

60% OF VIRTUAL MACHINES ARE LESS SECURE
THAN THEIR PHYSICAL COUNTERPARTS



Careers

Networking From Home

Jenna Goudreau, 03.23.10, 5:20 PM ET

Julie Clark, now a Seattle-based business owner of real estate company [SharedBusinessSpace.com](#), was unexpectedly laid off from her commercial real estate job in January 2009. The shocking loss of the position and income came with a second punch: She wouldn't be allowed back to her office to retrieve her contact database, which stored over 15 years of professional and personal information.

Like many on a career break--elected or imposed--Clark was faced with rebuilding her professional network from home. And in her case, rebuilding it from scratch.

She started by coming up with a short list of people with whom she wanted to remain in touch. Clark chose those that were influential in the industry, people she'd worked closely with in the past and others with whom she had a good rapport. She phoned each one and later followed up with an e-mail.

In the next several months, while also caring for her infant twins, Clark created an assertive networking strategy that combined online social media tools, e-mail updates and face-to-face meetings. By keeping in frequent contact with her professional peers, she felt ready and confident to launch her new business by the end of the year.

Even now, Clark knows she may end up re-entering the corporate world, so she hopes to maintain both her close and extended relationships via a quarterly newsletter, devoting an hour per week to both Facebook and Twitter and continuing to meet with her "VIPs" regularly.

A career break, especially for those staying home with children, can often lead to professional disconnection and isolation. It's critical, however, to keep up with and grow your network to aid a new career or future workplace re-entry and to boost personal confidence.

"I work with hundreds of women in this situation," says Carol Fishman Cohen, founder of on-ramping resource [iRelaunch.com](#) and co-author of *Back on the Career Track*, who notes that networking becomes even harder the longer you're out of the workforce.

"You must take a broad-brush approach," she advises, "because mixing up your networking approach is the most realistic way to be consistent."

Cohen suggests creating a networking web that includes people from the past, present and future. The "past" group includes former coworkers and people with whom you grew up or attended school. The "present" group encompasses those in your current social circle--people you volunteer with, friends and spouses of friends. Cohen's "future" group is one that you create yourself by organizing an effort that's important to you, perhaps a charity project or college interest group.

Once you pinpoint the right people, choose how best to maintain the connections. "Don't just sit in your house sending out e-mails all the time," Cohen says.

She did some of her best interim networking at an annual Christmas get-together with former colleagues. While she was taking a six-year break from corporate finance to care for her four children, every year she would get together with co-workers from a previous job at investment banking firm Drexel Burnham Lambert.

The event allowed her to keep those past professional relationships active without doing much work, and it eventually led to a job. Once she felt ready to go back to work, she floated the idea that she might be looking. A former colleague who had once

been her junior had been climbing the ranks while she was on break, and by then was in a great position to help.

"Do not forget about the people who reported to you," Cohen cautions, "because these people have been moving up and are happy to help you because of your previous relationship."

Of course you can't do it all. Often those who aren't in the workforce are still working really hard at home, so Michelle Tillis Lederman, a career coach and founder of corporate training company [Executive Essentials](#), recommends that you set limits to networking. The mother of two allocates five hours per week to phone calls, lunches or events so that she is able to manage other priorities. For some, she says, a time limit helps keep them from overdoing it. For others, it's a target to hit and will aid consistency.

Plus, it may not be easy or feasible for you to meet in person frequently, due to domestic responsibilities or location. That's when online resources can be a huge help. Lederman suggests using social media sites like LinkedIn and Twitter to keep your name in the conversation.

Also, on Facebook you can interact with different communities by setting up a fan page or following professional groups and reaching out to members. To use Clark's example, you may want to send out a newsletter that hits a lot of acquaintances at once and lets them know what you're up to. She uses the e-mail marketing Web site [ConstantContact](#) to customize hers.

While it's important for women on a career break to continue reaching out to professionals, it's equally important for women still working to maintain relationships with those staying at home. Jacqueline Veit, a litigation partner at Golenbock Eiseman Assor Bell & Peskoe LLP, has lost many contacts in her network when they stepped out to raise children, often choosing to stay home permanently or to start smaller businesses.

At 46, working full-time, she sometimes becomes frustrated that her male colleagues have hardly lost any of their networks and continue getting referrals and introductions. She believes that women should make a special effort to help each other professionally, no matter what point they're at in their personal lives and careers. Most women on career breaks find it interesting to stay plugged in and helpful if they decide to return, she says.

Likewise, if the same women kept their ears to the ground for opportunities or contacts for those still in the workforce, the female network could be maintained. "I think women support each other very well in life," says Veit, "but it's important to maintain these professional networks too."

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