Reflection Workbook



We'll Be Right Back

A Lifeline for Every Woman
Who Hit Pause on Her Career

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We’ll Be Right Back

Reflection Workbook

Use this companion workbook alongside *We’ll Be Right Back*. Each reflection exercise is organized by chapter so you can easily follow along while reading.

CHAPTER 1

Before the Pause

Reflection Exercise: Writing Your Professional Story

Set aside fifteen minutes. Find someplace quiet and take a deep breath. This is about remembering, not editing.

Step 1: Start with the basics.

What was your role before you left?

What industry were you in?

What were your main responsibilities?

Step 2: List your highlights.

What projects or accomplishments are you most proud of?

Did you ever get recognized formally (awards, promotions, positive feedback)?

What informal wins do you remember (mentoring a colleague, solving a tough problem, keeping a project afloat)?

Step 3: Recall the feelings.

How did you feel walking into work each morning?

What words would you use to describe your professional self back then (confident, resourceful, ambitious, respected)?

Step 4: Capture your story in a few sentences.

Don't worry about being eloquent. Just write: "Before my pause, I was a…" and let the words flow.

Whether your reflections took you back twelve months or twelve years, take note of what surfaced. You are reconnecting with the capable and accomplished professional you were before you stepped away. You are not starting over. You have a foundation to build upon.

CHAPTER 2

Opting Out

Reflection Exercise: Why You Stepped Away

Take some time to write about your own story. This isn't about judgment. It's about clarity.

Step 1:

Write down the year or season (i.e., after your second child was born) that you left your professional role.

Step 2:

List the factors that contributed. Separate them into "pulls" (reasons that drew you toward home or family) and "pushes" (reasons that pushed you away from your workplace).

Step 3:

Circle the one or two factors that were most decisive. Were they internal desires, external pressures, or a mix?

Step 4:

"I stepped away because…" Fill it in as honestly as you can.

Step 5:

"I was sad/sorry/disappointed I stepped away because…"

Step 6:

"I was so happy I stepped away because…"

Recalling the circumstances of your pause with the benefit of hindsight can be very enlightening. Many women describe their opt-out decision very simply: "I decided to stay home with my kids." Ideally, this reflection helped you gain insight into the many facets of your decision and the emotions that accompanied it.

CHAPTER 3

The Power of the Pause

Reflection Exercise: Naming the Gifts

Step 1:

Write down three ways your family benefited from your being at home. Examples: stability, extracurricular opportunities, stronger relationships.

Step 2:

Write down three ways your community benefited. Examples: leadership, volunteering, fundraising.

Step 3:

Write down three ways you grew personally. Examples: new skills, deeper relationships, resilience, friendships.

Step 4:

"If I had not paused, I might not have experienced…"

Investing time at home provided you and your family with opportunities for enrichment, stability, and connection. Acknowledging the positives is not meant to downplay the hard work and the struggles of a pause. It is about celebrating the investment and the results of your time, devotion, and sacrifice.

CHAPTER 4

Loss of Confidence

Reflection Exercise: Remembering Your Competencies

Step 1:

Think of at least three times in your stay-at-home years when you solved a problem, managed a project, or led a group. These could be anything from coordinating a carpool to organizing a community event.

Step 2:

Write down the specific skills you used. Did you negotiate schedules? Manage a budget? Motivate people? Communicate under stress?

Step 3:

Compare these skills to those you used in your professional life before the pause. Notice the overlap.

Step 4:

"My skills are very much alive. I see this in…" Fill in examples from your list.

With this reflection exercise, you have begun the process of seeing a bigger picture of who you are and how you have contributed.

BONUS REFLECTION

Reframing the Narrative

One of the most powerful tools for rebuilding confidence is reframing. Instead of seeing the pause as a void, see it as a period where your skills were redirected. Instead of saying, "I've been out of the workforce for ten years," you might say, "During the past ten years, I've led community initiatives, managed household operations, and volunteered in ways that kept me engaged and skilled. Now I am eager to bring those abilities back into professional settings."

This reframing is not about exaggeration. It is about truth-telling. You have not been dormant. You have been active, capable, and resourceful.

Bonus Reflection Exercise:

Use the example above as a guide and write your own response for the next time you are asked, "What do you do?" or about returning to work.

CHAPTER 5

Shame and Guilt

Reflection Exercise: Ferreting Out Shame and Guilt

Step 1:

List times when you may have felt shame or guilt.

Step 2:

Write down what caused the feelings and/or what happened just before the occasion.

Step 3:

Imagine your friend shared a similar story of guilt or shame. How would you react?

Step 4:

Give yourself that grace. Write down what you would say to your friend in the same circumstance.

Step 5:

"I am not going to feel shame/guilt anymore about… because…"

This exercise is designed to help you let go of some of these feelings.

Maybe this is something you are feeling right now. Or maybe they are memories. Either way, they deserve to be acknowledged. You might consider coming back to this reflection from time to time. None of us is perfect, and nobody gets it right all of the time. Be gentle with yourself, as you would with someone else you love.

CHAPTER 6

Isolation and Loneliness

Reflection Exercise: Naming Your Connections

Step 1:

Make a list of all your current connections: friends, neighbors, relatives, community groups, online groups, colleagues from the past.

Step 2:

Put a star next to the ones that energize you when you connect.

Step 3:

Ask yourself how you might connect with each: phone, text, email, Facetime, Zoom? Could you meet for coffee or lunch at their workplace?

Step 4:

Circle one or two people you could reach out to this week.

Step 5:

Reach out to at least one person you circled right now.

Step 6:

"I feel most connected when..." Complete it honestly.

Are you surprised by your list? Do not get discouraged if your first couple of attempts do not work out. It is likely you will think of more people as the days go on.

> **BONUS REFLECTION**

Consider volunteering at a local nonprofit. What are you passionate about? A school, foodbank, church, animal shelter? Volunteering is a great way to meet new people and can also give you experience to use in your return-to-work credentials.

CHAPTER 7

Grief

Reflection Exercise: Naming Your Losses

Step 1:

Write down the identities you feel you have lost since stepping away from work. Examples: "manager," "mentor," "colleague," "champion," "daily caregiver," "mommy."

Step 2:

Next to each identity, write what you miss most about it. Is it being needed? The recognition? The structure? The relationships? The fun?

Step 3:

Write one way you could honor or carry forward a piece of that identity today. For example, if you miss being a mentor, could you mentor a younger woman through a community group?

Step 4:

"I grieve the loss of…, but I could carry forward…"

Do you feel some relief? Sometimes the simple act of reflection and acknowledging grief can help to reduce that ache in our heart, whether it is truly physical or metaphorical.

CHAPTER 8

Body Changes

Reflection Exercise: Tracking Your Transitions

Step 1:

For one week, keep a journal of physical and emotional symptoms. Note patterns: sleep changes, mood shifts, hot flashes, energy levels.

Step 2:

Identify situations that make symptoms worse (stress, caffeine, alcohol) and those that help (exercise, hydration, mindfulness).

Step 3:

Circle the situations that make your symptoms worst, then pick something that could help. For example: reduce caffeine by substituting one cup with decaf.

Step 4:

Write down one or two questions you could take to a healthcare provider. For example: "Could hormone therapy help?" or "What are natural ways to improve sleep?"

Step 5:

"With just a small improvement in _____ symptom, I could feel more confident because…"

Ideally, this reflection gives "voice" to your symptoms. By acknowledging that these are real issues, you can brainstorm and implement ways to address them that can help immediately and over time.

CHAPTER 9

Strategic Confidence

Reflection Exercise: Confronting Doubt

Step 1:

Write down three doubts you have about returning to work.

Step 2:

For each doubt, ask: Is this a real barrier or an imagined fear?

Step 3:

For real barriers (like technology skills), write one step you could take to address it. For imagined fears (like "I'm too old"), write one piece of evidence that challenges it.

Step 4:

"I can build confidence by…" Complete it with at least one of your strategies.

Just the simple act of completing this reflection can help to restore confidence. Keep it going!

CHAPTER 10

Motherhood's Hidden Skillsets

Reflection Exercise: Uncovering the Hidden Skill Set of Motherhood

Step 1:

Draw a timeline of your life from the year you left work to today. Mark milestones: children's births, community involvement, caregiving for parents, leadership roles. Next to each milestone write the skills you used. Example: Organized school fundraiser → event planning, budgeting, donor communication, marketing.

Step 2:

Choose several activities from your timeline and fill in this chart:

Activities	Professional Skills

Step 3:

Based on your chart, choose three words that describe your former professional self that still apply today. Examples: "Strategic. Resilient. Collaborative." These become anchors for how you talk about yourself.

Step 4:

Write a short statement that reframes your role. Avoid apologizing or over-explaining. Example: "During my career pause, I led complex projects in education and community fundraising, managed multi-thousand-dollar budgets, and coordinated cross-functional teams of volunteers."

Step 5:

Read your statement out loud. Notice how it feels to claim those skills as part of your professional identity.

CHAPTER 11

Owning Your Return

Reflection Exercise: Drafting Your Return Narrative

Step 1:

Review the Reflection Exercise in Chapter 10 and revise your statement by adding a forward-looking phrase such as: "I am now eager to bring these skills into a professional role where I can contribute and grow."

Step 2:

Read your narrative out loud. Practice until it feels natural. You want to be ready when asked, "So what have you been doing?"

Step 3:

Keep refining this to include in cover letters, resumes, and networking conversations.

CHAPTER 12

Your Next Chapter

Reflection Exercise: Clarifying Priorities

Step 1:

Write down your top three values at this stage of life. Examples: family, creativity, financial stability, health, contribution.

Step 2:

Using the Kaleidoscope Career Model below, rank challenge, balance, and authenticity from most to least important in your job search right now.

Challenge — Am I learning, growing, and being stretched?

Balance — Can I manage work alongside the demands of home, relationships, and personal responsibilities?

Authenticity — Can I be true to myself and my values in the work I do?

Step 3:

"For my next chapter, I want work that…" Complete it with your values.

Step 4:

Write down any non-negotiables not covered above. For example: international travel, weekends, overtime.

Now you are starting to paint a picture of what you want for your return career. Some positions will fit these parameters, and some will not. Flexibility may be needed, but identifying non-negotiables gives you power and direction in your search.

CHAPTER 13

Your 90-Day Action Plan

Reflection Exercise: Designing Your Plan

Step 1:

Write down one networking goal for the next month.

Step 2:

Write down one skill you want to refresh.

Step 3:

Write down one visibility action you will take.

Step 4:

Put these three actions on your calendar.

Step 5:

Continue to set goals and dates.

Accountability is key. Treat your plan like a professional project, because it is.

CHAPTER 14

The Power of Returning

Reflection Exercise: Envisioning the Positives

Step 1:

Imagine yourself in your first role back. Picture the setting: office, nonprofit, classroom, home office.

Step 2:

Write down three feelings you hope to experience. Examples: pride, relief, excitement, belonging.

Step 3:

Write down three ways returning might positively affect your family. Examples: financial security, role modeling, shared responsibilities.

Step 4:

"When I return, I will feel…"

This exercise allows you to anticipate the positives, not just the challenges. It prepares you to welcome joy alongside the effort.