



A PRACTICAL PLAYBOOK

The Executive's Guide to Supporting a Spouse's Return to Work

For husbands whose wives are re-entering the workforce after 10+ years at home — five practical moves, and the worksheets to put them into action.

BEFORE YOU START

This Isn't Her Transition. It's a Family Transition.

Your wife spent a decade running the operation that made your career, your household, and your children's lives work. Now she's returning to a professional world that has changed in almost every respect — and she's changed too.

You don't need to know how applicant tracking systems work. You don't need a network of recruiters. What you need is a plan for the part that's actually yours: creating the conditions at home and in your shared thinking that let her return on her own terms.

This guide breaks that plan into five moves, each with a worksheet you can complete together. Set aside 20–30 minutes per section. Do them in order — each one builds on the last.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| 01 | Ask Good Questions, Don't Volunteer the Answers
Become her sounding board before you become her advisor. | Pg. 3–4 |
| 02 | Remove the Roadblocks
Run a household responsibility audit before her first day. | Pg. 5–6 |
| 03 | Invest in the Polish
Help her present a decade of value, not a decade of gap. | Pg. 7–8 |
| 04 | Provide Strategic Support, Not Oversight
Build a target list. Skip the daily progress reports. | Pg. 9–10 |
| 05 | Remember: A Career Is a Journey, Not a Sprint
Evaluate offers by trajectory, not just terms. | Pg. 11–12 |

01

MOVE ONE

Ask Good Questions — Don't Volunteer the Answers

The instinct to jump into solution mode is strong. Resist it. Your job here is to help her get clear — not to get her a job.

She isn't necessarily trying to recreate the career she left. She has changed since she stepped away, and so has the working world. AI has changed how work gets done. Remote and hybrid expectations have shifted. Recruiting technology, LinkedIn, and screening tools have all evolved past what she last saw. Someone who left the workforce a decade ago missed all of it.

THE SHIFT YOU'RE AIMING FOR

Move her from **"I need a job"** to **"I know what I'm looking for."** The first is a scramble. The second is a search with criteria — and it's your questions that get her there.

SKIP THIS

"You should talk to my friend at..."

"What about working for..."

"You could just..."

TRY THIS

"What do you want work to give you right now?"

"What are you not willing to compromise on?"

"What would success look like in a year?"

The goal isn't to interrogate her — it's to ask the questions that help *her* find the answer. Use the worksheet on the next page as a conversation starter, not a checklist to rush through in one sitting.

WORKSHEET

The Discovery Conversation Guide

Set aside 30 quiet minutes. Ask, then listen — let her write, or write for her. No editorializing until she's done.

1 What do you want work to provide for you at this stage of life? (Income, purpose, identity, connection, structure — name them all.)

2 Is there a specific income number you need? Want? What's the floor?

3 What parts of your previous career did you love? What do you never want to do again?

LOVED

NEVER AGAIN

4 What are you unwilling to compromise on? What are you willing to compromise on?

NON-NEGOTIABLE

FLEXIBLE

5 How much flexibility do you need — and do you actually want office structure and in-person connection more than you think?

6 If money weren't the primary consideration, what work would you want to do?

7 One year from now, what would make this feel like a success?

02

MOVE TWO

Remove the Roadblocks

This is where you have the most overlooked leverage. If she's been the default operator of your household, returning to work can feel less like adding a job and more like adding a second one.

She knows the school calendar, the doctor's appointments, who needs cleats before Saturday's game. She runs the invitations, the camps, the groceries, the laundry, the forms — and the mental load behind all of it that no one notices until it's undone.

When a team member takes on a new role, a good manager doesn't just add it to everything they were already doing. Some tasks get eliminated. Some get delegated. Some get automated. The same principle applies at home.

HELPING (NOT ENOUGH)	OWNING (WHAT WORKS)
• "Just let me know if you need anything." • Waiting to be asked. • Pitching in occasionally, on your terms.	• "I'll handle school pickup Tuesdays and Thursdays." • "I'm taking over the grocery run." • "I own the pediatrician scheduling now."

Before her first day, sit down together and run a full household responsibility audit. The worksheet on the next page walks you through it, task by task.

WORKSHEET

The Household Responsibility Audit

List everything she currently owns — visible tasks and the invisible mental load behind them. Then decide, together, what happens to each one.

TASK / RESPONSIBILITY	ELIMINATE	AUTOMATE	OUTSOURCE	I TAKE IT	KIDS TAKE IT
e.g., School pickup				✓	

✔ The three things I am committing to own — starting this week:

03

MOVE THREE

Invest in the Polish

She's often competing against candidates who never left the workforce. That doesn't mean she's less qualified — it means how she presents matters more.

Think about selling a well-maintained car. You don't hand over the keys while it's covered in crumbs and cleats — you get it detailed first, so the buyer can actually see the value. A professional re-entry deserves the same preparation. This isn't about disguising a career gap; it's about making sure the gap isn't the first — and only — thing an employer sees.

WATCH FOR THIS

Returning professionals often hesitate to spend on themselves because they aren't currently earning: "*Why spend \$1,000 on a resume when I'm not making money?*" This is precisely when the investment matters most. Remind her she's worth it.

The full checklist is on the next page. She won't need everything on it — work through it together and circle what actually applies.

WORKSHEET

The Re-Entry Polish Checklist

Check what applies. Add an owner and a target date so it actually happens.

- ☐ Update and professionally review her resume
- ☐ Refresh her LinkedIn profile and photo
- ☐ Update her professional wardrobe
- ☐ Reconnect with professional associations or alumni groups
- ☐ Join a networking or re-entry group
- ☐ Take a course to refresh an outdated or technical skill
- ☐ Get comfortable with the AI and productivity tools now standard in her field
- ☐ Reconnect with former colleagues and industry contacts
- ☐ Prepare a clear, confident explanation of her career break
- ☐ Set a budget for the above — treat it as an investment, not an expense

\$ Budget we're setting aside for this re-entry investment:

! Her career-break story, in one confident sentence:

04

MOVE FOUR

Provide Strategic Support — Not Job-Search Oversight

There's a real difference between supporting a job search and monitoring it. One feels like partnership. The other feels like performance management.

AVOID

"What did you do today?"

"Did you apply to anything?"

"How many applications is that now?"

OFFER INSTEAD

"Want to build the target company list together tonight?"

"I think I know someone at that firm — want an intro?"

"How can I help you prep for Thursday?"

The highest-leverage exercise you can do together: build a target-company list. Start with companies she'd genuinely like to work for, not job postings. Then look at your *combined* network — former colleagues, college connections, neighbors, school parents. It's usually larger than either of you realizes.

For each target company, go one layer deeper: who leads the function she's interested in, who might be the hiring manager, and who in your network could make an introduction. That turns a passive job search into a strategic one.

WORKSHEET

The Target Company & Network Map

List five to eight target companies. For each, map who you both know who could open a door.

TARGET COMPANY	WHY IT'S A FIT	WHO WE KNOW THERE	NEXT ACTION & OWNER

★ The single best introduction I can personally make this month:

05

MOVE FIVE

Remember: A Career Is a Journey, Not a Sprint

A return-to-work search often takes longer than either of you expects. There will be stretches where nothing seems to move, interviews that don't convert, and eventually — likely — an offer that isn't quite what she hoped for.

The salary may be lower than expected. The title may feel like a step back. The flexibility may fall short. Your instinct will be to evaluate the offer on the spot. Instead, help her think in terms of trajectory: her first role after the break doesn't have to be her final role. It can be a bridge — recent experience, rebuilt confidence, an expanded network, a new industry, or simply the feeling of having a professional identity again.

REFRAME THE QUESTION

Not "Is this the right job?" but **"What does this make possible 12–24 months from now?"**

She may feel excited, guilty, liberated, overwhelmed, and like she's starting over — sometimes all in the same week. That's not a sign anything is wrong. Transition is supposed to feel uncomfortable. Don't mistake her uncertainty for failure.

WORKSHEET

The Trajectory Check

Use this when an offer — or a tough week — makes it hard to see the bigger picture.

WHAT IT MAKES POSSIBLE	WHAT SHE'LL LEARN	WHO SHE'LL MEET

1 Does this move her closer to the career she ultimately wants?

2 What might this role make possible in 12–24 months?

How is she feeling about this, really?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

3 One thing I can say to her this week that reminds her I believe in this:

IN CLOSING

You don't have to get her back to work. You just have to help create the conditions in which she can find her way back.

Believe the skills she built raising your family have real value. Believe a career break doesn't erase the career that came before it. Believe she's allowed to want something for herself — and that her next chapter doesn't have to look like her last one.

This is a shared project. Ask good questions. Remove roadblocks. Invest in the polish. Provide strategic support. And give the process time.

YOUR COMMITMENT

DATE