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*a return-to-work guide*

# HOW TO EXPLAIN A GAP ON YOUR RESUME

Caregiving, parenting, health, a layoff, or a break: how to talk about your time away with confidence and get back to work.

Raising children, caring for a parent, recovering from an illness, a layoff, a move, a sabbatical, going back to school. Career gaps are a normal part of working life, and far more common than most people think.

As an HR leader, I can tell you that a gap rarely costs someone a job. A nervous, defensive explanation of the gap sometimes does. This guide shows you how to talk about your time away with confidence and get back to work.

### In this guide


1. What hiring managers actually think about gaps
2. How to show a gap on your resume
3. Your gap story in three sentences
4. Count what you did during the gap
5. Refresh your skills and confidence
6. Returnships and other ways back in
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## 1. What hiring managers actually think about gaps

When a hiring manager sees a gap, they usually have two quiet questions: **Are your skills current?** and **Are you ready and committed to work now?** They're not looking for a detailed account of your personal life. Answer those two questions, and the gap stops mattering.

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## 2. How to show a gap on your resume

- **Be honest about dates.** Using years only (2019 to 2022) is common and acceptable, but don't hide or invent dates.
- **Consider naming the gap** when it's long, in one line: "Career break: full-time caregiver for a family member, 2021 to 2024."
- **List relevant activity** during the gap: freelance work, volunteering, courses, certifications.
- **Lead with a strong summary** that focuses on your skills and the role you want now.

You never have to share medical details or other private information. "Personal health matter, now fully resolved" or "family caregiving" is enough.

## 3. Your gap story in three sentences

Use this structure: **what happened, what you kept doing, and why you're ready now.**

> CAREGIVING
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> "I took two years off to care for my father. During that time I kept my certification current and did part-time bookkeeping for a local nonprofit. Now he's in great care, and I'm excited to get back to full-time accounting."

> RAISING CHILDREN
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> "I stepped away for four years to raise my kids. I stayed involved in my field through PTA budgeting and an online project management course. My youngest is now in school full time, and I'm ready to bring my experience back to a team."

> AFTER A LAYOFF
>
> "My role was eliminated in a restructuring, and I used the time to finish a data analytics certificate and take on two consulting projects. I'm now focused on a full-time analyst role."

Say it calmly, then move on to what you can do for them. Don't over-explain or apologize.

## 4. Count what you did during the gap

Life outside paid work builds real skills. Managing a household budget, coordinating medical care, organizing a fundraiser, leading a volunteer team, or running a small side business all involve planning, negotiation, and problem-solving. Include what's relevant, described in professional terms, the same way you would any job.

## 5. Refresh your skills and confidence

- Read recent job postings in your field and note the tools and skills that are new since you left.

- Take one short course or certification that closes the biggest gap.
- Reconnect with former colleagues for coffee. Ask what's changed and what they'd focus on.
- Join a professional association or attend one industry event.
- Practice interviewing out loud, especially your gap story, until it feels natural.

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## 6. Returnships and other ways back in

- **Returnships** are paid programs, offered by some larger companies, designed for experienced professionals returning after a break. They often include training and mentoring, and some lead to permanent roles.
- **Contract or temporary work** gets current experience on your resume quickly.
- **Part-time roles** can be a stepping stone back to full time.
- **Former employers** often welcome back people they already know and trust.

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## 7. Your return-to-work plan

1. Write your three-sentence gap story and practice it out loud.
2. Update your resume with honest dates and a one-line career break if needed.
3. Add relevant skills and activities from your time away.
4. Take one course that closes your biggest skill gap.
5. Reconnect with five former colleagues.
6. Search for returnships, contract roles, and part-time bridges in your field.

*ready for your next step?*

# LET'S WORK TOGETHER

## Book a strategy call with Elena

One-on-one help with your interviews, resume, salary negotiation, or next career move.

**Book your strategy call**

## Sign up for the next networking session

Two hours, live, with a small group. Practice real conversations and leave with scripts you can use the next day.

**Save your seat**

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