

Good Morning - Mums Returning to the Workforce

Being invited to talk on national television about mums returning to the workforce was a little nerve-racking to say the least. In compiling my 'pearls of wisdom' for mums considering returning to work, I did the only sensible thing and consulted a number of very successful working mums when preparing my responses. Following is an overview of the questions that I was asked to address in my interview for Good Morning along with my responses.

My background

For five years I worked within a recruitment consultancy which specialised in recruiting administrative positions. This meant that the consultants regularly encountered women wanting to return to work. Often they were unsure about how to re-enter the job market and they lacked the confidence to really present themselves at their best to potential employers.

This led to return2work being established, a coaching service which was initially aimed at mums, helping them to gain confidence and the skills to re-enter the workforce at an appropriate level. As Manager and Facilitator of this business, I coached many mums on preparing CVs, getting ready for interviews, understanding how to respond to job adverts and really promote themselves to the best advantage, as well as discussing what to wear, work place etiquette and where to find the best jobs.

Since having my second child, I have set up my own business, Pod Consulting, which provides tailored outsourced HR solutions for businesses on an ongoing or project basis. In addition, I do career coaching with mums intending to return to work. I have a number of fantastic success stories and the ladies I work with rise to the challenge of finding great jobs which lifts their esteem and helps them to contribute financially to their family.

I am a huge advocate of working mums, Lisa on my team (and mum to Kahn) works part time as Business Executive and we hope (fingers crossed) to have another HR Consultant joining us soon, again a mum with an excellent work history and skills.

Why it's hard to get back into the workforce

Mums have so much to offer, but once out of the work environment a number of concerns enter our heads, making us think that we have little to offer an employer and these negative thoughts get in the way of us putting ourselves forward for roles that in our previous lives (life before children) we would have jumped at. Concerns affecting the mums that I have met include:

- Lack of confidence and self esteem
- Feeling that they have lost touch with the job market and the skills needed for a specific job

- Not knowing where to start the job hunt
- Feeling guilty about not being with the children
- Not sure if it will be financially viable (once child care costs, transport costs and parking etc have been taken out of the salary)
- Finding suitable childcare options
- Concern about the children being sick and needing to ask for time off to look after them

How flexible are employers are and why are mums good to employ?

Kelly Reid, Director at Jobs for Mums made a valuable comment:

'Employers in NZ struggle to think outside the box of a 40 hour week in the majority of skilled vocations. They feel anxious if they can't see their employee. But, do an hour long commute and a desk really make for more productive workers?'

There are so many reasons to employ mums including the following (I should note these are comments from both working mums and employers of working mums):

- Working mothers are more committed, put in more hours, and deliver - because they have refined the skills needed to manage their work load effectively to maximise results
- Most women also feel extremely loyal to the companies who support them in their parenting role and are, therefore, they are highly motivated and reliable staff
- Working mums are hard working, dedicated, have good time management, they work well to deadlines, they are focused and want to prove themselves, almost over compensating – they are eager to impress
- The average office worker is interrupted 73 times a day and statistics tell us that it takes 20 minutes to get back to the level of concentration we were at prior to the disruption – this surely suggests that mums working from home will be more productive
- One employer commented that they need people who are understanding, empathetic and good with people and mothers seem to fit this role perfectly. The employer accepts that when children are sick that their employees place their children first and miss work. This can be hard to manage in a business sense, but worth it to have these kind of people.
- The first baby boomer hits 65 in 2011, this is going to mean a giant headache for New Zealand employers but mums with good experience and qualifications will be well placed to pick up the work

Once in the job, what are the biggest challenges for women when back at work?

There are pros and cons with everything and I'm sure that a number of working mums can relate to these and probably list a dozen more:

- Getting to work on time without the baby badge or mucky handprints!
- Dreading the call from day-care to pick up the children when they are sick

- Leaving work at a specific time – either earlier in the day or flying out the door at 100 miles an hour to get to day care before you incur a late 'collection' fee
- Missing out on the social side of work if it is conducted after the normal working day
- Demonstrating that you are right for promotions over your full time colleagues
- Trying to do two jobs (minimum) effectively – the guilt of are you giving your kids enough time and dedicating yourself fully to your work?
- If working at home on your own, it can get a bit lonely

What jobs can mums do at home?

- Start your own business –
 - **Mums on Top** – this website has many members that are business women and entrepreneurs, who operate their businesses from home. On this site you will meet everyone from a graphic designer who creates kids t-shirts and sells them online, beauty therapists, virtual PA's, an insurance broker, a writer/editor and even a mum that does transcription work for a lady in the UK
 - **Recruit NZ** – one of my very good friends runs a fantastic recruitment consultancy from her home office, in addition she employs mums who work from home. Tanya, Director of Recruit NZ also runs affordable workshops in Auckland for mums returning to work
 - **Porse** – if you have an interest in working with children, you could spend each day with your children whilst looking after other children at your home
 - **Avon** – this was a popular way for mums to make money when I was young. I used to go door to door with my mum dropping off catalogues and testing out the sample lipsticks. Avon has now had a re-vamp and this may be an option to bring in some revenue for you
 - **Tupperware** – if you have the people skills, perhaps you could run parties and why stop at kitchenware – lingerie and handbag parties are ever popular
 - **Hair dressing** – My friend Sara has set up a hair salon at her house and is doing very well, her clients travel from miles around for an appointment with her
 - **Working for others** –
 - Jobs for Mums and FreeBEE Mums both advertise roles aimed at mums
 - How about working for your previous or current employer i.e. doing remote PA work' and/or accounts?
- **What are the first steps to finding a job?**
 - Create a CV that really promotes you
 - Be prepared for the interview – make sure you know what questions are likely to be asked i.e. competency based questions

- Look the part – first impressions count
- Research who would you want to work for, the culture that you would like to be part of, identify the skills and experience that would be necessary to ensure your success
- Consider the location
- Think about what hours will work for you and your family
- Ask yourself if it financially viable, what is the minimum salary that you should accept – you don't want to be working for free. Make sure you understand what employers would be prepared to pay for your skills and experience and don't sell yourself short
- Become part of a great network and support group like Mums on Top

If you are setting up in business on your own – be knowledgeable:

- **NZTE, WHK and banks** – offer free (or subsidised) courses for new business owners
- **Write a business plan** – know what you want to do and how you will achieve your goals
- **NZ Business Mentors** - after six months you can apply to get a business mentor to guide you and your business (invaluable in my opinion) and this service is free