

Ask the Career Coach: Juggling Job Search and Family

How do you balance looking for new employment while embracing the time with your family?

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Dear Career Coach Lisa,

I was laid off and have been home approximately three months. Juggling my home, kids and the job search is amazingly challenging. I never realized how much you can get involved in the community, at school and occasionally relaxing. Since I let go of my child care due to budget concerns, how do I convince my spouse to join in carrying the load with me?

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It is easy to get involved in many things within your community, your children's schools and find ways to fill your day with activities. Sometimes after a layoff, individuals take the liberty of doing things or getting involved with activities that have high interests or just take the privilege of doing something they have not been able to do while working.

You need to develop a new routine. You need to establish new guidelines for the household. Your layoff has affected you and the family, although you feel the immediate impact. Your routine no longer exists as you knew it. You begin to juggle things that you would not have taken on in the past given the structure you had to follow. Think through what you have taken on that you did not do while working. What has changed? In your case, letting go of child care does have a significant impact on your schedule.

Think through your goals. Is it to find a new position right away? What will you need if and when you return to work? Is it to take a break for a designated time period? As you define your goals, then you can plan and create additional changes in your household.

In the meantime while you are determining your longer term goals, you may need to enlist transitional support from spouse or significant others, family members or neighbors. Transitional times can be stressful when you are assessing your skills and determining what you want next on the career front.

Solicit support from all members of your household. If your goal is to find another position right away, then your job search is your priority. Ask your family to join in planning the week's agenda and see how they can help. You may be surprised by the offerings you receive.

As a mom, I am so used to handling it all that it took some time to realize that asking for help was important. It opened the discussion on what needed to be done, what could be let go of, and how we, as a family, could reshuffle the responsibilities left.

Explain to your family that searching for a job takes more energy than being in one. You are networking, meeting with people, exploring opportunities, attending professional association meetings, joining job search groups, taking classes or attending a lecture to keep yourself up to date in addition to identifying opportunities on the web and creating a social media presence.

Tactical support may include getting coverage for afternoon care on selected days when you are networking, interviewing or engaging in a professional learning opportunity. Consider swapping afternoon coverage with a neighbor, hire a responsible high school or college student for a few hours or

ask a family member if they live nearby for an afternoon or evening as needed. Try arranging car pools, using the aftercare program on a drop in basis or, if old enough, letting them come home and be on their own for a couple hours as needed. Many like the privilege of being home alone for a short time. It builds their independence.

Consider getting a crock pot for preparing dinners and cooking extra on a night you are home or on the weekend so there is prepared food ready to microwave during the afternoon/evenings you are out. If your budget permits, consider take out.

Emotional support is important as well. Do not underestimate the emotional needs during this time. You may feel on top of your game one minute and then deflated the next. This is a challenging time in the market. Keep positive by doing something for yourself on a daily basis. Everyone's schedule and needs are different. Figure out what works for you and engage in an open dialogue with your family. Tell them what you need and want and then work together to achieve it. You may be surprised to learn how they can help. Being a family and staying connected is what is important.

"Ask the Career Coach" is a column dedicated to those who may be in transition or wrestling with a career dilemma by providing a forum for advice. We welcome your questions. Please send them to CareerCoachLisa@gmail.com.

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