

## **TWF'S BEST PRACTICE GUIDES TO DEVELOPING THE PIPELINE OF FEMALE TALENT**

# **Success Markers for Return-to-Work Programmes for Women**

May 2016

# INTRODUCTION

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TWF is delighted to present this complimentary resource for return to work (“RTW”) programmes for women.

Other resources in the same series, comprising Success Markers for Mentoring Programmes for Women and Effective Women’s Networks, are available at [www.twfhk.org](http://www.twfhk.org)



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# RTW PROGRAMMES: A SNAPSHOT

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## KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF RTW PROGRAMMES

- Initially designed for women as a means of bringing mothers back into the workforce. The concept has since expanded to include former military veterans, those with a disability, individuals made redundant post global financial crisis, people who have taken time out for elder care etc.
- Candidates tend to be experienced professionals who have been out of work for several years.
- Most RTW programmes offer no or nominal pay but candidates have the chance to prove their competencies, regain their confidence and re-establish a network.
- Organisations generally provide RTW programme participants with a trial period of a set number of weeks during which time, they may undergo refresher training and mentoring.

## ORGANISATIONS OFFERING RTW PROGRAMMES IN HK

- Bank of America Merrill Lynch
- Bloomberg
- Credit Suisse
- Goldman Sachs
- Hong Kong Stock Exchange
- JP Morgan
- Morgan Stanley

## RTW PROGRAMME INTERMEDIARIES

- Back to Work
- FDM

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# WHY DO WOMEN NEED THEM?

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**ACCORDING TO SYLVIA ANN-HEWLETT'S SEMINAL RESEARCH PUBLISHED IN HBR, A SIGNIFICANT PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN OFF-RAMP AND FIND IT DIFFICULT TO RETURN TO THE WORKFORCE, ESPECIALLY ON THE SAME TERMS AS WHEN THEY LEFT <sup>1</sup>:**

- Some 58% of senior female talent experience career interruptions that side-track them from traditional linear career paths. This negatively impacts their earning power, long-term promotional prospects and ambition, causing many women to switch employers or quit work altogether
- Although childcare is commonly seen as the main driver for off-ramping, elder care is becoming increasingly important: 30% of respondents in 2010 cited elder care as the reason, compared to 24% in 2004. Off-ramping due to elder care also often occurs at the peak of women's careers
- Reasons for off-ramping vary: Over a quarter of the sampled women were single and just under 40% were childless. More than 40% of childless off-rampers cited an unsatisfactory or disappointing career as a major factor, while 28% responded that they felt stalled
- Only 73% of highly qualified women who want to return to the workforce succeed in finding a job; only 40% of these were able to find full-time, mainstream roles
- Compared to 2004, women who off-ramp today are staying out of work for longer
- The research also suggests that the non-linear career path is not a luxury for boom times but the way many women want to structure their careers regardless of the economy

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[1] SOURCE: Harvard Business Review <http://hbr.org/2010/06/off-ramps-and-on-ramps-revisited> ; <http://hbr.org/2010/07/as-careers-paths-change-make-o>

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# WHY SHOULD COMPANIES RUN THEM?

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**MORE & MORE RESEARCH SHOWS THAT A DIVERSE WORKFORCE MAKES BUSINESS SENSE. MCKINSEY'S 2015 "DIVERSITY MATTERS" REPORT, FOUND THAT 'COMPANIES IN THE TOP QUARTILE FOR GENDER DIVERSITY ARE 15% MORE LIKELY TO HAVE FINANCIAL RETURNS ABOVE THEIR RESPECTIVE NATIONAL INDUSTRY MEDIANS.'**<sup>2</sup>

**In addition:**

**Successful RTW programmes:**

- build loyalty with employees and result in enhanced brand reputation as an employer of choice
- provide an alternative channel for tapping into strong, experienced talent
- allow for a more diverse middle and senior leadership team
- allow returnees to refine their skill set for a variety of business streams

**Returnees:**

- bring with them a wealth of experience and transferable skills
- demonstrate an increased level of engagement and purpose
- tend to have high levels of motivation to succeed

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[2] SOURCE: McKinsey & Company <https://web.duke.edu/equity/toolkit/documents/DiversityMatters.pdf>

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# MAIN BARRIERS TO WOMEN RETURNING TO WORK

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## DISCONNECTED DURING EXTENDED CAREER BREAK

- Loss of, or limited, networking with peers & business contacts
- Difficulty in finding meaningful part-time or consulting work
- Effort needed to remain abreast of industry developments
- Challenges exacerbated for those relocating from overseas

## RE-INTEGRATION CHALLENGES

- The role/level to come back to doesn't meet returnee expectations
- Career breaks can have significant impact on earnings and prospects
- Managing work/life commitments can be more complicated
- Returnees can question how work-ready they are and lack confidence

## SCEPTICAL HIRING MANAGERS

- Many hiring managers are concerned about relevant technical skills, focus & commitment when they see CVs with career gaps
- Most search firms discount candidates who have taken a career break and don't put them forward

## LACK OF RTW PROGRAMMES

- Very few employers have RTW programmes or proactively look for RTW candidates
- Current sectors are limited to investment finance, IT and other back-office roles

## LACK OF ROLE MODELS AND SUCCESS STORIES

- Many successful women leaders have had a career break but this is not widely communicated or included in CVs
- Organisations can do more to promote the success of RTW programmes

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# SUCCESS FACTORS FOR RTW PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN

1

## OBJECTIVES



Organisations need to be clear on the rationale and metrics for success for RTW initiatives

2

## APPROACH



Employers can adopt a DIY approach or use an intermediary who will manage recruitment and training

3

## RECRUITMENT



Non traditional recruitment methods to source applicants, including social media and employee referrals, are generally more effective

4

## STRUCTURE



Programmes need to be flexible enough to support women who may be unclear about the role they want and allow for mid-course corrections

5

## SUPPORT



Support networks/mentors are key to the successful reintegration of a returnee

6

## LEADERSHIP BUY-IN



Senior leadership buy-in is critical and helps to positively position the programme with multiple stakeholders

**KEY POINTS:**

- Organisations should be able to articulate how the programme helps address gender diversity gaps by introducing a pipeline of experienced female talent, allowing hiring decisions to be based on meaningful work trials
- Firms might also have other PR or CSR-related motivations for launching RTW programmes
- Clarity upfront about the prospects of candidates being hired post-programme is important to set expectations appropriately for returnees

**Review your diversity, human capital management & CSR goals**

- How evolved are your organisation's diversity policies?
- What are your biggest gaps/priorities in terms of human capital management
- Is supporting women to achieve their potential one of your CSR goals?

**Consider how your RTW Programme addresses any gaps & priorities**

- Are you looking to fill permanent roles or develop a pool of flexible contract staff through your RTW programme, or is recruitment not the priority?
- For many RTW candidates, the opportunity of gaining current work experience, training & access to new networks is already very valuable – even without the guarantee of a permanent role
- Having clear objectives facilitates impact assessment and assessing whether the programme met its goals

# 2

## APPROACH



## DIY or leverage an intermediary

### KEY POINT

- Make an informed choice about your selected approach to establishing a RTW programme, taking into account your organisation's resources and capacity
- Consider if your programme is a one-off or whether it can be repeated

**Consider how your RTW programme should be established and structured**



- Assess if your organisation has the right resource/capacity to set up and maintain a sustainable RTW programme
- Can you borrow approaches/materials from existing internships or other programmes
- Consider piloting with just one or two divisions

**Benefits of using an intermediary**



- If specialist skills (e.g., IT) are required, this might lend itself well to using an intermediary who also provide IT training
- Partnering with an intermediary reduces the recruitment/retention risk since participants are usually initially contracted out to clients for a defined period
- Using an intermediary also reduces the strain on internal resources in terms of recruitment and training

# 3

## RECRUITMENT



## Look beyond traditional recruitment channels

### KEY POINTS

- “Traditional” recruitment channels aren’t generally the most effective ways to identify RTW candidates who tend not to be on the radar of search firms and don’t have current networks of industry contacts
- Alternative recruitment methods that have proven to be effective include social media, employee referrals and tapping academic alumni networks

### Reassess traditional methods



- Challenge search firms on how many “non-traditional” candidates they have on their books
- Assess whether the expectations you are communicating on your website or in job descriptions about current/recent job experience are discouraging RTW candidates

### Incorporate non-traditional methods



- Consider using social media to expand the pool of talent you are tapping
- How can you incentivise employees to refer RTW candidates?
- Can you partner with re-training institutions to get a first look at their graduates?

# 4

## STRUCTURE



Facilitate broad exposure & networking and allow for mid-course correction

### KEY POINTS

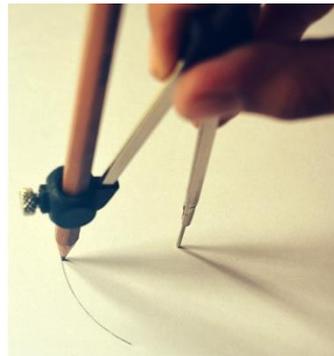
- Since RTW candidates are potentially unsure about the right role/function for them given how their interests and skill-sets might have evolved, programmes should ideally let candidates try different roles and engage with different business streams and divisions
- Recognising that RTW candidates are possibly unused to presenting and working in teams, many RTW programmes provide training in “soft” skills as well as technical skills
- Having interim check points allows for mid-course corrections if a RTW experience is not working out

**Are the content & structure broad and flexible enough?**



- Does the structure allow candidates to explore different roles and functions?
- Is the “soft skills” training appropriate for the returnees’ expectations, experience and seniority?
- Do candidates have the opportunity to meet a range of senior business leaders and hiring managers?

**Does the structure include interim check-points?**



- Does the programme include interim check points with participants and their managers?
- Does the structure anticipate and allow for mid-course corrections if there are problems or if the candidate progresses at a faster or slower rate than first anticipated?

# 5

## SUPPORT



Provide peer support and encourage sharing of experience & advice

### KEY POINTS

- Leverage internal women's networks and mentors or buddies to support and help RTW participants integrate into the organization
- Peer buy-in and support is key to a successful returnee experience through the transition back into the workplace
- Showcasing successful role models who have come back from a career break or followed a non-linear career path is important and helpful

### Assess the support available to returnees



- How can you leverage your internal women's network to ensure the success of your RTW programme?
- Are there other "buddies" that can coach and mentor RTW participants?
- Is there a platform for former/existing returnees to share their experience & advice?

### Assess the organisational culture regarding D&I initiatives generally



- Are your organisation's policies, practices and culture supportive of D&I initiatives generally?
- Does the firm already have other coaching, mentoring and buddy systems in place?
- Smart use of technology can enable employees to remain connected during off-ramping and facilitates reintegration

# 6

## LEADERSHIP BUY-IN



## Senior leaders buy-in is critical

### KEY POINTS

- The active participation and endorsement of senior leaders sets the tone and will influence hiring managers to take returnees more seriously
- The engagement of senior leaders and successful returnees will help positively position the programme as a core part of the culture as an example for all employees
- Proactively managing the “brand” of the programme with multiple stakeholders is critical

### Identify & engage the key senior leaders



- Who are the key business leaders whose engagement is critical for the success of the programme?
- How can they be effectively engaged in promoting the programme and getting others to support?
- What are their concerns and how can you address them?

### Actively manage the brand of the programme



- Identify the key stakeholders (RTW candidates themselves, colleagues, managers, senior leaders, external partners)
- Are you proactively managing the programme’s “brand equity” to encourage external and internal stakeholders to sponsor returnees and otherwise lend their support?
- How is the programme perceived both internally and externally and are you measuring and sharing successful returnee stories?

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## GENDER-DIVERSITY ECOSYSTEM

Gender diversity embedded into business strategy and culture



### CEO AND MANAGEMENT COMMITMENT

- » Vocal and active CEO
- » Commitment and buy-in from management
- » Fully integrated in business strategy



### DEVELOPING WOMEN AS LEADERS

- » Internal/External networking and community building
- » Mentoring and sponsorship
- » Training and coaching dedicated to women



### COLLECTIVE ENABLERS

- » HR policies and processes
- » Relevant data indicators and reporting
- » Targets and accountability

SOURCE: McKinsey Women Matters Research

#### GLOSSARY

- **Returnship** | Goldman Sachs coined the phrase ‘returnship’ and piloted a US programme in 2008 before launching (2009) and relaunching (2015) a Hong Kong RTW programme
- **Relauncher** | term used by Carol Fishman Cohen in her 2015 TED talk to describe people who have taken career breaks for elder care/childcare reasons, to deal with health issues or pursue a personal interest
- **Off-ramp & on-ramp** | likely originating from Sylvia Ann Hewlett (Hewlett & Luce, 2005), off-ramping refers to the process of exiting the workforce and on-ramping is the process of re-entering the workforce after taking a break

#### USEFUL LINKS

<http://www.irelaunch.com>

<http://www.fleximums.com/>

<http://onrampfellowship.com>

<http://flexworklife.my>

<http://uk.virginmoney.com/virgin/women-in-finance>

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