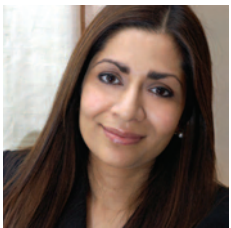


# family or career?

More and more women are taking time off from their career to raise children but getting back to work can be a problem



Aliya Ali-Afzal is a woman of experience. Her first job when she left university was as a translator. When she got married and had children she took a job in a Recruitment Agency. 'I earned good money,' she told me, 'and it certainly helped the family budget, but I soon realized that the demands on me were more than I was prepared to give. I was

expected to work a twelve-hour day, and I realized that it appeared to be a choice between a well-paid career and family life. So I decided to change career and train as a Life Coach.

I believe my experience in various jobs (as well as being a mother of two children) gives me invaluable experience to help others - in particular women.' Aliya specializes in helping women back into the job market. 'When a woman has been out of her career for a while, looking after a family, she often experiences a loss of confidence,' she told me. 'I help people develop a back-to-work strategy, to regain confidence, and to achieve the kind of job that they are qualified for, or possibly start a new entrepreneurial career.' She encourages them to think of getting back to work as a project - 'Project Me' - and to plan the whole exercise as a series of small steps. Each step carefully documented, each successful action creating new confidence. 'Confidence doesn't return overnight - it comes by taking actions,' she said. 'It could be going on a seminar, or signing up with a Recruitment Agency that will eventually lead to the type of job that gives a life balance between career and family.'

She helps people brainstorm what they want out of life - where they would like to be in a year's time. 'I encourage them to get a friend to write down ten points of strength to help boost confidence, and to underline the qualities that a woman has to offer that are often unrecognized but are often prized by employers. Each person is different,' she said, 'so it is impossible to lay down a How To Do It plan. It all depends on the individual - their needs and strengths.' But one of the tactics she often employs is to keep a diary, and record the various high and low points of the campaign. It might be checking through the Situations Vacant in the local paper or going out shopping to buy a wardrobe of clothes that are suitable for a new life in commerce. 'It is vital,' she said, 'to share your ambitions with the family, so that they all see your return to work as an advantage and not a loss. Sometimes children (and husband) become anxious as to how it will affect their life when the woman, who has been the mainstay of the household for ten or fifteen years, is no longer there twenty-four hours a day. Talk to them,' she said. 'Point out the advantages of you having a job, e.g. more cash for better holidays or a new modern TV.'

'When you eventually land that dream job - make your plans, re-organise your life,' she urges, 'so that the transition is as easy as possible. Have your systems in place. Stock the freezer with convenience food; ask for help from extended family and friends; make a weekly menu and put it on the kitchen notice board. Employ a cleaner to come in and do all those household jobs that had become a burden to you. Usually the family adapts more quickly than you would imagine, and become noticeably more independent. They might even start to enjoy using Jamie Oliver's new cook book,' she laughed.

'We seldom get the opportunity to look at our lives objectively and assess our real priorities,' Aliya said. 'It is an opportunity to tease out what is

really important and get down to the basics. I really believe that the whole exercise makes your life easier - you finally focus on priorities, on what is important, and clear away all that is unnecessary.'

Aliya Ali-Afzal 020 8789 9314 offers a complete life and career-coach service.



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