that get in the way of your development. Everyone has gremlins, regardless of their position or experience. They come to life in high-pressure situations, and returning to work is exactly the kind moment where Gremlins love to grow.

Success stacking is a simple, effective way to help cage your gremlins and build your career confidence as you return to work.

Write down 3 successes every day for at least a week in the same place. As your successes stack up your gremlin gets smaller.

	Success #1	Success #2	Success #3
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			



Expert advice

Jane van Zyl

CEO at Working Families

Stay positive

Returning to work can feel like a daunting prospect, especially if you have caring responsibilities. But there's reason to be positive. More and more employers are seeing the value of family-friendly workplace cultures. Many will let you know in the job advert that they are open to working in a flexible way, so look out for wording or the [Happy to Talk Flexible Working logo](#).

Do some ground work

Spend some time thinking about what you need. Is it an earlier or later start, part-time, job share, working from home, or flexi-time? There are so many ways to work flexibly, so do the groundwork to understand what working patterns might fit with the job and your commitments.

Know your rights

Since the [Flexible Working Act](#) came into effect in the UK in 2023, you have the right to request flexible working from day 1. You no longer need to explain how working flexibly will impact the business, however, it's a good idea to show that you have considered this and offer any solutions to challenges that might arise. You'll find lots of information, resources and template request letters on the [Working Families advice pages](#).

Be open and experiment!

Be open to compromise and don't be afraid to experiment. All flexible arrangements take adjustment, and sometimes you won't get things right from the off. It's ok to admit if something isn't working and make changes, because it's only when flexibility is working for you, that you and your employer will see the benefits.



Expert advice Julianne Miles

CEO and Co-Founder of Career Returners

Return to work roadmap

- 🔗 **Value yourself.** Take steps to boost your confidence by reminding yourself of your skills and achievements from before and during your break.
- 🔗 **Own your career break.** Don't apologise for it, defend it or hide it. Recognise the strengths it has developed in you.
- 🔗 **Believe returning is possible.** If you feel you're too old or it's too late, check out stories of people who are thriving back at work after long breaks on the [Career Returners Podcast](#) and [Success Story Library](#).
- 🔗 **Take the rare opportunity to reflect on what you want to do next.** Commit to reinvest in your previous career or develop a plan to pivot or change.
- 🔗 **Refresh your skills and knowledge.** Don't fear AI — find out how to use technology to help you.
- 🔗 **Be targeted** in your job search and tailored in your applications. Avoid a scattergun approach.
- 🔗 **Look out for returnships** and other returner-focused opportunities (see [Career Returners Opportunities](#)) – and specialist flexible working job-boards if flex is important for you.
- 🔗 **Rebuild your work networks** by getting back in touch with old colleagues on LinkedIn. Don't underestimate your local networks too. Most returners find roles through connections.
- 🔗 **Create a return-to-work support group.** Find positive friends and family to keep you motivated. Connect with like-minded returners in the [Career Returners Community](#) where you can also access a huge range of advice, support and inspiration.
- 🔗 **Be positive, patient and persistent.** It can be a winding road back to work, and you may need to take a few stepping-stone roles, but a fulfilling role is out there!

Recommended resources



Watch

**Returning to Work
with a Resume Gap**
Free LinkedIn Course



Read

**Return Journey: How to get back to work
and thrive after a career break**
Julianne Miles



Listen

Squiggly Careers #462
How to build career
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Julianne Miles MBE
CEO & Co-Founder
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