

MANAGING A CAREER BREAK

Many people in South Africa unexpectedly took some kind of career break during the COVID-19 pandemic. This might be due to being laid-off from work, working from home, working irregular hours or on rotational basis, losing of breadwinners or significant others, liquidation of business and retrenchments.

Though these experiences teach us a lot about our resilience, values and our priorities, it can be extremely intimidating (and even traumatic) to suddenly lose an employment income and deal with the prospect of returning to the labour market environment afterwards. In order to support you through this transition, the Employment Counselling unit has come up with a number of ways to manage a career break that will assist those affected to improve both their employability prospects and confidence levels.

BE PREPARED FOR YOUR RETURN TO WORK

It is important to consider the following aspects when preparing for your return to work:

- **Reflecting on your career break experience.** What did you learn about your values, needs and aspirations? Did you really enjoy your last job or did the break remind you of previous passions to reconsider? What are your current goals and aspirations?
- **Setting your career goals.** Identify new career goals, as well as weaknesses that needs an improvement in order to reach the goals. Develop a strategy to work on your weaknesses, record the outcome of your development and assess your progress.
- **Improving your professional skills.** Take stock of all the skills acquired in your career thus far. Which of those are generic and can be transferred to any work environment? Are your skills still relevant in today's labour market? If there is room for improvement, consider signing up for a training course or attending workshops. There are a lot of online courses on the internet of which some are free of charge. Examples include platforms like Udemy, Shaw Academy, Coursera, Future Learn, Edu Connect, Edx, LinkedIn Learning and Skills portal etc. Individuals may also enrol for free online language lessons offered by UNISA which allows one to learn different African languages. To sign up you simply need to log onto the UNISA website, select the 'UNISA

Open' tab and then 'OER @Unisa' tab. Then click on 'Learn to speak an African Language' and choose from the list of available lessons.

- **Research on current trends in your industry and network with relevant individuals.**
Keep track of industry influencers and publications. Which businesses are new in your industry and how do they differ from what you were exposed to? Identify businesses in your industry that survived an economic recession and research skills valued by those businesses. Ask for referrals from your previous job and start networking from your list of contacts. Learn how to use social media as a networking tool correctly.

ACKNOWLEDGE THE VALUE OF YOUR EXPERIENCE

New experiences nurture new skills. Your career break might have taught you skills like resilience in coping with new challenges, improved self-awareness, how to make realistic plans and carry them out, financial planning, effective communication and problem solving. Incorporate these skills in your Résumé or Curriculum Vitae.

BRUSH UP ON YOUR JOB HUNTING SKILLS

Ensure that you update your CV, attend interview preparation workshops and conduct research on the current job market. You may even consider new self-employment prospects. The career counsellors at the Department of Labour's offices are well trained to assist you with your job hunting journey.

TAP INTO AVAILABLE SUPPORT

There is also the option to update your skills through the training lay-off schemes provided by your employer, applying for skills development opportunities through SETAs, pursuing self-employment opportunities through SEDA offices, online registration with ESSA and other employment agencies' employment databases. Log onto www.dol.gov.za to register a request on employment counselling support programmes designed to help you consider available up-skilling opportunities and information on job-preparations, such as job-hunting skills, work ethics, interviews, and much more.

REFERENCES

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/starting-new-job/getting-back-to-work>

<https://www.cipd.co.uk/careers/career-guidance/manage-break>

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