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Happy Fall! (or is it winter?) With six inches of snow on the ground this morning in Colorado, and more coming, it's hard to tell. At least it should be gone in time for Halloween.

This is my favorite time of year at Mothers & More. It's a time for great connections, great topics, and a renewal of our chapters. With the kids deep in their school year or their fall activities, it seems a little easier to focus on ourselves, and our Mothers & More topics often reflect this. What do we want this year, for ourselves and our chapters? How do we want to spend our days? Our evenings? Maybe some of you are looking at a bigger picture of where you want your career to go, what new projects you want to take on, or how to engage in new exciting volunteer opportunities. I hope you bring those explorations in to your Mothers & More experience. There are surely other members, both locally and nationally, going through the same process. And watch out for our new national programming: the *Mothers Work* Initiative.

In this issue of FORUM, you will find an interview with Carol Fishman Cohen from iRelaunch, an organization dedicated to helping people relaunch their careers after a break. There's also an interesting classic article about labels. I have had many different labels in the last 10 years, from stay-at-home mom to CEO, entrepreneur to artist. I have been fascinated watching the different reactions I get from people I meet, depending what label I throw out.

Enjoy your changing weather, and please keep Mothers & More in mind as you plan your year-end giving. We are in critical need of your support.

Best regards,

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Re-connecting With Your Professional Interests

Carol Fishman Cohen has been personally adding to the definition of “relaunching” since returning to the full time workforce in 2000 after an 11-year break. She is the co-author of the career reentry strategy book *Back on the Career Track: A Guide for Stay-at-Home Moms Who Want to Return to Work*, and the co-founder of iRelaunch. In late 2011 and early 2012, Mothers & More will be working with iRelaunch on our *Mothers Work* Initiative to provide career reentry events and content.



The term “relaunch” generates many questions such as “What does “relaunch” mean?”, “I know what relaunching is but how do I go about making it happen?”, and “How can I make my relaunch a successful one.” We spoke with Carol Fishman Cohen in the middle of October just as Mothers & More was gearing up to announce the *Mothers Work* Initiative. Who better to talk about a successful relaunch than the “mother of all relaunchers” herself?

To start off, can you give us your definition of “relaunch”?

To "relaunch" is to emerge from your full-time, at home role, re-connect with your professional interests, and resume your career. We call the people who go through this process "relaunchers".

What advice would you give a relauncher who has spent their time away from the paid workforce doing volunteer work?

I would tell her or him that if the volunteer work is in line with her or his career goals, it is definitely resume material and it provides networking and recommendation opportunities. Talk about it in an interview if the experience is relevant to the work the relauncher is seeking. I was just interviewed on this topic by [Fortune Magazine](#).

What are some common resume mistakes that befall relaunchers?

Downplaying or undervaluing legitimate work and volunteer experiences.

Talking about past work experience as ancient history instead of as if it happened yesterday.

Not doing a career assessment — that was one of my big mistakes. You need to evaluate whether your interests and skills have changed or have not changed during the time you have been on career break.

Conducting your relaunch from behind your computer. Networking is a key strategy for relaunch success.

Telling a company you are willing to "do anything" and submitting resumes to multiple jobs at the same company on line. Only apply for specific jobs that match your skills and interests.

Submissions

Forum accepts first-person essays of any length, humor, poetry, photography, and art from **members**. We also accept any ideas or topical clippings you many want to send for our use. To contribute to the Forum, please send electronic submissions by email to info@mothersandmore.org or printed submissions by mail to P.O.Box 31, Elmhurst, IL 60126. Indicate "Forum Submission" on the subject line or envelope. We do not accept faxed or handwritten submissions.

Note: Mothers & More is not intended as a substitute for medical and/or psychological care of those in need of such care for themselves or their children. Although every measure has been taken to make the information in the Forum as complete and accurate as possible, no Mothers & More member, past or present, shall be liable for any damages resulting from the use or misuse of information contained herein.

What are some examples of interview questions relaunchers can expect and how are the best ways to answer?

The most important interview question relaunchers are concerned about is the one about your career break. Realize that sometimes you get asked about your career break and sometimes you don't. Acknowledge you took the career break and then move on immediately to why you are the best person for the job. Do not apologize. Be enthusiastic and detailed in your response about why you are so interested in the company and the job. "I took five years to care for my children and now I can't wait to get back to work. The reason I am so interested in this particular position at your company is because it draws on my experience doing similar work at xyz company. Then I did volunteer work in the same area and that sealed my decision to return to the same field. Let me tell you about an experience I think you will find relevant...etc etc".

Another line of interview questioning is about the company itself. Employers complain that candidates do not know enough about the company for which they are interviewing. Make sure your research goes deep — well beyond the company's website. An excellent strategy in an interview is to talk about something you saw on their Facebook or Twitter page that you then looked into further. "I saw on your Twitter page there was a tweet about the new study you just did on cloud computing. I took a look at it and thought the part about xyz was particularly interesting." This answer gives them a double message: You are telling them you are comfortable with social media and technology, sometimes a concern of employers about relaunchers, and more importantly, you are indicating you do really thorough research.

You and Vivian Steir Rabin wrote and published *Back on the Career Track* in 2007. What did you hope to accomplish?

When we relaunched our careers in 2000 and 2001, we felt alone and without a game plan. No one was talking about relaunching and there were no resources out there to guide people through the process. Our goal in writing *Back on the Career Track* was that no other person trying to return to work after years at home should feel the same isolation and lack of direction we felt. We feel we have a unique perspective on the process because, unlike others in the "career reentry space", we have been through every step ourselves. We know what it is like to put a resume together after many years away and to get up to speed in a field and to interview for the first time after years at home. We know the kinds of conversations relaunchers need to have with their families when they are contemplating a return to work because we had them ourselves. We took this first hand perspective and went out and spoke with women, employers, recruiters, academics, work-life experts, spouses and partners to get the full perspective on relaunching.

Is there a something that you can share from *Back on the Career Track* that addresses what many relaunchers are feeling as they start this process?

Our Mission

Mothers & More is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of mothers through support, education and advocacy. We address mothers' needs as individuals and members of society, and promote the value of all the work mothers do.

Our Beliefs:

- A mother is more than any single role she plays at any given point in her lifetime. She is entitled to fully explore and develop her identity as she chooses: as a woman, a citizen, a parent or an employee.
- All the work mothers do – whether paid or unpaid – has social and economic value.
- Caregiving work is real work with real social and economic value.
- All women deserve recognition and support for their right to choose if and how to combine parenting and paid employment.
- All mothers, all children and all families are unique. We respect the wisdom of each mother to decide how to care for her children, her family and herself.
- Mothers have the right to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities without incurring social and economic penalties.
- The transitions women make into and through motherhood are challenging and can be difficult.

Together, mothers are powerful.

This came from a relauncher just starting the career assessment process. "Figuring out what you want to do is a problem. It's a vicious circle. You can't figure out what you want to do, because you don't know what's out there. You have to talk to people to find out what's out there. But when you talk to people, they ask you what you want to do. And if you don't know, they think you're an idiot." I love this quote because it reflects how so many of us feel when we are just beginning the process.

Another comes from Pulitzer Prize nominee Ann Crittenden's introduction to her book *The Price of Motherhood*. She said "A few years after I had resigned from The New York Times in order to have more time for my infant son, I ran into someone who asked 'Didn't you used to be Ann Crittenden?'" I think that captures perfectly the loss of professional identity we all feel the longer we are at home, which is one of the motivators for returning.

For many of our members, the *Mothers Work Initiative* will be their first exposure to iRelaunch. How would you describe the person iRelaunch is geared towards?

iRelaunch is for mid to senior level professionals, both women and men, who have taken intentional career breaks for childcare, eldercare or other reasons, and now want strategies and advice on how to return to work.

Can you describe what it is like to attend an iRelaunch conference. What can attendees expect to get from the experience?

First and foremost, the conference is structured to provide comprehensive and tactical return-to-work strategies and advice. We start with our information-packed keynote "Top Strategies for Returning to Work". You will hear directly from those who have made successful returns, and have the opportunity to participate in our intensive workshops on Career Assessment and Networking & Marketing Yourself. You will also hear employers share advice on how to conduct a job search in today's difficult market, and have the chance to engage in substantive conversations with employer representatives.

Our *Mothers Work Initiative* will give members the chance to interact with Carol Fishman Cohen and iRelaunch through a free, members-only Return to Work Strategies webinar on November 18th and an exclusive *Back on the Career Track* virtual book chat in January 2012. Our members are also encouraged to register and attend upcoming *iRelaunch Return to Work Conferences*. Also in 2012, members will have the opportunity to sign up for Mother & More-only *iRelaunch Coaching Circles*. These offerings are just part of the initiative geared to support and guide you if you are looking to return to work or make a change to how you currently work. So when you leap, you don't have to leap alone. We're very excited to have iRelaunch's experienced staff on board to help you achieve that success.

Labels

Erin Kelly

I've been thinking lately about labels. One of the things that has bothered me most about my decision to become a "stay-at-home mom" is just that – that label. And the many assumptions that go along with that label. I've been put neatly into a box and it's not a box I'm entirely comfortable with.

I met a group of women recently when I joined their book club. They were all young, childless professionals with magnificent titles. Lawyer, IT Professional, Teacher. I was new to the area and, being an interesting person, wanted to meet some other interesting people. Smart people. People with opinions and emotions and complexity. These women were most definitely like that. Unfortunately, they found out what I "do" and immediately decided I was NOT. They put the label on me and it stuck.

These smart, urban professionals came to my big house in the suburbs, met my handsome, professional husband, saw my beautiful little girls, noted my swimming pool, and cemented their label — "Suburban Housewife" — Yuck.

I heard a speech given by Coretta Scott King recently and she so eloquently put into words everything I had been feeling. She noted now she is introduced at her many speaking engagements in several different ways. Most often as the "Widow of the Late Martin Luther King, Jr." Sometimes as a "Great Civil Rights Leader." Sometimes even as a "Key Human Rights Advocate." All of these labels, she said, are accurate. But they are sound bites of her life. A convenient way to quickly sum her up. She went on to beautifully articulate so many of the experiences that make her a human being, an individual and a precious member of the human race just like the rest of us.

Housewife, Mother, Stay-at-Home Mom. These are the sound bites of my life. I wish you to know more.

I am a woman approaching middle age, worrying about my middle. I am the daughter of a handsome, alcoholic, Irish charmer who died too young and taught me too little and a smart, beautiful and selfless mother who did the very best she could in a lousy situation. I am a sister who wishes she were closer to her one sibling. I am a latchkey child and the firstborn, giving me the curse and blessing of being incredibly responsible and sometimes too serious.

I grew up in the inner city of Milwaukee and moved a lot in my childhood. I switched schools four times in four years and became shy and introverted despite a naturally outgoing personality. I rode the bus more than rode in a car as a kid and could get all around the city by myself. I took care of my little brother and myself.

I am a true and devoted friend. There are few more loyal to those they love. I am a Sagittarius, am quite psychic and love all that mystic stuff. I am an amateur

psychologist and am often the first person my friends turn to in really tough times. I figure I ought to be good at being a shrink since I have been to so many myself.

I am a political animal and there are few more opinionated or headstrong. I am too often condescending, think I am always right and am usually the first to apologize after a fight. I am a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat and will be till the day I die.

I love my children as deeply as any mother could and have had many moments where I have hated them. I am not the best wife in the world but do my very best. I have battled postpartum depression and fibromyalgia. I think I am overweight and look older than my years. Some days I think I am beautiful.

I love music, musicals, theatre, any body of water and being with my friends. I have a fantasy that I am a singer and know the words to almost every song written since 1950. I saw Elvis in concert just before he died. I am a total sap, cry at commercials and can out-chug the boys at the local beer hall. I make a mean margarita and I love to entertain.

I am a Mother. I am a Wife. I am a Stay-at-Home Mom, and I am a Housewife. I am pretty terrific and I hope you'll try to put aside the labels, the preconceived notions, and try to get to know the flawed human being that I am. And I promise I will try to do the same for you.

Erin Kelly has made a number of transitions since she first wrote "Labels". She is now divorced and living with her two daughters, aged 10 and 12, in Stillwater, MN. Erin began working after her divorce and now runs a home-based business as a Fashion Consultant with clothing for both men and women. You can check out the men's line at www.erinkelly.jhilburn.com To learn more about the women's line or how to transition from a stay-at-home Mom to a Mom with a home-based business, contact her at info@mothersandmore.org.

CLASSIC FORUM

Whatever Happened to “Adequate”?

Christel Kozar

On May 3, 2005, a wonderful article by Jenny Deam appeared in the *Denver Post*. It was entitled “The Perfect Mother?” and encouraged moms everywhere to relax and just shoot for “adequate” in their parenting. Most of you probably didn't see this article, so I would like to summarize it here for you as I believe its message is invaluable.

As it turns out, before Ms. Deam ever had children of her own, she heard stories of mothers who were tireless, fearless and very imaginative in their parenting styles. They took their children on nature walks and pressed their nature treasures into scrapbooks. They flossed their toddlers' teeth at night, EVERY night. To her, the thought of such creativity and commitment was terrifying. Then, at a party one night before the birth of her first child, she broached the subject with a woman who had just had her second child. “Do I really have to do that stuff?” she asked with terror in her voice. The woman's response: “*Oh, for heaven's sake. Just do what I do: aim for adequate. You'll be fine.*”

Deam has had three children in the 10 years since that night and often thinks back to that piece of advice. She asks, “When did “good enough” become tantamount to failure?” We sign our children up for sports so they can experience teamwork, sign our children up for after-school activities to compensate for what is not taught in the schools, and organize a multitude of play dates because we aren’t comfortable letting them play outside by themselves. Deam notices mothers everywhere “turning themselves inside out, day after day, exhausted, angry all the time, hating the pace of their life.” Hellloooo... sound familiar?

To be honest with you, I wish someone had given me this advice before I became a mother. What a difference it would have made for me to know that I didn’t have to be perfect in my new role as a mother, or even as a pregnant woman. I spent the 13 years prior to motherhood in the corporate world and spent two years after that trying to conceive our first child. So when I got pregnant, I treated motherhood as a privilege and as my new job, all at the same time. After all, the reality of thinking I would not be able to conceive made me even hungrier to have babies. And motherhood was now taking the place of my career so I’d better be really good at it. (And by the way, knowing the demographics of most Mothers & More members, I am pretty sure some of you think this way, too.)

From the beginning I felt nothing went right in my new role: preterm labor at 27 weeks, multiple hospital visits, medications and constant fetal monitoring, a long and complicated delivery, a severely jaundiced baby, daily visits to the hospital lab for baby’s blood work, and weeks spent with medical equipment in our home to monitor the baby for all sorts of things. I couldn’t even reach for a book to help me through this because there wasn’t one. We were already thrown off course and, in my mind, I felt like I was failing miserably before I even got started. I had to compensate for these setbacks, put on my cape and be Super Mommy because of the situation I was in. It didn’t matter that I was physically and emotionally drained, without the support of family, frequently without a husband whose job meant lots of travel, and most frighteningly, without a “mentor.” (Back in my comfortable little corporate office at least I’d be assigned one of those!) I took on many roles during this time and that mentality continued for seven years. Because of the way motherhood began for me, I never really felt relaxed in the role, and my Type-A, over-achiever personality resurfaced after being squashed by leaving corporate for a better life in Colorado.

Eventually, I promised myself that I was going to aim for a simpler life. All after-school activities have been cancelled except for one half hour of piano and one half hour of swimming lessons. I have said no to gymnastics and dance classes because I was the only one who seemed to care about them when we signed up last time. I resist the urge



to take the children wherever they ask to go and learned to spend less time in the car by grouping errands. Rather than going for ice cream, we make our own sundaes. Rather than signing up for soccer, we spend more time on our bicycles. All after-dinner activities have been replaced by card games, board games and a 7 p.m. bedtime for anyone under five feet tall.

As you can see, in my eyes, the value of Deam's articles is priceless. I am hoping that by sharing this with you, someone else will have the same "light bulb moment" that I did. I am hoping that the next time you are thinking of scheduling your children in a multitude of summer activities, spending time researching the best schools, or worrying about the quality or quantity of their little friends, you will be able to step back and take a reality check. Are you trying to be "perfect?" Are you micromanaging your children in a way that will leave you exhausted by the end of each day's activities? Are you overprotecting them to a degree that leaves you emotionally drained and leaves them with an unrealistic view of the world? Are you designing a life for your children that leaves you with no time for yourself?

Never before has the word "adequate" held such value for me. Just remember that adequate isn't a dirty word, and as we support each other through these motherhood years, let's reinforce adequacy and denounce perfection. We can learn from each other's stories of failure, share our frustrating experiences, compare unrealistic expectations, and rejoice in each other's adequacy!

Christel Kozar continues to practice 'Adequacy' in Parker, CO on behalf of her three children, who are now 12, 10 and 6 years old. Her soapbox never collects dust as she continues to resist common social trends such as premature cell phone ownership, electronics addicted children, and going to school with a Starbucks latte in your hand every day.

CLASSIC FORUM

Guess Who's Coming to Book Club?

Cheryl M. Scheir

To: lizabeth@youremailaddress.com

From: cheryls@myemailaddress.com

Subject: Guess Who's Coming to Book Club!

Hey Liz! I know you've been busy raising those adorable munchkins of yours (not to mention mopping up the debris from their daily deeds of destruction). And you probably haven't read much lately (at least nothing with more than 10 words on a page or actual human characters). So I'm glad to hear that you can finally make it to book club! Getting together to discuss great books for grown-ups should be a welcome change of pace.

Since you're new, I wanted to give you a little briefing – just to get you up to speed, you know? First, the rules...

Rule #1 It's OK to come to book club if you haven't brought the book.

Rule #2 It's OK to come to book club if you haven't finished the book.

Rule #3 It's OK to come to book club even if you haven't read the book – as long as you still bring that fabulous peppered cheese ball that you're so famous for! (We all appreciate food for thought, but, hey, sometimes food is good enough all by itself!)

Don't worry about buying a copy of the book for this month. I have it already, so I can loan it to you when I'm done. I tried once or twice to keep costs down by borrowing from the library, but that's never quite worked out. The best I can figure, snagging the library's copy of the next selection is a little like scoring hard-to-get rock concert tickets. I am convinced that there's one person in every book club who camps out on the doorstep of the library, poised to pounce on its one and only copy; then she renews it three times, and that's the end of that. I have only one thing to say to that person: Amazon Rewards Credit Card.

A word of warning before you read anything: whatever you do, never trust the reviews on the book jacket. You'd think "uproariously funny" means "hilarious," "side-splitting" or "has high pee-in-your-pants potential." Way off base. In my experience, those reviews are written in code, so "uproariously funny" really translates to "never leaves the cancer ward." And watch out for those books that pompously proclaim to be "life-altering." They'll only change your life if you didn't have one in the first place.

I hope book club is as good an experience for you as it has been for me. I love having an excuse to read, because, let's face it, life is so... so... DAILY, and reading a good book is like being a fly on the wall in another world. I've learned from book club that books are like people – whether thick or thin, young or old, beautiful or ugly, they still deserve a chance. I've learned from my group's discussions that we all have unique points of view (though some, it seems, are more "unique" than others). And I've learned that books don't just tell me a story, they tell me about myself (like when I re-read *Catcher in the Rye* last year and discovered that Holden Caulfield isn't half as sexy as he used to be – at least not when you are a 35-year-old mother of two who uses her shopping list as a bookmark).

Well, gotta sign off now as the kids are climbing up the back of my chair. I'll be sure to get that book to you. Say well, and don't forget the cheese ball!

Happy Reading!

Cheryl

Cheryl Scheir is a freelance writer and editor living in Dover, DE. She returned to the workplace after taking eight years off to be at home with her children. She now works at home developing training material for pharmaceutical sales representatives. Cheryl lives with her husband and two children, ages 11 and 13. She is an avid tennis player, an amateur violist, an enthusiastic church-goer, a compulsive baker, and a reliable volunteer for several community organizations. For more information about Cheryl, you can visit her blog at scheirmad.wordpress.com.

