

WELCOME BACK!

Your action plan for returning
to work in the legal industry

CONTENTS



03

Introduction

12

Mind the gap

04

You've got so
much to offer

16

Getting your
house in order

09

There's so
much on offer

19

Making it
happen

INTRODUCTION

Obelisk Support was founded in 2010, with the express purpose of creating a new way of working that means people don't have to make such hard choices between growing their legal career and their commitments outside of work. Nine years on, we have grown to serve 35 of the FTSE100 companies, some of the UK's leading law firms and many other businesses around the world. Our consultants work on a flexible basis and set their own terms. For some, this might mean full-time, on-site projects, others work exclusively from their own homes and set their own hours.

As our CEO, Dana Denis-Smith explains, "When I was thinking about starting my own legal business I was struck by the huge amounts of talent the industry was wasting, here in the UK, by not being more open to flexible ways of working and making it easier to come back to work after a break. I felt strongly that there could be another way, and founded Obelisk Support on the philosophy of "Human first"; I believe looking after people leads to better results for business and a more diverse profession."

At last count 20% of Obelisk's consultants had come back from a career break, making the decision to work as consultants in order to get back into the legal industry. Over the last nine years we've learnt a lot about what you need to do and think about in order to make returning to work a success, so we thought it made sense to share what we know and help even more people get back to work.

The purpose of this guide is to inform, inspire and help start you back on the path to employment after a career break. Whether your break lasted 10 months or 10 years, we hope there is something useful for everyone. As a legal service provider, the legal industry is what we know best but lots of this content is universal - so if you think someone else will find this useful, please feel free to pass it on!

Wherever you are in your career thinking, good luck! We hope this humble guide is a useful companion as you journey back to work.

You've got so much to offer

Even if you haven't used them for a while, your legal skills and experience are incredibly valuable - so start by reminding yourself what you can bring to a new employer.



Step One: Your Skills MOT

When you've been away from the working world for a while, you can lose sight of your skills, experience and the unique qualities that will help you make a valuable contribution in your next role. Reinforced by a media that tends to focus on the negative, it's all too easy to listen to the nagging voice inside that says "I haven't done this for too long, no-one will want me" or "All people will see is the gap on my CV". The first step in your journey is to stock up with ammunition that you can use to shut that voice up. It will probably still keep nagging away, so you want to come up with plenty of evidence to prove it wrong.

First, block out some time to yourself and start to write down all the things that you are good at.

At this stage, don't worry about trying to create or revamp a CV (more on that later), just start writing. If you like structure, here are some useful headings:

- Legal skills I have
- Other work skills I have
- Legal experience I have
- Other work experience I have
- Core qualities that make me a good colleague
- Work I really enjoy doing
- Comments I remember other people making about my work
- My proudest legal achievements

At this stage, don't think about how long ago some of these experiences may've been, just capture everything. Think about companies and firms you have worked with, projects you have delivered, articles you have written. Think about past appraisals or feedback from previous clients and colleagues. If you want to go really deep, then the bible on this topic is a book called, "What Color Is Your Parachute", so get a copy and follow Richard Bolle's methodology in detail.

If you go through this process and discover that you really don't enjoy any of the work that uses your legal skills, then you need to spend some time thinking about changing career - which is a different subject and you may want to consider some coaching or further reading to help with that (see our Resources at the end for some ideas). Hopefully you're still in love with the law, or at the very least want to use your legal skills to earn some money while you're moving into another sphere.

Step Two: Selling your skills

Once you have your list, now you need to think about how you can package this information up so that it's a compelling offer to a prospective employer. Again, don't worry about a CV format yet, instead work on writing out a few pages of "contribution statements" that help to frame your skills in a work context, for example:

As a competent commercial lawyer who is good with people, I can come in and help a busy in-house team with general supply-side and partnership contracts.

With experience of managing large multinational IT projects, I would be able to make a contribution to the in-house team of any telecoms or tech provider.

As a fluent French-speaker who has worked on sponsorship & licensing deals, I'd be a great asset for any FMCG company negotiating with French or French-speaking partners.

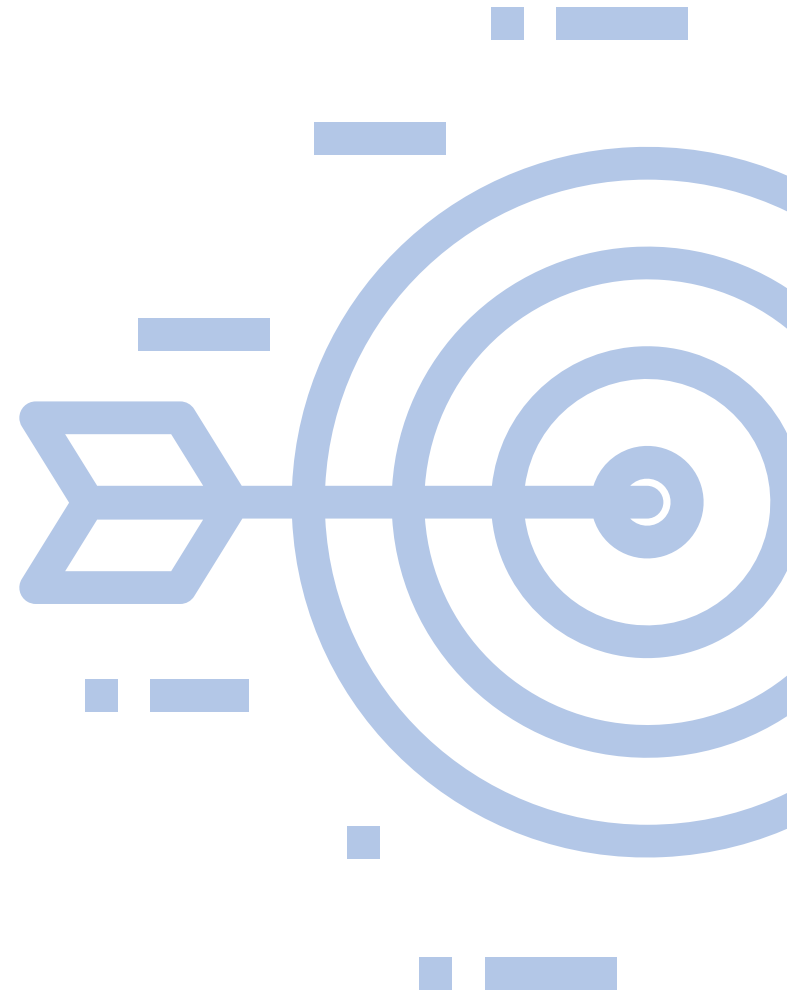


As you are doing this exercise, make a note of any skills or knowledge that you think might be out of date. For example, you might be aware of new technology that is used for document automation, yet have never used it. Or market practice in your area may have moved on.

At the end of this process, you will have two lists. The first list is all your strengths, ready to help you build your CV and conversations with future employers. The second is your “to do” list of gaps to work on. Some of these gaps will only be truly filled by getting back into work but there are things you can do while you are job-hunting:

- Tap into your network -- meet former colleagues for lunch or coffee and ask for their advice or experience (and remember, most people love to help in this kind of situation)
- Read the industry trade press (there's a list in “Resources”) and sign up to free newsletters and alerts if you haven't already
- Go along to free meet-ups, “Returner” events at your local law society and industry briefings.

If you're getting out and about, remember the contribution statements you worked on. Practice introducing yourself by starting with some of your core skills and qualities and what you are looking for in your next role.



Step Three: Boosting your confidence

We've seen over the years how in demand talented lawyers are, despite breaks of ten years or longer. However, when you're starting out again, especially after a break of two years or more, we know it feels pretty daunting. So here are a few of our favourite tips and tricks for boosting your confidence:

1. Thank the nagging voice when it pops up with its "Nobody will want me" whispers and use your contribution statements to remind it that you have plenty to offer
2. Find a buddy or mentor who has either just been through a similar journey or is going back at the same time. Look out for each other and remind each other of all your skills and talents
3. Find the small wins along the way. Just making an appointment to speak with a recruiter or a former boss isn't the big prize, but it is a step along the way so celebrate your progress
4. Go back to previous positive feedback. Remember previous deal celebrations, award wins, bonus payments, comments from your boss's boss. You are still that capable person. (And if you don't keep a record of things like this, start - build a bank of positivity to draw on in the future.)
5. Pick another goal to work on alongside your career return. For example, find a challenge in whatever sport takes your fancy and commit to it. As well as the feeling of achievement, all those endorphins while you're training will help keep you in a positive frame of mind. If sport's not your thing, then choose another activity where you can measure your progress and see results.

If you feel your confidence is a crucial stumbling block for you, then (assuming time and resources permit) you may want to do some further reading in this area or even invest in some coaching.

Inspirational lawyers

Gareth is a UK-qualified lawyer who trained at a Silver Circle law firm in 1992 and worked for several law firms, specialising in finance, asset finance, derivatives and syndicated loans until 1997. With 7 years' law firm experience, he was headhunted to join the in-house team of a global bank, becoming a transactional lawyer dealing with a suite of legal documents, as well as a regulatory elements. From 1999 to 2005, he worked for the bank first in London, then in Hong Kong, but in 2008, felt it was time to come back to the UK. He had a young family by then and was offered the chance to come into the family business with his father. He remained with the company until 2014, then worked in wealth management until 2017 but he missed being a lawyer. He contacted Obelisk in March 2017 after seven years away from the legal profession and was on-boarded shortly after as an Obelisk consultant. In June 2017, a major bank contacted Obelisk – they were looking for a banking and finance lawyer for the Debt Advisory team, someone who had experience with LMA style facility agreements or debt structuring. Out of 14 legal consultants, Gareth was selected and in July 2017, started his first freelance legal role as a returner with the bank, a role that boosted his confidence in a rapidly-changing market.

In summary:

- Make sure you know what you have to offer. Do a thorough skills audit on yourself.
- Package up your skills and experiences. Write some contribution statements so you are never stuck for words.
- If there are areas you feel out of touch with, find ways to fill in the gaps as much as you can now.
- Don't do everything on your own. People will want to help, so find a buddy, get in touch with old contacts and open up.

Resources

Books:

What Color Is Your Parachute?, Richard Bolles, 2019, Ten Speed Press

The Happiness Trap, Dr Russ Harris, 2008, Robinson Press

Useful legal websites:

<https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/blog/in-house/analysis>

<https://www.legalbusiness.co.uk/>

<https://blogs.thomsonreuters.com/legal-uk/category/inhouse-legal-counsel/>

<https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/>

There's so much on offer

If you've been out of the market for a while, we have good news. Legal roles are no longer confined to full-time jobs in law firms or corporate offices. Alternative service providers like Obelisk, changes in technology and an increasing commitment by the industry to flexible working means there are lots more options out there.

As well as looking at your skills, you need to look at the market and who you want to work for/what sort of work you want to do. In this section, we're going to look at three different routes to getting back to work; going straight back, returnships and using your network.

Get straight back into it

If you haven't been out of the job market for that long (less than two years) or are confident following your skills audit that your knowledge and experience is still very marketable, then why settle for anything less? It's time to start earning.

Depending on your availability and capacity for travel, you may want to look at all or some of these routes:



Target employers you'd love to work for.

Find them on LinkedIn, job boards or look on their websites and either apply for open roles or send in speculative applications. Remember to use your contribution statements and tailor any applications specifically to their needs.



Search for vacancies in your field

Again, LinkedIn is your friend here, along with legal industry job boards such as The Lawyer.



Register with alternative legal service providers, like Obelisk

If you're looking for flexible or remote working, then register with specialist providers like us at Obelisk Support. This route is particularly useful if you only want to work two or three days a week, or non-traditional hours without any travel.



Set up on your own

If you have a good contact book and specialist skills, you might consider setting up your own firm and working independently.



If you've had a career break of more than two years, it is still worth speaking to a service like Obelisk. We are experienced at placing people after a career break and we have openings with a range of clients, so you don't need to do any job searching or business development.

The rise of the "Returnship"

Prompted by the conversation about the lack of gender parity at senior levels in the industry and the increasing employee demand for career patterns that suit their different life-stages, the legal profession is becoming more open to "Returnships". These programmes can vary in their components, however they typically involve working within either an in-house team or a firm on a programme that provides training, coaching and upskilling, with the potential of a job opportunity at the end of it.

Remuneration on these programmes varies, so it's important to look at all the details carefully and also to bear in mind that they do not usually guarantee

a permanent placement at the end. However they can be an excellent way to get more recent work experience, so are worth considering if you have been out of the profession for longer or feel out of touch with market practice.

Making the most of your network

Managers tend to feel most comfortable offering a job to someone they know, either directly or by reputation. You might feel as though your time away from the job market has diminished your standing, but usually the qualities that helped you work well with someone before will not be impacted. Get in touch with people you know and let them know you are available for work again, and ask them if they know of any opportunities. Pay particular attention to former managers that you got on well with - they may be looking to hire again or be happy to recommend you to someone else. A personal recommendation can count for a huge amount and help outweigh the fact you have been out of the industry for a while.

In summary:

- There are lots of options out there, some will be familiar (full-time work in a firm or in-house team), others are newer (working flexibly for a platform like Obelisk)
- There are even now dedicated programmes for bringing people like you back to the legal profession - though not all of them guarantee a role at the end of them
- Just as it ever was, your network is a valuable source of job leads - don't worry if you haven't spoken to people for a few years, most people love to re-connect.

Resources

Women Returners - provide details of returnships across a range of sectors:
<http://www.womenreturners.com>

Inspirational lawyers

Jane became an Obelisk consultant after a career break of four years. She works remotely for a European bank, but is available on a full time basis on standby. She makes monthly visits to the office to attend the lending lawyers' team meeting, which suits her need to stay in touch but also manage family life. Joining Obelisk has enabled her to restart her career as a finance lawyer. As she can't commute to London, that is not an option which would have been easily available to her without the opportunities that Obelisk offers.

Says Jane, "Working with Obelisk has allowed me to combine a rewarding and fulfilling career as a finance lawyer with family life. I can fit in the school run and generally be around for my children in a way that would not have been possible if I was working long hours in the City. I still work hard and for long hours as and when required but I do have a bit of flexibility, depending on the urgency of the instruction, in that I can start very early in the morning or work late into the evening to fit the work in around family life."

Mind the gap

When you're ready to hit the market, make sure that you're prepared to sell your skills and be confident about talking about your career journey so far, including your career break.



Whichever route you choose, and you may well choose to try all of those above, you're going to need a killer CV. And nowadays that means a great LinkedIn profile as well. Start by organising your CV, following our top ten tips:

- Use the contribution statements you worked on already to help craft an opening personal statement and inform the rest of your CV
- Make sure that for every role you don't just include a description of the role but also what you personally contributed or achieved. Choose powerful openings, "I led on a multiparty outsourcing deal worth US\$5M", "I delivered work for three new clients that I brought into the practice", "I negotiated substantial benefits for our company when reworking our IT contracts". You get the idea.
- Be upfront about your career break but don't go into too much detail. It's fine to put down the dates and label them "Career break".
- Keep the presentation of your CV simple. Don't use fancy layouts, templates, fonts or graphics. Nowadays lots of applications are made online and systems use machine learning to "read" your CV, which gets confused if the layout isn't standard.
- Try to keep to two pages of A4 - more than that isn't necessary, you can go into further detail as you meet people and in any covering letter.
- If you have an extensive work history, then it's fine to group earlier roles together under the relevant time period, rather than going into detail for each and every one.

- Do keep some interests on there, but only if they're good conversation starters and distinctive. Going to the cinema and reading aren't worth the space!
- Don't include a photo, there's no need and it will take up space
- Don't include references, age, marital status, again there's no need
- Do make sure you ask someone else to proof-read for you.

Once you are happy with your CV, it's time to turn your attention to LinkedIn. Like it or loathe it, if you are looking for a job, you have to be on it. Do the easy stuff first, make all the sections align with your CV, open with an upbeat personal statement and put your photograph up. If it's been a while since you had a professional photograph taken, dig out a suit jacket and either ask someone to take one for you against a neutral backdrop or go to a high street photographer. It's not usually very expensive and it is worth doing.

After you've set up your profile, it's time for the hard work. Like most things in life, with LinkedIn, you get out what you put in. So, boost your connections by inviting people you know to connect, but don't just use the default note the system suggests. Rather, tailor with a personal message, perhaps suggesting a coffee. Start to boost your personal brand by posting interesting content relevant to the type of work you want to do. You can share interesting videos and articles you come across or, if you're a confident writer, you might even want to write longer posts of your own. As well as running job searches, look out for people in your network moving to new roles - they may need new team members in their new role so send a note congratulating them on the move and open up the conversation.



Hopefully your networking, applications and registering with services like Obelisk will soon start to bear fruit and you will start to get interviews. Here again, things might've changed a bit since you were last in this position, so here are a few tips to help you feel interview-ready:

- Be prepared for conference call and video conference interviews. These are increasingly popular with busy recruiters. To do well, you do need to put a little bit of extra effort into your presentation - as your presence is lacking the contribution body language makes to the way we communicate when we're face to face.
- If you are feeling nervous about talking about your career break, practise what you will say beforehand. There is no need to be defensive, it's perfectly acceptable to explain you have had a break for family reasons, or to pursue other projects etc. Equally, don't let your break distract from your interview - you want to bring the conversation back to the skills you have to offer and why you will be great in this job.
- Show you have given some thought to the areas that you might need some extra support with due to your break. This is where the work you've already done to identify and mitigate these comes into play, as you can talk with

confidence about any gaps and describe any steps you have already taken to fill them.

- Make sure you know what kind of interview it is. Some recruiters still like a general "meet and run through your CV" approach, others may take a more structured approach. Competency-based questions relating to the role are often asked, so prepare by thinking about how you will describe some examples from your experience that match the competencies they are interested in. Practise using the STAR approach: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Using this model you demonstrate your competency by describing some background information, the task at hand, what you personally did to address it and the outcomes you delivered. The relevant competencies will normally be set out for you as part of a job description or interview briefing.
- Remember to make your skills and experience relevant as much as you can, and show you have done your homework on the organisation. These days, just looking at the company's website isn't enough - look them up on Google News, check if you and the interviewer have any mutual contacts on LinkedIn or ask your network if anyone has any experience of working there.



- Don't forget to prepare some questions of your own to ask the interviewer, but focus on asking about the team and the organisation. There will be time to talk about working arrangements and hours once you are offered the role.

Again, you may find either professional coaching or partnering up with a buddy or mentor useful at this stage in the process. Failing that, if you're feeling a bit rusty, there is no harm in practising in front of a mirror or filming yourself, particularly if you have to deliver a mini-presentation as part of the interview. You will likely feel ridiculous, but it helps you to see how you are coming across and adjust your posture or voice to make the best possible impact.

In summary:

- You need a CV, keep it simple and on two pages of A4
- You don't have to explain your career break in detail
- LinkedIn is your friend, but you do need to put some effort in
- Make the most of every interview opportunity and don't think a telephone or video conference is less important - they are becoming the norm

Resources

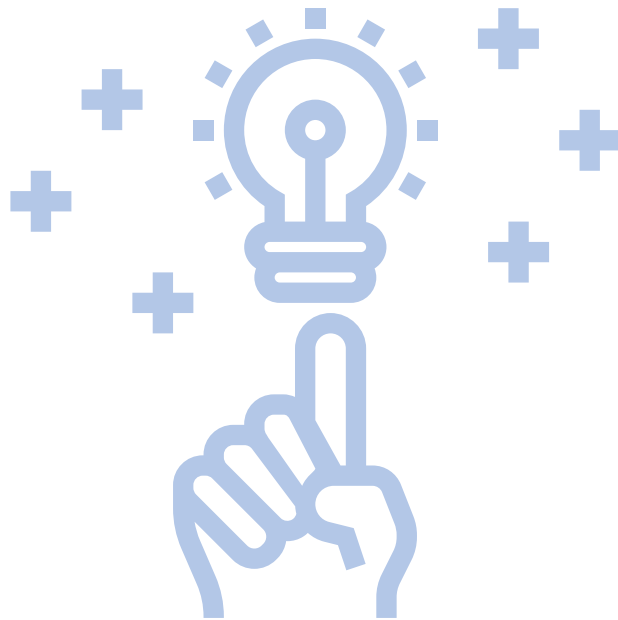
Extra guidance to using LinkedIn:
<https://blog.linkedin.com>

Inspirational lawyers

Emily, a UK-qualified lawyer trained at a City law firm from 1996 to 1998 and worked in their corporate department until 2000 in international securities offerings, M&A transactions and general corporate and commercial work. In 2000, she worked as assistant editor on Global Counsel magazine and in 2001, took a career break for family reasons and raised four children.

Twelve years later in 2013, she heard about Obelisk Support through a friend and with her children in school, she was ready to return to a professional career. She onboarded as an Obelisk consultant and in February 2015, interviewed to work for White & Case in their advisory practice within a busy private equity team. They wanted someone with corporate experience, someone who would be happy to muck in and help out. This was perfect for Emily, who was selected out of four lawyers and joined the team shortly after.

Getting your house in order



Once you're back at work, you need to be able to focus and be on top of your professional game. Give yourself time and space to adjust and set yourself up for success by preparing for the transition at home.

If you're coming back after a career break, chances are you have some kind of caring responsibilities. If you are fortunate enough to have someone to share these with, then you need to have a full and frank conversation about how demands on your time are going to change as you go back to work and how that is going to work in practise. Think about how the caring you do now is going to be covered, assuming that you are not in a position where someone else in your household or family can pick up from you.

Winning at life admin

There are a lot of very boring chores that need to happen to help a household run smoothly, whether you live alone or as a family. Here are some tips to help you cheat these tedious tasks that are worth implementing before you start working again:

1. Online shop for groceries. Yes, you'll get the occasional bruised banana. On the flipside, it will take about 10 or 15 minutes to do all the shopping.
2. Set up all your bills to direct debits or standing orders. Accept that you might not shop around as much as you used to for utilities and phones. If your bank offers it, set up the online payment app on your phone, so you can blitz school dinner money requests or vet bills from the train.
3. Get anything that needs decorating, servicing or maintaining done before you go back to work. That includes yourself and any children: get eye checks and dentist appointments out of the way for a while if you can.
4. Outsource as much as you can afford to. Gardening, cleaning, laundry & ironing. Unless you enjoying doing these tasks, cut them loose if you can. If you can't afford to get help, make sure everyone in the household is doing their bit.
5. If you have children, look at their activities outside of school and make sure as a family you aren't overloaded. If you can't cull anything, try to pair up with another family and take turns in dropping and picking up so you half the number of trips.
6. If you make any kind of appointment or deadline, make sure that it goes into your diary immediately.

7. Organise all your clothes for the week on a Sunday night, alongside anyone else's that you are responsible for. Minimise choice during the week and you will free up time.
8. Buy at least 10 birthday cards of various types, stamps and a stock of generic wrapping paper, plus one child and one adult gift. Keep these with some Sellotape somewhere safe, ready for last-minute parties or forgotten birthdays.
9. At Christmas, Easter and other occasions, check that you are not over-doing it. Does everyone need presents or just the children? Is the work of hosting, shopping, cooking etc shared fairly?
10. Wherever possible, streamline and live to your own standards, no-one else's. Trying to do too much on the homefront while you get back up to speed at work will only lead to burnout.

Looking after yourself

Turns out "self-care" is about more than scented candles and millennials. If you're making the transition back to work, no matter how few hours you're working initially, you are still going through a period of change that will impact on you physically, mentally and emotionally.

Make sure you look after yourself, because you want to be on the top of your game, especially in your first role back after a break. There's lots of things we all know we should be doing - eating more vegetables,

taking our vitamins, taking exercise etc - that all become harder when it's time to fit more work into our schedule. You make time for things that matter, so make time for you.

Returning to work can also be an emotional rollercoaster. While you're searching for that first role, there will more than likely be false starts and you will have to pick yourself up from disappointments. Then, when you secure that first job back, you will have to manage the excitement and nerves that come in your first weeks, alongside keeping enough energy for any other commitments you have to honour outside of work. Our advice? Pace yourself. Build in some time for reflection, even if it's just a few minutes at the start of the day or on your way home. If you need support from others, like your partner or family, make sure they know, don't expect them to guess. You're reactivating another facet of your identity and that can be challenging for those around you, so make sure that you keep some distinction between work and home, especially if your office is the spare room.

Look after your mental health. If you feel overloaded, or that tiredness and emotional ups and downs are tipping into anxiety or depression, then get help. Expect a period of adjustment but don't suffer in silence if you feel something is wrong. Your GP, charities such as Mind or Anxiety UK or local private counselling services can all be ports of call if you feel you need extra help as you make this change.



Don't feel like you have to do everything on your own. As well as creating professional buddies and mentors, make sure you are making time for your personal friendships. Too often socialising is the first thing to go, but time with friends can provide vital support and recharge your batteries.

In summary:

- If you have caring responsibilities, think through your options and check availability before you line up a role
- Have a "Plan B" for emergencies, such as a sick child or sick carer
- Get any big life admin jobs out of the way as far as you can before you start your first role back
- Streamline your household, and if there's more than one of you, make sure everyone is pulling their weight
- Build in time for reflection and time to yourself, even if it's only brief
- Be prepared for a period of adjustment and some emotional peaks and troughs.

Resources

Books:

The Mother of All Jobs, Christine Armstrong, 2018, Greentree

Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes, William Bridges, 2004, De Capo Press

Life Admin: How I learnt to Do Less, Do Better and Live More, Elizabeth Emens, 2019, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Sites & services:

Parental Choice - a service providing help with finding care for children or relatives:
www.parentalchoice.co.uk

Headspace - an app to help you with reflection and meditation: <https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app>

Inspirational lawyers

Kate is an ex-city asset finance lawyer, happily living on the Sussex coast and mum to Podge the house rabbit, an uber-intelligent autistic 11 year old son and ballerina/vet/future prime minister 8 year old daughter. After a short career break, she joined Obelisk five years ago and now works completely differently to conventional work patterns, working at any time during a 24-hour period and fully remotely. This means she can do the school run, help with homework, have a life and still commit to the number of hours of work a day her clients require.

Says Kate, "My skills and experience are unrecognisable from those of the specialist city lawyer I used to be. I have learnt to research things I need the answer to, draft without precedents and understand business needs quickly. My city-experience was 11 years of asset finance, but now I am also confident to review and advise on IT/ media/telecoms and retail matters, which is an opportunity I would never have had in city private practice. As a result, I am a much more well-rounded lawyer."

Making it happen

We hope this guide has given you some inspiration and an action plan for your next steps back to work:

- Remind yourself of all the skills you have to offer
- Think about how you can fill any gaps
- Look at the different options out there - legal work doesn't have to be a full-time job
- Write a killer CV
- Sort out your LinkedIn
- Work your network
- Practise describing your skills, telling people about your ideal next role and explaining your career break
- Find a buddy and/or mentor to support you
- Clear the decks at home
- Enjoy being back at work!

There will be bumps along the way but we know you can do it, because we've helped so many other men and women along the same path. Good luck!



About Obelisk Support

Obelisk Support is an award-winning provider of legal services to in-house teams and private practice across 18 commercial practice areas. With a talent pool of over 1,000 lawyers who work flexibly, powered by Obelisk's own work allocation technology, the company has delivered services to FTSE 100 companies, major professional services firms and scale-ups across the UK and worldwide since 2010.

Contact Us

If you would like to work with us, we'd love to hear from you:

Telephone: 020 3417 6590

Email: info@obelisksupport.com

www.obelisksupport.com

This publication has been prepared for general guidance only and does not constitute professional advice, it may be subject to change or update without notice. You should not act upon the information contained in this publication without obtaining specific professional advice. No representation, assurance or warranty (express or implied) is given as to the accuracy or completeness of the information or data contained in this publication, and to the extent permitted by law, Obelisk Legal Support Solutions Limited, its members, employees and agents do not accept or assume any liability, responsibility or duty of care for any consequences of you or anyone else acting or refraining to act, in reliance on the information contained in this publication or for any decision based on it.

© Obelisk Legal Support Solutions Limited. All rights reserved.