

## **PREPARING TO RETURN TO WORK**

Returning to work or contemplating a job change after experiencing a life-threatening illness can seem scary at first but with a little preparation and some coaching and tips to help you practice ahead of time, you'll find that you feel more confident in approaching prospective hiring managers. Solid job search practises and interviewing skills that quickly communicate your skills, abilities, and experiences can often make the difference in which candidate hiring managers choose. Here are some effective tips to consider using to increase your effectiveness when you're thinking about going back to work:

### **Tip 1: Research the company/department/position you are applying for.**

It's really surprising how many candidates don't do any research on the company/department/position they're applying for. Stand above the crowd and impress your interviewer by doing some background research on the company. This will enable you to have a clearer idea on what the company is striving to do, and it will help you to have an idea on where and how you can add value in the role by contributing to their objectives or their "bottom line".

A good place to start your research is the internet, or the company's *intranet* if you're already working within an organization and are thinking about making an internal move. Go to the company's/department's webpages and read all the information that you can- this will help to increase your confidence during the interview. Another strategy is to consider asking for an "information interview". Ask your contacts and co-workers if anyone knows someone that works in the company/department and call that person to see if they would be willing to meet with you for 10-15 minutes to discuss the requirements of the role with the company, what success in the role looks like, the skills and competencies the hiring manager is looking for, the company/department's culture, etc.

This is a great strategy for getting more information on the company, the position, the team, and the department and it'll help provide some insights on what it might be like to work there. There's a lot of support and training available on this subject and it's often free of charge. Skype, email or call Lina for more information and support in building your network.

### **Tip 2: Ask yourself what specific competencies you would bring to the position and the department.**

Examples of competencies include:

<b>Achieving Team Goals</b>	Believes in the power of teams; builds trust through open dialogue and commitment to team goals. Motivates and inspires others through recognition, celebration and shared success. Implements plans that achieve individual and team goals.
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<b>Building Relationships</b>	Believes in people and responds to the unique needs of key stakeholders, whilst maximizing opportunities to integrate service delivery. Initiates, develops and maintains effective relationships with key stakeholders. By modeling company values in all interactions, consistently offers exceptional service through listening, supporting and enabling stakeholders to transform their dreams into reality.
<b>Effective Communication</b>	When communicating, adapts approach and words to meet what the audience and situation needs. Speaks clearly, doesn't use jargon in oral and written communication. Cares about what people say, asks questions and listens attentively to make sure they understand what is being said. Is genuine and real in all interactions.
<b>Innovation and Risk Taking</b>	Constantly looks for ways to make improvements, to find creative solutions and to explore "what if"? Holds self accountable for making informed and responsible decisions, taking calculated risks and seizing opportunities to turn fresh ideas into workable approaches that add value to the organization.
<b>Managing Yourself</b>	Is self driven: delivers quality results. Takes accountability and ownership of personal style, career and development goals and work/life balance. Balances conflicting demands and maintains focus and flexibility in dealing with the challenges of change and ambiguity.
<b>Understanding our Business</b>	Understands the part that we all play in understanding, living, sharing and promoting Vancity's story, commitments and business strategy; identifies and capitalizes on opportunities to draw on his/her expertise and wisdom to grow and develop the business.

And some more competencies:

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Adaptability</b>	Copes well with change. Is very flexible.
<b>Communication</b>	Ability to express thoughts/ideas/opinions either verbally, non- verbally or in writing

<b>Critical thinking</b>	Ability to develop innovation solutions to everyday problems
<b>Functional knowledge</b>	Extensive knowledge of one's area of expertise
<b>Interpersonal skills</b>	Ability to relate well with all types of people both within and outside the organization
<b>Innovation</b>	Ability to generate creative new ideas
<b>Organizational Skills</b>	Ability to use time and resources efficiently to accomplish targeted objectives

- In preparing for the interview, decide *ahead of time* what key contributions you bring that you want to let the hiring manager know about
- Think about possible interview questions before the interview, based on the information you think they may want to know about. Practice your answers ahead of time, as this will increase your confidence and the interview will have a smoother “flow”. Don’t worry about taking your time before responding: a candidate who has a thoughtfully prepared answer comes across very effectively to the interviewers
- Ask questions that show you know about the company/department/position and have taken the time to do some research and that you can envision where you would fit. This also lets them know how keen you are about the position.

**Tip 3: Be prepared to answer behavioural interview questions by practising ahead of time and rehearsing your answers.**

These days, many hiring managers and recruiters use behavioral questions in which they’ll ask the candidate to share past successes and failures. Sometimes candidates feel like they are being “put on the spot”, so try to anticipate these ahead of time. Interviewers tend to use questions that follow these guidelines to help them gauge the candidate’s suitability for the position:

- Asking about your past work experience and how it relates to their job
- Reviewing your education and/or relevant certifications or training
- Discussing your ability and propensity to travel, if required for the position
- Discussing your ability to work overtime, shift work and/or weekends, if required for position
- Asking if you are legally entitled to work in Canada
- Asking if you are bondable

### Some examples of behavioural questions are:

- Give me two examples of things you have done in previous jobs that demonstrate your willingness to work hard (i.e. to assess work ethic)
- Tell me about the last time you felt frustrated at work (i.e. to assess attitude, ability to work under pressure, etc.)
- Please provide an example of a problem that you identified that had previously been overlooked? (i.e. to assess analytical skills, attention to detail)
- Tell me about a time when you were disappointed in your work performance (i.e. to assess ability to self-manage)
- Tell me about the gap in your employment history- why were you not working?

Try to brainstorm some of the specific questions that the hiring manager might ask you in relation to the job you have applied for. Be prepared by rehearsing your answers ahead of time and try using this easy-to-remember format, **STAR**:

**S**= describe the **situation** or problem to give context

**T**= talk about the **task** you were assigned or undertook to address the issue

**A**= describe the **action** that you took

**R**= talk about the **result** of your action to illustrate what happened

Following this format will assist you in providing clear, concise answers to behavioural questions. Taking the time to practice and rehearse will also help you feel more confident.

### **Tip 4: Be aware of tricky or illegal interview questions.**

Questions that some candidates may be concerned about, especially if they have had an illness, or have a gap in their resume, are questions or issues such as:

- Answering health history questions
- How to handle illness-related or other gaps in their resume/in their employment history
- How to handle questions related to health in an interview

By focusing on your strengths and abilities and clearly linking those to the requirements of the job, you will increase your chances of having a successful interview. For example, if heavy lifting is a “**Bona-Fide Occupational Requirement**” (BFOR), then the hiring manager is legally entitled to ask a candidate if they have any health restrictions that would prevent them from carrying out the necessary duties of the position. If this is not the case, consider

responding to health-related questions to the effect of... ***“I just want to assure you that I am capable of performing the duties of the position as you have described them”***

Remember, you are the best judge of your individual style and your personal situation, so this is just one possible response for you to consider. Role-playing possible scenarios is a good way to prepare if you're concerned about this area.

Keep in mind that some hiring managers may not be aware of the questions that are “out of bounds”. Typically, the following topics are off-limits for interview questioning:

- Wondering about any physical or mental disabilities you may have/health history
- Asking about your age or probing for age-identifying information
- Asking about your marital status or plans for marriage
- Looking for information about spouses or significant others
- Asking about your race or ethnicity
- Asking about your sexual orientation
- Asking about your religion
- Questions about your political affiliation
- Wanting to know about your country of birth
- Asking about your plans for having children/adopting
- Asking about any criminal records
- Other personal information that does not directly relate to the job

Even though the above questions are not legal to ask, some hiring managers may be unaware of the legislation and will inadvertently ask them anyway. You are not required to answer these types of questions, instead consider responding to the effect of... ***“I share your concern that it is important to have a good fit between candidate and position. Let's explore how my skills and abilities fit with the duties and responsibilities for the position”***

Again, this is just a suggested response: you know your personal style and situation best, so if this doesn't feel right to you consider getting some additional help and support in handling these types of questions. Remember, the most important aspect of a job interview is the degree to which you are informed about the company, the department, and the role, and the value you can bring to the position.

**Tip 5: Avoid common interviewing mistakes:**

- Not doing any research on the department, or having any idea about the nature of the position or the value you can bring to it
- Lack of preparation and not being clear on exactly what you can offer
- Talking too much and not staying focused on the interviewer's questions

- Arriving late
- Speaking poorly of past managers or co-workers
- Not answering questions directly and with clear examples
- Depending too much on your resume and application information instead of what you are presenting and how you are presenting yourself in the interview

**In summary, consider following these tips to help you in talking about your strengths and to increase your confidence during the interview:**

- **Tip 1:** *Research the department and the position*
- **Tip 2:** *Know the competencies/skills/attitudes/abilities you bring*
- **Tip 3:** *Be prepared to answer behavioural interview questions*
- **Tip 4:** *Be aware of tricky or illegal interview questions*
- **Tip 5:** *Avoid the most common interview mistakes*

**For more information and support feel free to connect with Lina Crossin directly:**

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