

# How to stay current during a career break

People take career breaks for a multitude of reasons – caring for elderly parents, starting a business, relocating with a partner, and raising a family. Whatever the reason and the duration of their career break, most people will return to the workforce. In this article, we will show how a little regular career maintenance can make your re-entry easier – and might just have some other unexpected benefits.

When you are on a career break, and life is busy, staying up-to-date with your career can seem like the very last thing on your never-ending ‘to do’ list. The good news however is that some minimal effort, even if only in two or three quick bursts a year, will make a big difference when you are ready to return to work.

## Why can't I do this just before I return to work?

The truth is that you could get back up-to-date just before you begin to look for your next role. You could read up on your industry, madly network with former colleagues, and overhaul your CV all in a matter of days. There are however a few downsides to doing this as a rush job. First, it could make it clear to everyone that you have been on a career break. Secondly, it is usually more time-consuming to reconnect with people than it is to re-energise warm contacts in your network. Finally, it could seem just a bit desperate (“Let’s connect on LinkedIn and can you please endorse me now!”).

There are surprising benefits of staying up-to-date, and they are not just for your career!

When a career break has coincided with a major life event such as having children or moving abroad, we can very quickly forget who we were when working. This forgetting of the ‘work’ self can happen very quickly, sometimes over mere months.

For many people I coach, remembering their ‘work’ self can help to boost their confidence. Seeing ourselves through the eyes of our favourite manager who has just endorsed us on LinkedIn, or a former colleague who compliments our technical skills, can remind us how great our ‘work’ self is. Being able to contribute to discussions on a business-related topic in a social setting can bring us the respect of our partners, friends and even our children.

For many people, then comes the realisation that they can go back to work: this career break is voluntary. They will be ready and confident, to return to work when the time is right. It can also, of course, lead to interesting roles that fit within a career break such as voluntary and trustee positions.

## But I want to change careers, isn't this a waste of time?

Not everyone wishes to, or can return to their previous career. Many people take the opportunity presented by a career break to review their options and move into a new career or take up a voluntary position.

So, is this investment in a career you are leaving not simply a waste of time? The short answer, supported by comprehensive research, is ‘No’.

Here are three reasons why it pays to stay current, regardless of your intended next role:

1. Your next job is statistically most likely to be found through your extended network (including the networks of your network). The research suggests that 80-90% of all jobs are not advertised. If your preferred next role is in another industry or location, your network has an even more important role to play in helping you identify opportunities.
2. Both employers and professional recruiters look at the social media accounts (including LinkedIn) of candidates. Although you might feel that this is not appropriate, they are usually trying to understand the context of your career. Are you in touch in positive ways with people that you previously worked with? Are people endorsing you for the types of skills you should have given your career history?
3. You are likely to need recommendations from your network to secure an offer for any future role.

“Don't aim for perfection: it is better to do a little than nothing at all.”

## How to Stay Up-to-Date

These ideas can be completed online, from anywhere in the world. As a bare minimum, try to do four of these things, every six months. Given that many of these activities take less than ten minutes to complete, you could be finished in less than an hour each time.

You will, of course, reap more rewards if you invest more time and effort, but don't aim for perfection: it is much better to do a little occasionally than nothing at all.

## LinkedIn

**Profile mini review:** Check your location and profile picture. Your LinkedIn profile will be one of the first things people see when they search for you by name so make sure it is up to date.

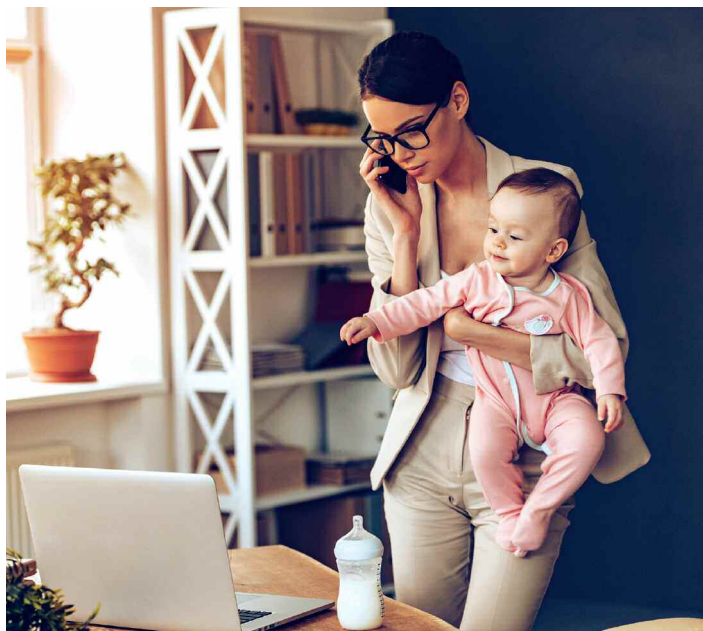
- **Grow your network:** Accept any outstanding LinkedIn invitations, and send five to ten invitations to new contacts. Remember to also connect on LinkedIn with people you are meeting in social contexts.
- **Congratulate people on their successes:** LinkedIn notifies us when former colleagues, former bosses and friends have started a new job, published an article or shared other good news. It takes seconds to send a congratulations message and yet very few people do so. Make this small effort and your contact may well pause to refresh you in their mind as a current contact.
- **Endorse your contacts:** This has two benefits: first, the person you endorse will think positively of you and, secondly, they are much more likely to endorse you in return. LinkedIn is rumoured to begin offering endorsed skills information to recruiters so this is important.

**Set up Google Alerts:** The free Google Alerts system will email to you any online articles that contain specific keywords. It is a convenient way to see published information about an organisation, industry, place or person.

**Join online groups:** Both Facebook and LinkedIn have industry and alumni groups, which can help you to stay on top of trends and changing terminology.

**Read professional magazines and newsletters:** These don't often make for exciting reading but a quick skim read can sometimes highlight a mention of a former colleague for you to follow up. File any particularly interesting articles so you can re-read them before you begin interviewing.

**Christmas or holiday cards:** An emailed card – usually with a donation to charity mentioned – is perfectly acceptable and takes almost no time to organise, but will ensure you are in touch at least annually with your contacts.



“Staying in touch with your ‘work’ self can deliver benefits – even before your next job search begins.”

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## Make Every Contact Count

Now that you are thinking more about your pre-break career, as a final step try to bring your career into everyday conversations. Start some sentences with “when I was working in...”. Cite anecdotes from your experiences with your team or a client. You can also introduce yourself to people (or ask your partner to do so) including some reference to your career. This will open up a whole new range of conversations with people, even people you know quite well, who may have no idea about your career background, experiences or ambitions.