

- [Get Home Delivery](#)
- [Log In](#)
- [Register Now](#)

- [Home Page](#)
- [Today's Paper](#)
- [Video](#)
- [Most Popular](#)
- [Times Topics](#)

Search All NYTimes.com

The New York Times
Tuesday, March 17, 2009

Magazine

- [World](#)
- [U.S.](#)
- [N.Y. / Region](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Technology](#)
- [Science](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Arts](#)
- [Style](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Autos](#)

Motherlode

Adventures in Parenting



January 7, 2009, 6:04 pm

Job-Hunting Help for Mom

By [Lisa Belkin](#)



Work-Life Balance

(Illustration by Barry Falls)

It's been [a few months](#) since the [Today Show](#) and Motherlode began working with Caroline Knise and Maritza McCarthy, two mothers who have been at home with their children for several years and who now need to get back to work.

I promised updates along the way, and the great news is Knise found a job, as an administrator in a local doctor's office. It very different work than the event-planning job she had left, but it provides exactly the short commute and predictable hours she needs.

McCarthy, in turn, who left her Wall Street position trading government securities six years ago, has not had as easy a time. Like Knise, she is looking to do something different, in part because she knows that the type of job she left would be all but impossible to find in this economy, and in part because she seeks more flexibility and less pressure (for which she expects to receive far less salary).

She put her resume on sites like [Monster.com](#), and went on two interviews. The first was at a nearby public school, for a job as a full-time attendant to a student with a disability. She became flustered at that interview, she says, and didn't remember to stress all the hours she has spent in her son's school, as a volunteer.

The second was at a medical lab, for a position that was mostly data processing and labeling of samples. The interviewer, she says, "was 23, and it was a little humiliating." By her description, it went something like this: "Do you have any medical experience?" "No." "Have you ever worked in a lab where..." "No."

She never heard back from the lab, but the school wrote a nice letter, essentially telling her she was overqualified. That's a tough argument to answer. What do you say — that you really aren't very qualified at all?

On Monday, the Today Show brought in Allison O'Kelly, the CEO and founder of [Mom Corps](#), which is in the business of helping stay-at-home moms get back into the workforce. The two women spent most of the day together, and they began with McCarthy's resume.

It needed an overhaul. The most glaring problem was the six-year gap, so Mom Corps advised her to begin not with her chronological work history, but with a summary of her skills. This was better than a "Career Objective" section, which has been in vogue in recent years, O'Kelly says, because those objectives need to be tailored to a specific job, while a skills summary is more general and a better fit with the range of positions McCarthy is seeking.

Leading with the summary meant that her list of employers and employment dates fell further down on the page. "You want to craft it in a way that doesn't cry out 'Why hasn't this person been working for six years?'" O'Kelly says.

She also advised McCarthy to add a few things. First, the volunteer work she has done — and which she forgot in her interview at the school. Second, a prominent mention of the fact that she speaks fluent Spanish, something McCarthy just hadn't thought relevant.

Next the women tackled McCarthy's interviewing skills. Part of the point of role-playing, O'Kelly says, is so you don't forget things as McCarthy had that first time around. They focused on the questions that most concerned McCarthy — how to make clear that she is eager and qualified to work after a six year break.

O'Kelly advised her that there were questions an interviewer was not legally allowed to ask, that she needed to find an opening to answer anyway. If asked why she had been out of the workforce, she should say, "I decided to stay home and raise my son," but not leave it at that. She should add: "I can't wait to get back. I have already lined up after-school care so that the hours won't be a problem, and my husband's schedule is flexible enough to fill in any gaps."

In that way, O'Kelly says, you can allay employer concerns that you won't be able to juggle home and work.

In the same way, she says, use questions about "experience" to introduce the word "energy." Yes, an employee McCarthy's age who has worked straight through might have logged more time, but he or she might also be burnt out. Take a possible negative and turn it into a selling point.

Finally, they went shopping. McCarthy's closet is filled with outdated suits from Wall Street and a lot of "Mom clothes" — none of which are appropriate for the kind of personal assistant jobs she is looking for now. A trip to Ann Taylor resulted in two outfits — a black and white skirt with a matching black sweater, and a pair of smoky gray trousers with a plum button down blouse.

You can see one of those this Sunday on the Today Show, when McCarthy and I will be on to talk more about her ongoing attempt to Opt Back In.

- [E-mail This](#)
- [Print](#)
- Share

[Job Search](#), [Life/Work Balance](#), [Today Show](#)

Related Posts

From Motherlode

- [Telecommuting During Tough Times](#)
- [Will Family-Friendly Jobs Disappear?](#)
- [Live, from New York...](#)
- [The Obama Work-Family Balance](#)
- [Slight Change of Plans](#)

-
- *Previous post* [Spending too Much? Blame Mom.](#)
 - *Next post* [When Daddy Goes to War](#)

From 1 to 25 of 39 Comments

1 [2](#) [Next »](#)

1. 1. January 7, 2009 6:41 pm [Link](#)

It is interesting to return to your website today and find this article about moms returning to work. I have been shaping my plan to do just that after an 18 year “mom sabbatical” as you called it in your article about Caroline Kennedy this past Sunday. In fact, I have begun a blog (for heaven’s sake) about this journey and cite your article in it. I expect this will be a real adventure as I learn just how fast the world has raced ahead of me.

Thank you for your wonderful writing and please wish all of us 50-something moms luck. The good news is there is still time to conquer the world.

Laura Riddle
<http://thehousewifesredemption.blogspot.com/>

From Lisa Belkin: Best of luck, Laura. I’ll stop in at your blog now and then to see how you’re doing.

— *Laura Riddle*

2. 2. January 7, 2009 8:23 pm [Link](#)

I think litigation is the answer. Only when we treat those who return to work after extended stints in parenting as victims of insidious discrimination will companies begin to do the right thing and allow alternative career paths, including allowing one to ramp up in one’s fifties. Path-breaking civil rights litigation serves to “turn the world upside down,” as one legal scholar has written, and now is as good a time as any to get started. The world as it is is deeply unjust. The obstacles that returning to work moms face are examples of this injustice; it may look neutral, but it’s part of a pervasive culture that is itself discriminatory. Let’s fight to overthrow it!

— *Gary*

3. 3. January 7, 2009 8:35 pm [Link](#)

If we want employers to believe that stay-at-home moms haven’t been just wasting their time, then we should start talking about them as though they hadn’t, either. This is a shift into different kinds of work, not a sudden immersion into it. It’s true, the skill sets don’t transfer, and prejudices abound. But energy, dedication, responsibility, a clear sense of one’s priorities and goals, they are all present in a mom who takes care of kids full-time, and all are desirable attributes in an employee. Some examples of the phrasing that’s part of the problem:

“need to get back to work”

More precisely, they need to get back to paid work, or work outside the home.

‘Why hasn’t this person been working for six years?’

Even though this is the hypothetical question of an employer, it sounds a lot like the inner critic of women afraid to re-enter the workforce. Best to give it a different voice, like, how do I transform a seeming deficit into an asset?

“how to make clear that she is eager and qualified to work after a six year break”

I doubt six years of full-time childcare was a “break.”

— *Molly*

4. 4. January 7, 2009 9:04 pm [Link](#)

As one who had difficulty finding work after taking a six month ‘break’ when my husband relocated, I can only imagine how difficult it would be after staying at home to raise children.

Because my work history has been spotty (following the hubby), the career possibilities became narrower and narrower for me as time went on and despite having a double ivy league degree, I was all but pushed from the workplace.

I’ve been told I’m overqualified more times than I can imagine, but with gaps in a resume employers are wary of hiring you for the jobs for which you *are* qualified.

I have the luxury now of staying home (to work, write, manage the household, whatever), but I fear a day when I would have to go back to work out of economic necessity - it wouldn’t be pretty.

— *Jinni*

5. 5. January 7, 2009 9:31 pm [Link](#)

maybe the interviewers are sensing a lack of urgency in the women. maybe the interviewers are also picking up deep ambivalence in the women about working.

perhaps the women project the idea that work is a luxury rather than an economic necessity.

it can’t be easy returning to the workforce at entry level, and

frankly, if i had to wear one of those outfits to work — smoky grey trousers and a plum blouse — i would kill myself.

— *working mom*

6. 6. January 7, 2009 9:56 pm [Link](#)

don’t you find it odd that you aren’t legally allowed to ask re marital status and childcare, but you feel candidates should offer the info up? clearly the laws are ineffective at protecting women in the workplace.

-mom tired of having it all

— *bay brown*

7. 7. January 7, 2009 10:11 pm [Link](#)

whoa, # 5, a little resentment fueling some anger there?

Nowhere in Ms Belkin’s article did I get the sense that these two women “just felt like getting back to work maybe.” In fact, the first paragraph referred to the women as those “who now need to get back to work.”

I had always thought I would work as an adult and was stunned in college to see women in the Caucasus Mtns enjoy the privilege of staying home ‘doing nothing.’

Then my first child was stillborn. I went part time. I had a healthy baby. Another loss, and then a second child. A year after that, after 9/11, I quit entirely. I fully enjoy the privilege of staying home for my dear (in the old-fashioned sense of the word) children.

That doesn’t mean that some days I’m not anxiously anticipating a time of non-parenting achievement. I hope Ms. Belkin’s blog is still around to offer advice whenever that day comes, and if I’m lucky, maybe the market will be a little better as well.

— *cu*

8. 8. January 7, 2009 10:15 pm [Link](#)

“Only when we treat those who return to work after extended stints in parenting as victims of insidious discrimination ... examples of this injustice... a pervasive culture that is itself discriminatory. Let’s fight

to overthrow it!"

Oh, please.

This is the same kind of politically correct rubbish that means again and again that real change cannot be accomplished. One woman (Woman A) chooses to leave work and raise children with all of the developmental work necessary for those children, while another woman (Woman B) stays in the workplace and continues to develop her professional skills. Each choice is valid and fair, but they are simply not the same choice, and don't have the same rewards.

The woman who has chosen to raise her children simply cannot expect to rejoin the workplace at the same level as the woman who has worked through the same period, and in fact, the woman who raised children may not even have the same skill levels she had when she left the workforce, especially if technology or procedures have changed. Woman A should get opportunities, but it's patently unfair to Woman B to say that her continued efforts for years do not have higher professional value. Calling it "discrimination" is like saying that a new hire should get the same pay as someone with five years experience - it's a specious and foolish use of the word.

With Woman A, there's a genuine concern that she has not had to be in a structured workplace, even one where one has to "wear one of those outfits to work — smoky grey trousers and a plum blouse" and place oneself second to the requirements of the job (and that's not gender related - men have to put the job first, too). The job counselor from Mom Corps had some factual and down-to-earth recommendations, items that are good people of any gender - focus on accomplishments and skills, dress for the position, step in front of employer concerns with a focused approach that will defuse the concerns before these become dealbreakers. Sound advice, and not a word of "injustice", but many points of practical action.

Let's save the discussions of "discrimination" for the larger tougher issues, and address factors inside our control first, eh?

— *Wilhemina*

9. 9. January 7, 2009 10:18 pm [Link](#)

I've been home for 5 years having been downsized after my first kid was born. It wasn't for lack of trying to find work, but ultimately childcare was more expensive than staying home and eventhough we put our son in daycare, he kept becoming so ill that I was forced to keep him home.. Also, we had no other support of family, friends etc. Now after 2 kids, I'm looking to return, and all I keep getting asked is what else have I been doing other than just looking after my kids; as if I had time for anything else! I would've loved to have done more (MBA)while I was not earning, but employers/hiring mgrs dont understand what it takes to raise kids, and unless you have help, there's no time or money for anything else.

What's worse, is that the women who interviewed me were less sympathetic and more brutal in their questioning me than the men. Maybe that was a tactic. It is really extremely sad that this nation cannot value the time people take to raise young children and just give them a break on the 'gap' when they try to re-enter the workforce. I had really nasty and sarcastic responses from recruiting agencies when asked to explain why I was home for so long. What people dont understand is that the stay at home mums are raising and training and developing the characters, minds and bodies of the next generations. If the next generation is a bunch of people who were in daycare and raised by babysitters and had little contact and quality time and guidance from their parents, then what sort of future nation will we be?

jmp

— *ramped off mum*

10. 10. January 7, 2009 10:22 pm [Link](#)

It is all about "re-packaging" yourself. I stayed home for five years (after working for over 20 years) and was fortunate enough to gradually re-enter the workforce in a part-time capacity. During my "sabbatical" I continued to do volunteer work for my church in an administrative capacity. I did mention that experience in my resume. When I re-entered the workforce part-time, it was as a personal assistant to an architect. So I got to learn a little about architecture. I then got another part-time job but held on to the one in the architecture office (it was one day a week for 5 hours). The second part-time job was at a theatre on weekends and one-day a week initially. I left the architects office after 2 years, kept the theatre job which was expanded (they recognized my skills), and landed an additional part-time job as an admin associate for a executive director at a not-for-profit. Given the economic times, I'm still holding on to 2 part-time jobs. While I'd love for one to be a flat "30 hours" a week, that's not possible in today's work environment. I'm understanding of that and being patient for the economy to turn around. In the meantime, though, I'm proving my worth to two wonderful organizations which will help me in the long run. My advice is not to be afraid to start out slowly re-entering the workforce.

— *Working Mom Metro NY*

11. 11. January 7, 2009 11:05 pm [Link](#)

Why not just lie, and cover the multi-year gap with some fictitious “started my own business” thing? It’s not hard to create a list of past “clients” from friends and neighbors.

— *Brett*

12. 12. January 7, 2009 11:05 pm [Link](#)

7 — i am not sure what you are reading is resentment. i have great flexibility with my job, but never, during my entire time raising children, did i ever give up the ambition, the drive, the desire, to do my work.

i love my children, but i would not feel like a ‘complete’ person if i did not have work to do... so not working is not an option for me because it is integrated into who i am.

— *working mom*

13. 13. January 7, 2009 11:53 pm [Link](#)

I am a late 30-something mother of two young children who (and I hate the term) “opted out” of a challenging professional life to stay home with my children for 3 years. I am now also looking to return to the working world and share many of the frustrations of the women you profile in your column. However, I am a little disappointed by the narrow approach that the Today Show and your posts appear to be taking in trying to help these women, starting with the emphasis on profiling particular companies (revenue I’m sure - Ann Taylor outfits, MomCorps consulting?) and having the women follow the traditional HR route, a huge roadblock to so many good, smart people looking for work. Is there any advice beyond playing games with your resume and spiffing up your wardrobe? How about advice on how to network well, on-line and in-person, or creatively using volunteer opportunities? Making good continuing education choices, or finding other ways to appropriately brush up on your skills. Or, addressing the serious negative attitudes that many other women and HR folks have about women who have chosen to stay at home (and, why is it that women can be so nasty to other women when it comes to this subject?). Please, women do not lose their minds (mostly) or their abilities just because they stay at home for a few years — surely there are companies out there that recognize the tremendous resource that these women (or men) represent — what kind of programs might they have to help women re-enter the work-force, can they be copied? How do other countries address the issue? And finally, how about discussing broader policy options for creating a more supportive environment for working parents, or just workers in general — people leave the work-force for all sorts of reasons, to raise children, to deal with an illness or disability, to take care of an aging or sick relative. Shouldn’t we explore ways to make the exit softer and the return less brutal no matter why you left, without shifting the entire burden and blame to the employer or so harshly judging those who leave?

That would be a show worth watching.

From Lisa Belkin: All good points. I have written about most of them during my years covering life and work. A quick search found a few past articles if you have the time. Go [here](#) to read about programs that forward thinking companies are instituting to recruit women who have been out of the workforce, [here](#) to read about how men who leave salaried work handle the resume gap, [here](#) for the thoughts of those who study workplace flexibility with some prescriptions for change, [here](#) for a detailed look at how law firms are finally taking steps to help working parents, and [here](#) for an exploration of what this new economy means for hard won workplace reform.

That said, the Today segments were never meant to tackle global questions, but rather as a practical way to address a few of the nerve-wracking nuts and bolts of trying to return to work.

And as for networking, Maritza is working on that. She has a promising lead gotten through putting her name out there with friends and acquaintances. If it works (and she will know in a few weeks, I think) I will write about that here.

Meanwhile, good luck with your own job hunt.

— *Karen L*

14. 14. January 8, 2009 10:17 am [Link](#)

Unless you have a special needs child or care for an incapacitated family member, staying out of the traditional workforce any longer than it takes your youngest child to reach the age of 5 or 6 is about you, not them. That’s a wonderful choice as is the choice to work intermittently or remain in the workforce continuously, but it involves certain tradeoffs. Parenting is such an intensely personal and private “job” how could any employer be reasonably expected to assess a candidate’s “experience” especially after, not several years, but several decades?

— *Couvade*

15. 15. January 8, 2009 10:50 am [Link](#)

Good article Lisa!!! :-)

I have used some of the same advice you mentioned to further my career and take “stints” @ home with my 3 kids!

I really do enjoy this blog!!!

— *NC mom*

16. 16. January 8, 2009 11:50 am [Link](#)

As someone who coaches stay-at-home moms trying to get back to work I couldn't resist commenting on this blog. Here is my 2 cents.

What strikes me is the vast difference in the two jobs McCarthy interviewed for - I see no relationship between being a full time attendant for a student on disability and data processing in a medical lab. Is McCarthy clear on what she wants to do or is she so desperate for a job that she will take whatever she gets? A potential employer can spot desperation a mile away and this is just not an attractive attribute. McCarthy needs to spend some time thinking of her strengths and her interests and come up with a personal marketing plan that will make employers want to snap her up.

She also needs to work on her confidence level - this is a common problem with stay-at-home moms who are trying to return to the workforce. They tend to think that they have lost that part of themselves that excelled professionally and they need to be told by a neutral third party that this is really not the case.

Feyi Boroffice

<http://www.2hatsnetwork.com>

— *Feyi Boroffice*

17. 17. January 8, 2009 11:50 am [Link](#)

This was a great article, not just for moms currently in or out of the workforce, but for those young women who are still in the planning stages of their lives and careers. When I talked to my daughters about the career counseling they receive at school, absolutely not one counselor was even mentioning planning for career changes to raise kids, need for work-life balance, flexibility, limited hours, etc. As a result, too many smart girls are doing what so many of us did - pursuing expensive educations to fit us for fast-track careers that we end up leaving. Many of the women you mention, when returning to the work force, are choosing to do a different job than what they were originally educated for - often because those first careers were high-stress and not family friendly. One woman I know went into heavy debt to get a law degree, then chose to stay home with her kids, now is homeschooling them and working an online career from home. Good choice? for her and for her kids, a resounding yes. I applaud her for putting the next generation's needs before her own ego. It's just too bad nobody told her that being bright doesn't mean she needed a piece of paper from a college that says so! She could have saved a lot of time and money with a couple of internet classes at a community college.

My daughters are certainly competent in school, but I am questioning the wisdom of giving them \$100,000 educations when quite possibly a trade certificate or some training in entrepreneurial skills would serve them better in the long run. I have told them I value and support their investing themselves in the families they will one day raise. They need to be able to generate income to support themselves and help the family economically, but a plumbing license or chef's diploma would give them more income than a liberal arts degree, which will only fit them to be sidelined when they “ramp off”. Plumbing is plumbing, there is no “career ladder”, unlike business and professional jobs. So what then is the point of the big push to over-educate girls with degrees they aren't going to make full use of?

From Lisa Belkin: I don't even know where to begin to respond to this. No, not everyone — young men or young women — should go out and get a piece of paper just for the sake of getting a piece of paper. And yes, there are probably individuals — men and women — who would be more content with less high-powered, high-pressured career choices. But one of many questions raised by what you are saying is this: is education a value in and of itself, or a means to an immediate and specific end? I firmly believe it is the former, and that a working life that can span 60 years should not be truncated from the start by arguments like yours. Now, I will leave it to my readers to raise other concerns with your argument...

— *Morwyn*

18. 18. January 8, 2009 12:04 pm [Link](#)

I recently returned to work after a 7 year “break”. I have to wear a goofy visor, a name badge, and the company t-shirt. (Thankfully, it's not mcdonalds) Do I feel this is beneath me? At times, yes. But the trade off is worth it for me and my husband. The hours work for us, we don't have to pay for child care

and one of us is always with the kids when they aren't in school. So why bother? Because the extra income is nice, and the way I see it, I'm starting to re-build my resume so that in two years when my youngest is in school full time, the first thing a potential employer won't see is a 7 year gap. This is not my usual line of work, I'm more the admin type, but for the short term, I can deal with it. As long as I keep my eye on the big picture.

— Lisa

19. January 8, 2009 12:06 pm [Link](#)

To Karen L:

A comprehensive list of career reentry programs at employers, universities, and organizations worldwide was compiled by my company iRelaunch.com and can be viewed here:

<http://www.irelaunch.com/docs/complist.pdf>

For strategy and advice on returning to work after a career break, read *Back on the Career Track: A Guide for Stay-at-Home Moms Who Want to Return to Work*, and check the tools and resources at <http://www.iRelaunch.com>.

Also check the *Back on the Career Track* blog which is featured weekly on Yahoo Shine!, Yahoo's women's portal, for tips, news, and thoughts on "relaunching" your career.

Here's the link:

<http://shine.yahoo.com/blog/aZa5kXDOuRZjymrGdfValiakqa69DN6kGrlyRteEEeFHG.DznXWuw/>

If you contact me at info@iRelaunch.com, I can try to direct you to local resources depending on where you live.

Carol Fishman Cohen, co-author, *Back on the Career Track*, co-founder, iRelaunch

— Carol Fishman Cohen

20. January 8, 2009 12:49 pm [Link](#)

Morwyn — do you have sons, too? Or is work-life balance an issue only for the girls?

I agree with the concept of a cost-benefit tradeoff. Kids shouldn't blindly go into \$100K of debt if their chosen field won't give them a reasonable opportunity to pay it off, or if they really just want to get married, quit, and have kids. And everyone should learn that what you think you want at 18, or 22, or 25, may not be what you want at 35 or 40.

But suggesting that it is appropriate to push our daughters toward community colleges and trade degrees because they may want more family time at some point? Wow. How very 1950s — you know, when it was perfectly legal not to hire women "because they're just going to have babies and quit."

A lot of women don't have babies. Even more have babies and don't quit work. And I bet a lot of women who have babies and ultimately quit enjoyed their jobs and went back in at some point. It is fairly ridiculous to ask a girl of 17 to foreclose a whole variety of career options because of something that may possibly happen at some point in the future, maybe.

I am a working mom. At 17, all I knew was that I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do when I grew up (still don't!); I just didn't want to be bored. And we didn't have a lot of money. But instead of just assuming that I should therefore choose a "cheap" path, I searched hard to find a way to afford the path I wanted to follow — less expensive schools, chasing scholarships, work-study, etc. Where did that get me? I'm a partner in a small law firm; I make enough money to support my family, while working at 80% on a very flexible schedule — and I can cut back even more any time I want.

Here's the thing. Debt is limiting, yes, but education is freeing. My education gave me the credentials I needed to get my foot in the door of a well-compensated profession and prove myself. Once I got in, I had to look for quite a while to find the right fit for me. But now I work where people value my mind and my skills — and are more than willing to "put up with" the fact that I also value my family time because of it. To a very significant extent, I am in a position to write my own ticket and decide just how much I want to work. If I didn't want to work here, I could take any number of jobs in government or with a company, which would give me a 9-5 workload with predictable vacation and sick days and benefits. I don't know many chefs or plumbers who have the freedom to control their own professional life the way I do — or even the option to find a 9-5 job with benefits. (Seriously, chefs? Do you have any idea how hard they work, and for how little money?? Try 10 AM-2 AM, 6 days/week, for \$15-25K/yr. That's work-life balance?).

I am going to push my daughter to pursue whatever her career dreams turn out to be, and I am going to do everything I can to support her efforts. Yes, of course I am also going to help her learn how to be smart about the financial angle. And I hope I can teach her that it's not about chasing the biggest bucks

or grabbing the most power — that whatever path she chooses to follow needs to be able to accommodate and support her LIFE goals. But in the end, it's her life, and I want her to be in the best position possible to pursue whatever version of "balance" matters to her.

And I plan to do exactly the same thing with my son.

— *Laura*

21. 21. January 8, 2009 12:53 pm [Link](#)

To Morwyn: Oh, and just because some women don't vote, why not take the "girls'" voting rights away while you are at it? It's not like suffrage is useful for cooking, cleaning and full-time baby watching.

You could also make the argument that because some fathers also opt to stay at home, let's not bother educating anyone at all!

Seriously, if staying out of workforce is what works for your family — great. But please don't assume that everyone has to do so.

— *Elena*

22. 22. January 8, 2009 1:35 pm [Link](#)

Yes Laura, it will be a real adventure.

I also started with that enthusiasm: kids grown, divorced my husband - I was free to be me.

I stayed home with my children for 20 years, with a part time job the final three years. Before that I had ten years of professional experience as a scientist. While not special needs, 2 of my 3 children were very challenging and I am convinced would be drug addicts and/or dead by now if I had not stayed home through their high school years. My husband's job required frequent travel; 2 week trips were not unusual. Clearly my working was not an "option".

After having trouble landing a job I realized I needed to update my job skills, I went to community college and got a degree in Pharmacy Techonogy. I also took computer classes. It is three years now and I am still unemployed.

Here is what bothers me. That rearing children is not seen as a legitimate use of one's time. We are told to put volunteer work on our resumes. As if being on a PTA, or shelving books in the library, is more important to an employer than the myriad of challenges one faces parenting. The years I stayed home are seen as a big, blank hole in my resume.

I am 57 years old. I have lived in different places, dealt with many types of people, faced many challenges. I was brought up in an age of respect, self discipline, use of proper grammer and spelling, and a strong work ethic. I raised three children who are now productive members of society. None of this seems to be valued.

— *Mary*

23. 23. January 8, 2009 2:18 pm [Link](#)

In defense of part of what Morwyn said I do wish that someone had suggested that I think about how my career choices might fit with my decisions around child-rearing when I was in my early 20s deciding what to study in graduate school. It has become clear to me in my 30s as a Mom that there are some professional careers that more easily lend themselves to part-time work because they tend to be shift based (the most prominent examples for me are in medicine or something like it — dentistry, pharmacology, optometry etc.). If, in my twenties I had thought about what I wanted to do and whether what I wanted to do could be done part-time, I think there is a good chance that I might have pursued medicine (like being a nurse-practitioner) over the law and public policy degrees that I did pursue.

I am not overly regretful (and yes I realize it's never to late to start over, I just am not up for that kind of lifestyle sacrifice), and I am lucky to work 80% in the job that I have, but there are not a lot of ways to do what I am trained for and care about and do it part-time while my children are young. I do think that this should be an issue for men as well as women. I am lucky to have a husband who equally shares the parenting with me, and has a job that pays modestly (librarian at a community college) but also affords a lot of flexibility (he's generally off when the kids are on school vacations). By the time he chose to be a librarian we had children and we were actively factoring parenting into the career equation, but when we finished our undergraduate educations we really were not. I know that I should have thought about this, and in some sense I did. I pursued a public sector career because I wanted to work full-time as 40 hours and not 60 or 80, but until I actually had my son, I didn't really realize how wrenching it would be to work and parent full time simultaneously.

So Morwyn, I, for one, do wish that someone somewhere along the way had given me some advice about the best careers to balance work and family. I certainly wouldn't have forgone my BA which was a joy because it was not goal oriented but rather about becoming a critically thinking adult, but I might have pursued a different path after college graduation. Hopefully the future will provide a world for our

children where there is more room for job-sharing and part-time work in all professions, but until then I think that those of us who have faced these dilemmas would do our sons and daughters a favor by asking them to consider how they imagine balancing their career ambitions with their parental ones.

— *tracy*

24. January 8, 2009 2:40 pm [Link](#)

My wife has been working part time for the last few years as she as focused on raising our daughter, and she is now struggling to return to full-time employment. So I am very sympathetic to the problems that women face in this situation. But I can also see why a prospective employer would be very hesitant to hire someone who had been out of their field for a few years. In my own industry of pharmaceutical communications, the entire field has changed drastically over the last 5 years. If I were considering hiring someone who had been out of it for that long to raise a child, the notion of bringing that person up to speed on everything that has happened during that time might seem pretty daunting, no matter how sympathetic I am personally to their situation.

So although I think that things like resume polishing and wardrobe selection are clearly important, I think the real question is, how do we help this person identify and bridge the changes that have occurred during the period that they have been out of the office? And how do we demonstrate to a potential employer that they have crossed this bridge? This seems to me a far more difficult — but also more important — problem than the color of the skirt she wore to her interview or whether she listed that she was fluent in Spanish.

— *pierce moffett*

25. January 8, 2009 2:48 pm [Link](#)

Industry should do a real cost-benefit analysis of the costs of experienced and qualified labor walking out the door because they can't seem to figure out how to make part-time professional work a reality. Sure, people need certain skills to get jobs done, but anyone who has worked somewhere for a while knows that it's often the "old-timers" who know how to work their network and get things done. A new hire takes a considerable amount of time to acquire credibility in and organization, and there is no real substitute to the institutional knowledge that is lost.

If more companies could put up with a few years of mom working part-time, they would reap enormous benefits. Internal professional networks would stay intact, and when the kids hit school, full-time becomes a real option again, and they don't have to take the six months to a year to get someone back up to speed.

Part timers often consume zero benefits (covered by a spouse), don't accrue vacation in the same manner (less on the books), and can share offices with other part-timers. Two part-timers can cost significantly less than one full-time worker.

Of course, this is a "long view" thing, something hard to consider in a world where only the next quarter matters.

— *J*

[1](#) [2](#) [Next »](#)

Add your comments...

Your Name Required

Your E-mail Required, will not be published

Your Comment

Comments are moderated and generally will be posted if they are on-topic and not abusive. For more

information, please see our [Comments FAQ](#).

[Braselton Pediatrics](#)

New Peds Clinic Serving Braselton, Hoschton, Winder, North Gwinnett
www.braseltonpediatrics.com

[Octomom - Nadya Suleman](#)

1 minute poll. Is Nadya Suleman a good parent?
popular-polls.com

[Positive Parenting Tool](#)

KC the Fox improves your child's behavior without discipline
www.milestoneparenting.com

Search This Blog

- *Previous Post:* [Spending too Much? Blame Mom.](#)
- *Next Post:* [When Daddy Goes to War](#)

About The Motherlode

The goal of parenting is simple — to raise happy, healthy, well-adjusted kids. The road from here to there, however, is anything but simple. In The Motherlode, Lisa Belkin tackles it all — homework, friends, sex, baby sitters, eating habits, work-family balance and so much more — subjects culled from the news, from her own experience as a parent, from the latest books and studies and, of course, from reader input. So take a look at what Lisa has to say, and join the discussion about the way we raise our kids now.

Tag List

- [GUEST BLOG](#) 18
- [POLITICS](#) 16
- [LIFE/WORK BALANCE](#) 13
- [MONEY](#) 12
- [BARACK OBAMA](#) 11
- [PREGNANCY](#) 9
- [SCHOOLS](#) 8
- [HOLIDAYS](#) 8
- [ADVICE](#) 8
- [COLLEGE](#) 7
- [NEW BABY](#) 7
- [BREASTFEEDING](#) 7
- [TRAVEL](#) 7
- [TELEVISION](#) 6
- [TEENS](#) 6

- [HEALTH](#) 5
- [OCTUPLETS](#) 4
- [MULTIPLE BIRTHS](#) 4
- [SARAH PALIN](#) 4
- [TECHNOLOGY](#) 4
- [DISCIPLINE](#) 4

- [CHILD CARE](#) 4
- [ECONOMY](#) 4
- [SEX](#) 4
- [RECESSION](#) 4
- [DIVORCE](#) 3
- [CHORES](#) 3
- [DADS](#) 3
- [PETS](#) 3
- [PRIVACY](#) 3

Archive

Select Month

Recent Posts

March 16
(18 comments)

[Equally Shared Breast-Feeding](#)

Do you think it is possible to have both equality between partners and a commitment to breast-feeding?

March 16
(158 comments)

[Is Breastfeeding the New Vacuum Cleaner?](#)

A new article in The Atlantic asks whether the science behind the belief that “Breast is Best” is really as definitive as we all seem to believe.

March 14
(65 comments)

[Teaching Your Teen to Drive](#)

Should Mom or Dad — or both — take up the white-knuckled passenger role?

March 13
(60 comments)

[Are Online Cookie Sales Dangerous?](#)

Could use of the internet to sell Thin Mints make girls vulnerable to strangers?

March 12
(50 comments)

[Parents and School Shootings](#)

Do parents have anything to learn from the senseless killings in Winnenden, Germany?

Tech Update




Sign up for Tech Update: an afternoon e-mail newsletter with the latest tech news spanning the Web.

[See Sample](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

- [Other Articles by Lisa Belkin](#)
- [Father in Chief](#)
- [The Senator Track](#)
- [Another Triumph for Clinton, Many Women Agree](#)
- [Looking Back, Moving On](#)
- [Palin Talk](#)
- [Talking Politics in the Office](#)
- [When Children Leave](#)
- [Smoother Transitions](#)
- [Psst! Your Salary Is Showing](#)
- [The New Workplace Perk: Gas](#)

The New York Times
 nytimes.com [+ ADD TO MY SITE](#)

The New York Times MOVIES
nytimes.com/movies



Isn't he bromantic?

Also in Movies:

- [Five brilliant directors pick their favorite DVDs](#)
- [Centerfold sentiments](#)
- [Anatomy of a scene: "Watchmen"](#)

Feeds

-  [RSS](#)
-  [ATOM](#)

Ads by Google

what's this?

[The Secret to White Teeth](#)

Learn the 1 Trick I used to get rid of Yellow Teeth for under \$10 bucks
 PerfectTeethWhitening.com

[Octomom - Nadya Suleman](#)

1 minute poll. Is Nadya Suleman a good parent?
 popular-polls.com

[Find Atlanta Child Care](#)

Free Background Checks to Help You Find Safe Atlanta Child Care.
 www.Care.com/childcare

Home

- [World](#)
- [U.S.](#)
- [N.Y. / Region](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Technology](#)
- [Science](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Arts](#)
- [Style](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Autos](#)
- [Back to Top](#)

- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Search](#)
- [Corrections](#)
- [RSS](#)
- [First Look](#)
- [Help](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Work for Us](#)
- [Media Kit](#)
- [Site Map](#)