

Career returners tell recruiters and employers to change their approaches to employment breaks

The REC and social impact organisation Career Returners are continuing to promote to recruiters and employers the importance of hiring more people returning to work after a break because of, for example, illness, caregiving, further education, relocation or travel. They have produced new online guidance offering practical steps to help recruiters support more returners as candidates and the tools to encourage client employers to do the same.

The REC's influential *Overcoming Shortages* report highlighted that labour shortages in the UK could cost the economy up to £39 billion annually – almost as much as funding two entire Elizabeth Lines on London Underground. This is why initiatives such as this are so crucial. The guidance seeks to reshape perceptions and policies, encouraging recruiters and employers to appreciate the value of individuals returning to work after career breaks.

REC member f1, which is B Corp certified, has pioneered this approach. In March it held its annual two-week Back2business bootcamp and its message to fellow recruiters was “you snooze on hiring such workers and you lose in this tight labour market”.

Recruitment Matters' Hamant Verma attended the final event of f1's Back2business programme, which is now in its 13th year. This was a formal speed networking event where career returners in marketing and communications delivered their elevator pitches and got feedback from a room full of employers. All were keen to secure a job offer.

At the Back2business 10th anniversary celebration in 2023, f1 conducted a survey and found that 85% of its alumnae had managed to get back into their careers within a year of attending the programme.

Petula Kincaid, 60, from Clapham in London, has been on a two-year break from work since she finished a maternity cover role in marketing. Her message to in-house and agency recruiters is simple: “There is a misconception that older workers are more expensive – we are not. The children have flown the nest, I have a desire to add more purpose to my life and I have a lot of freedom and confidence.”

Another attendee, Laurence Bird from Wandsworth in London, has spent 28 years in director roles in marketing and research. “I feel recruiters could offer more advice on personal marketing,” he said. “Is there something on my CV that is not working?”



Meanwhile, Kristina Moskalenko, who has 11 years of journalism experience and seven-and-a-half years in editorial leadership wants to return after a three-year break dealing with caring responsibilities. She said she finds it odd that recruiters approach her on LinkedIn, sometimes about specific roles, yet she does not receive any feedback. She also said too many firms want her in the office five days a week, which is not possible with her child-caring responsibilities.

Career returner Monique Walcott, of South East London, who previously worked in B2B sales, said recruiters and employers need to “embrace diversity of thought, think outside the box and be open to looking at skills as well as recent experience”.

Among the firms at the speed networking event were John Lewis, Primark, Zeno Consulting, Teneo Consulting, Hope and Glory, London Marathon and FleishmanHillard.

Speaking after the event to RM magazine, Amanda Fone, founder of f1 Recruitment and co-founder of Back2business with human resource development and career coach Liz Nottingham, reminded recruiters of their huge influence with their clients. “We have access to hiring managers and client decision-makers to ask salient questions about career returners,” she pointed out. “If recruitment consultancies across the UK offered one-day programmes or short workshops showcasing the untapped potential of career returners in their sectors, clients could discover the significant benefits of hiring from this valuable talent pool.”