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## Personal Finance

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### From Mommy to Manager: Going Back to Work



It can be challenging for mothers to return to the workplace.

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**By Debbie Strong**

Provided by [ClassesUSA.com](#)

Blair Wilson was a high school student in 1975 about to enter college, when she met the man who would become her future husband. In six months they were married; in less than five years, they had three small children.

Wilson chose to stay at home to raise her kids (and they eventually had a fourth child) while her husband went to work -- a common choice made by women who put their own career plans aside to be home for their family. After all, many women chose to stay home for years with the kids: The U.S. Census Bureau reported that in 2006, there were 5.6 million stay-at-home moms.

Fast forward to today: After 20 years at home, Wilson became mayor of her New Jersey town and continues to serve as a town councilwoman; she's also the executive director of Morris Habitat for Humanity, where she oversees a thriving nonprofit organization and a sizeable staff of 11 employees and more than 2,000 volunteers.

How does a stay-at-home mom make such a big splash getting back into the working world? Deciding to re-enter the workforce later in the game can be a daunting prospect, but job opportunities are definitely out there - along with resources that can help.

#### Hot jobs for moms

"Figure out what job you want and then make a long-term plan to get it," says J.C. Conklin, author of *Comeback Moms: How to Leave Work, Raise Children, and Restart Your Career Even If You Haven't Had a Job in Years* (Broadway, 2007).

Conklin says that certain fields tend to be more accessible for mothers. "It seems like women with accounting experience have had lots of success, and some lawyers, depending on geography, specialty, and which field of law is hot at the time they go back. Other big Mom-friendly jobs: Pediatrician, nurse and various other positions in health care, Conklin adds.

Becky Young, who graduated from Vanderbilt University and received a Certified Public Accountant license in 1987 and then worked as an auditor and corporate controller before taking a hiatus to have kids, found a way to make a successful transition back into the workforce. After eight years, she was able to return to accounting -- but not without a struggle.

"I didn't anticipate having any trouble, since I had been successful in my

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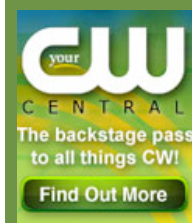
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career prior to staying at home. However, I had great difficulty," says Young. "I had no responses from the numerous ads that I answered and none of the recruiting agencies were helpful."

One issue seemed to be the length of time she had been out of the workforce. "A recruiter told me if I had only been out two years or less, no problem, but more than five was an obstacle that they did not feel I could overcome."

She took a position at a preschool, which, she says, helped her build confidence. "There were skills that I had learned from being a homemaker that are valuable to the workforce in general," she says, "like organization skills, management skills, and patience in working with different people with different personalities."

During the summer following her preschool experience, Young again began to look for a job in the field of accounting, this time contacting [Mom Corps](#), an agency dedicated to helping women find flexible professional opportunities. "Mom Corps actually went over my resume with me and placed me in contract work within a few weeks," says Young. The company, which provides career resources at no cost to job-seeking women, eventually helped her find her current accounting position at a local CPA firm.

### **Taking the first steps**

What about moms who lack certain education requirements?

"Call the human resources department of the company you want to work for, and interview *them*," says Conklin. "Ask what positions they are hiring for now and in the future; if they will be hiring for the position you want soon; and what kind of experience they are seeking. You may be able to get into the company you like by accepting a lower-level position. You could also find out what you need to do to improve your skills."

Plenty of college courses are offered online, and many programs, such as nursing programs, are offered in the evenings.

Also, Conklin advises women, "Make sure your computer skills are up to snuff before you go back. Take a class - or you could even have your child teach you. Children know a ton about technology."

### **Getting back in the game**

For Wilson, the mom who eventually became mayor and then a top executive, evening classes were the answer. She enrolled part time at William Patterson University near her hometown, focusing first on a special education track, and then switching to a more general liberal studies major. The classes took her several years to finish; she balanced studying with family duties and eventually earned a B.A. The degree, along with helping out with office tasks at her parents' family billboard-making business, gave her the skills she needed to enter the professional world.

The major challenge, however, was boosting her own self-esteem. "[It was about] getting over the feeling that I couldn't compete with younger people, and trying to explain that I was doing something for those 20 years, and trying to figure out a way to get my foot in the door," Wilson says.

What saved her was her interest in the community and her volunteer experience at her kids' schools. "Because of my involvement, I took the next step and ran for political office while I was working full time and raising my kids," she says. "I love being a mother and I really like politics."

Wilson points to nonprofits as another place where women can make a successful entry into the workforce. "I work a lot of hours - days, nights, and weekends - and am glad my children are grown, as I don't know if I could do the job as well. But I know others who have families do well in the nonprofit fields. The downside is that nonprofit does not pay as well."

The important thing for women, says Wilson, is to recognize their own

strengths before taking the leap back into the working world. "Women should recognize their talents. Find a career path that you love and have passion for, because when you are happy, then everyone around you is happy."



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