

"A must-have guide to get more women back
into the workplace" Arianna Huffington

SHE'S BACK

YOUR GUIDE TO
RETURNING TO WORK



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“If you’re a professional woman who wants to unlock your potential at the same time as raising a family, this book is a must-read. If you’re a CEO or business owner who wants to unlock the potential of your whole workforce, this book is for you. And if you care about future-proofing the UK economy at a time of heightened economic uncertainty, this is essential reading.”

SARAH WOOD, OBE



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<http://mybook.to/shesback>

1.

Prologue



It's tough out there. Whether you're looking to return to work after a break, change direction completely, or step up again after stepping back, for whatever reason, be under no illusion; it can be a slog.

We are bringing some data to the table. Evidence about what's happening today and information about what you need to do to reignite your career. We use real life stories as inspiration for what's possible and have gathered hints, tips, strategies and tactics to help you make your return a success.

WHY WOMEN STEP BACK

Women need and want to work. They've trained for it. They're good at it. They like it. Fact. Many women regularly shine at work. But here's the rub: many women also want children. Always have, always will. They often take on the bulk of caring responsibilities when family members are struck by ill health. Turns out they're pretty good at that too.

For thousands of women, the sad story is that work and family don't mix. A lack of flexibility at work forces their



hands. The prohibitive cost of childcare means work doesn't pay. Too many women are forced to choose. Worse still, when circumstances change and they are in a position to return, they find their way back blocked.

The result? Talented, well trained, brilliant women find themselves on the bench, unable to secure well paid, fulfilling and challenging work.

Surely we should have this fixed by now? Not just for women, but for their partners, employers and families. It can be different.

This book nails what's happening now and why. It pinpoints why, despite all the rhetoric and well-meaning initiatives, we still see thousands of women leaving successful careers in their droves. And it outlines a way forwards.

It's underpinned by our qualitative and quantitative research, conducted across a range of sectors, which tells the story of thousands of women who feel unable to fulfill their potential.

It's inspired by the amazing women who contributed to that research:

“I'm 40 years old, my kids are 10 and 12; I have twenty years to make a discernible impact. Where do I go? What do I do? Who do I talk to? How do I get back in the game?”

It's also for younger women who are looking ahead and can't see anyone balancing work and family in a way that

they aspire to do. Women who want to see that working life doesn't end after kids. It's for the youngest women of all who think this will never happen to them. And it's for anyone – man or woman – who hopes to find both meaning and balance in their working lives.

WHY US?

There's already a cacophony of views. Campaigns aplenty. Non-stop networking. A tsunami of column inches. Endless tomes. All worthy, and well-intended, and yet to date a whole stack of talking and writing seems to be leading to a whole heap of nothing.

What are we bringing to this overloaded table?

1. We sought answers to some tough questions

The value of having more women in work has been proven by lots of oft-cited research. What was missing was hardcore facts, data and numbers around women who drop out. Why do they leave? What do they do? Would they return? Under what circumstances? What would help? What's getting in the way?

It struck us that no one was asking these questions. So we did. Fuelled by a heady mix of fury, pragmatism, chutzpah and a weighty contact book – earned through years of sheer hard graft – off we set. We noticed a lot of well-intentioned, yet peripheral, discrete activity and anecdote rarely turned into actions that made a difference. We wanted data. Hardcore ammunition.



We adopted a business-like approach to this phenomenon.

Our unique research was sponsored by 10 best-in-class organisations across sectors as diverse as advertising, law and banking. We reached 2,000 individual women and crunched responses to over 40,000 questions. We ran lively, candid workshops with women who had left and women who had stayed. We listened to their views, and we read reams of insightful, honest, heartfelt and useful feedback outlining their experiences, opinions and learning. Countless awe-inspiring, capable women.

Key things we found:

They're not happy. Assumptions about about these women. Ladies languishing in blissful splendor, tuning in to Radio 4, volunteering when it suits, nipping to Pilates, meeting for coffee. All quietly content with their lot.

Barmy, outdated sexist nonsense. Passionate voices yelled the opposite. Their frustration leapt off the page. Women wrote line after line describing wasted skills, thwarted attempts to return, disappointment and disillusionment.

85% of women told us they did want to return. And exactly what is getting in the way.

2. We've had 60 years' experience working with and in businesses that STILL haven't got this sorted

A BIT ABOUT US

Lisa Unwin was a partner in Consulting at Arthur Andersen, where she advised clients on large-scale change projects. She later became Director of Brand and Communication at Deloitte.

In 2008, she took a career break and helped with numeracy and literacy at a local school, trained as a writer, became a magistrate and spent a lot of time at the school gates. In 2014, keen to return to professional life, she found that opportunities were limited and that she was surrounded by many women who, like her, had taken a break and could simply not return to operate at a level that fulfilled their potential.

Deb Khan has over 18 years' experience running her own business, developing long term relationships with a number of international creative, media and tech companies as well as helping luxury brand clients, architectural practices, leading charities and government departments.

Deb's specialty is people – leadership, creativity, team performance and culture. She has delivered bespoke leadership programmes, helped teams win pitches, led cultural change programmes and helped redefine organisations' positioning. She has a background in the



creative industries including working at the National Theatre and The Royal Opera House. She has worked as a senior teacher. She has had a lot of jobs and knows about non-linear career paths. She has worked with many women in the creative sector, just not enough of them at the top.

Together, Lisa and Deb* bring deep creative and professional expertise. They have seen the same problems and issues play out in organisations as diverse as law firms and advertising agencies. They have a shared passion to do something about it. They set up **She's Back** and quickly realised they had hit a nerve.

People identified with this frustration. It was their story too. They began to join in the debate, saying:

“This is me” or “my wife”, or “my sister”, or “my friend” and “This is wrong.”

*As we have written this book together, when we describe events in our own lives we refer to ourselves by our first names, Lisa or Deb.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The **first section** of this book is about what's really going on today.

In a **“Manifesto for Women”** we talk about why it's important to recognise that women's careers often follow different trajectories from those of men. Lives are long and complex and career opportunities and pathways need to reflect that.

“What's Going on Today” is an antidote to every website we've ever read that makes grand claims for commitments to equality and diversity, whilst in the real world, boards are still 80% male. It outlines the difference between corporate rhetoric and reality. It addresses the reasons why progress has been slow and why there is hope that change is possible.

If you find yourself at home wondering what happened to your career and your “pre-children self” be assured, you're not alone. This chapter explains why we're all in it together.

Section one includes a summary of our research and ends with a chapter called **“Why Work Needs Women.”**

A deliberate departure from those well-trodden lines about companies with more women on board performing better. Why? Because that means nothing to the person making a hiring decision; and it means nothing to a woman who is



wondering why it seems too difficult to be given a chance to return to a role she can do standing on her head. You need to know the real arguments to make. Why addressing this issue really is important. For you, for work and for the economy.

Section two is more practical. In it we examine the strategies, tools, techniques and tactics that you're going to need to get yourself back. And stay there. It's full of examples, personal stories, lists, exercises all designed to give you some practicable, actionable ideas and motivation.

The stories described are not about "Superwomen". They are real women who are making mistakes; struggling; having small successes; ploughing on; getting on with it. Women who are inspiring because they want to make a difference and are prepared to help. Women of all ages. Ordinary yet still remarkable women.

Finally, we've called the last section "**If Not Now, Then When**". It's there because, despite the glacial pace of progress over the last twenty years, we really do believe that the time is right for change. The wave of movements around women's rights at work, along with the digital revolution and other macro trends offer hope that work can and should be done in a different way. One that works better for both women **and** men.

WHO IT'S FOR

We originally wrote this book for women who had taken a career break. Over time, though, we have come to realise that

the messages it contains are relevant for a far wider audience. For women who have not taken a break but who might have stepped back or stepped to the side; for men who want to achieve a better work-life balance; for anyone who is thinking of taking a break and needs to understand the potential impact on their long-term career.

Where we use the word women, think “people”.

HOW TO USE IT

We’re all busy. The book is designed so that you can read each chapter stand alone. Each chapter will have some prose, outlining our observations about what’s going on today and suggesting some actions. The practical chapters all finish with a summary of the action steps we recommend.

We have drawn on the work of many other experts and these are referenced in each chapter. We also suggest where to go for more information and stimulation and there’s a bibliography of other useful resources at the end of the book.

Dip in and out. Complete the exercises when you have the right amount of time. Some of them need you to be able to step away from the chaos that is day to day life: to find the right place and time to create a space for reflection. Time to take stock of the world around you and your place within it.

We are not writing this book because we have navigated our careers perfectly or because we are shining examples of how to build a career that lasts. Far from it. Throughout the book we share stories of people who bring to life the points



we are making; they are all real people and they too would be at pains to tell you they made plenty of mistakes. All the stories are real, though are anonymised due to personal or commercially sensitive reasons.

From time to time, we will introduce articles or thought pieces that illustrate points in a slightly different way. Here's one about perfection and how much we feel it is over-rated.

WHY FLAWED FEMALES ARE ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS

Inspired by 9 Things Successful Women Never Do

Reading this blog by an ex female FBI agent (the only woman on her squad) inspired us to put pen to paper. We read the list of the things successful women never do and fell about laughing. We were pretty guilty of all of them. As are many women we know. And yet, we're OK. In fact, we're more than OK. So let's celebrate our flaws:

1. Successful women never ignore their fears. Our tribe, by contrast, are full of them. We're terrified of being found out. Of not being the perfect career woman /parent/partner/worker/housemaker/daughter. We muddle along. We make it up as we go. It makes us human, approachable & generally nice to be around.

2. Successful women never run from conflict. What? Our lives are defined by conflicting demands. We're constantly trying to avoid them blowing up in our face. Don't have time for the hassle. Too much to do.

3. Successful women never listen to their inner critic. Forget that. It's one of the loudest voices in our heads. "You're rubbish at craft, don't even bother to try to make the school book day outfit." "That job's out of your reach, you can only do 90% of what they're looking for." At worst this particular flaw stops us achieving our potential - but it is also what makes us look for help. What drives us to work with others. To help them. To be part of a team.

4. Successful women never look at their past as a mistake. Most women we know happily acknowledge lives littered with mistakes. The wrong boyfriend, the wrong choice of degree, the time we didn't put ourselves forward for promotion, when we didn't stand up to a bullying boss, when we didn't stand up against open misogyny at work. You know what? We have a sense of humour. We can laugh at ourselves. Recognising those mistakes makes us more determined to be better in the future - and to stop our daughters making the same mistakes all over again.

5. Successful women never miss opportunities to shine. See 4. One of our biggest mistakes, we now realise, is letting others shine; doing all the ground work only for someone else to take the credit; expecting to be recognised simply because of the fabulous work we do. Big mistake.

6. Successful women never fail to keep their cool. Ever tried to get a screaming toddler into a pushchair when they are determined to stay out of it? Kept calm when your teenage daughter yells obscenities & slams a door in your face? Smiled at a single work colleague who says, "Leaving early then?"



when you walk out of the door at 5 to begin another day's work at home? We are flawed. We lose our tempers. We have a strop, stamp our feet, tear our hair out. Then we find another flawed woman to whom we can relay our story, have a laugh & move on.

7. **Successful women never fail to do their research.** Nope. What we tend to do is find another fabulously flawed woman, ask her what she'd do/buy/say and then copy that

8. **Successful women never say quit.**

9. **See what we did there?**

We've made mistakes. We compromise. We put others first. We're human & humble. We put ourselves down far too often. Yes, we need to be far better at shouting out about how fabulous we are. We're utterly, utterly flawed. But boy are we fabulous with it.



ORDER NOW

In a world of MeToo and Time's Up, She's Back. And so are you.

Women's careers twist and turn. Women step back or step away for so many reasons. Then, let's face it, returning is tough.

Whether you are coming back after a break, or looking to ramp up a level, this book is an essential guide and helps you succeed.

You'll learn the truth about how the recruitment market really works; how to craft a narrative that explains your value; mobilise a network to support your ambitions and find work that will work for you.

Examples of real women's struggles and winning strategies provide inspiration and will enthuse you about how to make your own comeback.

Lisa and Deb draw on years of research across several different sectors and their experience of working with and listening to the stories of thousands of women to provide a fresh, pragmatic and above all useful handbook for today's fast evolving job market.

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