CAREER PATH: PURVI SHETH

Make Or Break Career Moves

Instead of seeing a break in your career as a failure, see it as an opportunity to reassess your path to the long-term goal—see the way out in order to get back

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WHILE on a career break, re-assess your long-term goals. Are they the same as when you started working? It may not be possible to reconfigure your objectives all at once, but decide on areas you are most likely to be engaged in, going forward. Build skills, competencies, network and participation in places that will be needed in your new avatar. Certifications, development programmes, seminars, presenting papers at interest groups, writing in publications, short-term projects—all add up.

When negotiating your re-entry into the corporate world, it is most important, first, to get one's attitude towards re-entry right! It should not be seen as a situation of "making a compromise". Many people view the process sometimes as a point of persecution and concession. The idea is to understand that one decided to balance one's priorities and therefore the circumstances are different—not less or more in any way. It is obvious that those who chose not to take a break would have a different career trajectory than yours. Competing and comparing yourself with them becomes irrelevant and self defeating the day you decide to take a break.

So, while negotiating, it is essential to have a less defensive stance and a more collaborative approach with the employer. Focus on matching competencies to the role rather than proving that the break should have no impact on the way your candidature is considered. Once you have mapped the roles where you will be most suited, understand the compensation structures for such roles. It is again important to keep in mind that companies don't try to take advantage of your break. But yes, they are taking a risk of sorts being the first employer after the break. It is unknown, even to yourself, how you will cope, where you will fail and succeed and so on. Reestablishing oneself is not an easy process for either side. So, respect the fact that the employer is also partaking in the gamble!

However, don't allow them to be unilateral or unfair. It is not a comparison game, but the value of your potential contribution.

Be clear at the outset and put down what is acceptable to you. Explain where you see the value addition to the employer and focus on tangible delivery goals that can be quantified.

Your designation will depend on the organisation, the job, the sector as well as which stage of your career you had decided to take a break. If you were in a mid or senior role, the chances are that there aren't too many roles in exactly the same level (and hence designations). The title should reflect your position and the impact your job holds. These days, titles aren't rigid or generic and can be fairly creatively provided. Designations are not as important as your role and its deliverables.

Negotiating time and other issues. If you have to negotiate work timings and other issues, be open and candid at the outset. If your timings are specific, don't overpromise as it can backfire! Most companies have a time policy and your best bet is to work within that framework and let them know the hours you are available for. In case you can't work all hours onsite, but could be available online or on phone, be sure to tell your employer and factor those in as work hours.

Dealing with double breaks If one needs to take two breaks, it will certainly affect the career growth. However, if these breaks are imperative, one should redefine one's goals and opt for jobs in fields with longer life spans. Compensation, titles and level parities should not become primary issues, but job satisfaction, role content and flexibility in timings must take precedence.

People who come back with revised priorities, may come back with refreshed perspectives and be seen as a voice of saner reason! This can often go in your favor and allow you to rise sooner than you had imagined! ❏

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