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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com

90 DAYS | JUNE 16, 2009

Making an Easy Re-Entry Into the Work Force

By [DIANA MIDDLETON](#)

If you've been unemployed for months and have finally found a job, you're likely thrilled at first. But anxiety often follows that excitement. Starting any new job is hard, and coming back to work after a long layoff can be even harder. You have to re-establish a routine, refresh your skills and rebuild your confidence. Here's how to make a successful re-entry:

Strengthen your skills and knowledge. Read industry blogs and trade publications to get current on news and trends. Pay attention to what skills seem most in demand -- if your expertise is out of date, look for ways to bone up. Ask your new boss to describe your duties as specifically as possible to determine where you may need to improve, says Roy Cohen, a New York executive coach and career counselor. One of his clients, a risk manager, bought software to learn new ways to evaluate credit decisions before he started a new job. "Always ask your supervisor if there's any research you should be doing, materials that would be helpful, people you should be talking to," Mr. Cohen says. "Businesses don't have much tolerance for a learning curve."

Get back into a routine. If you've grown accustomed to calling the couch your office and pajamas your work attire, shift into a work routine a couple of weeks before your first day. Do a test run of how long it will take you to shower and drive to your new office.

Be prepared for emotional volatility. It's hard to be the new kid on the block, especially if your self-confidence took a hit during unemployment, says Barbara LaRock, a Reston, Va., career coach. "Natural introverts will feel especially drained after their first few weeks on a job after a layoff," Ms. LaRock says.

Decide how to handle questions about your layoff. Your new co-workers may ask about your work history, so your layoff will probably come up. "You don't want to bare your soul or sound too bitter," says Linda Dominguez, a Los Angeles executive coach. "But you also don't want to keep it a secret." Nowadays, most co-workers won't raise their eyebrows if you tell them you were laid off, Ms. Dominguez says. You can simply tell them where you worked, explain that you got caught in a round of restructuring and that your job was one of many cut.

Start rebuilding your office network. Find out who the most influential people are in the office, and who can help get things done. Become a keen observer and networker. See who leads team meetings and commands attention in the office. Ask your supervisor to make introductions and ask colleagues who is helpful. Have lunch as often as you can with co-workers, especially when you first start, says Lori Davila, an Atlanta executive coach. "Discovering those key contacts means you can get up to speed quicker than anyone else," Ms. Davila says.

Don't make the same mistakes twice. Your layoff may not have been your fault, but it is worth assessing whether your own behavior made you vulnerable. "I was working with a client who was overly chatty at work, and it created the impression that he wasn't busy enough," says Mr. Cohen. "Even though he was still productive, he addressed that behavior after his layoff."

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Printed in The Wall Street Journal, page D14

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