

Mother's Day special: How these mothers successfully returned to work after a career gap

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Simple infrastructural tweaking made working in offices convenient for these women.

Starting afresh after a career gap can be really difficult for women, especially mothers. Women who have taken a career break to embrace motherhood do that knowing perfectly well that that it would be an uphill task to get back to work after a long sabbatical.

Most of the time, it is hard for them to find employment and even if they do, they are underemployed and underpaid. Those who do opt to have a career get into the endless, taxing cycle of attempting to balance household responsibilities and their jobs.

Thus begins the saga of 'sacrifice'. 'You can either be a mother or have a career, women can't have both', is an oft-quoted myth propagated by the society. But women *can* have the best of the both worlds.

One company in the insurance sector realised this and has successfully tapped into the potential of educated homemakers who had been unemployed or taken a break due to family responsibilities. Bajaj Allianz General Insurance launched its first 'all-woman branch' in Pune with 10 women agents in 2014. Today, they have 30 such branches across India with 1,000 women agents.

Anamika Roy Rashtrawar, who leads this initiative, says, "We know that a lot of women who were on a career break wanted to get back to work and were looking for a suitable platform." The company understood the constraints women faced

while looking to get back to work and not only eliminated them but also provided facilities so they are encouraged to work.

Anamika explains what the company did to attract women partner with them. “Women don’t go to a regular office. We have adjusted our infrastructure, changed the office structure so that they have the flexibility to work and not worry about managing household responsibilities,” she says.

The major plus for women agents in the company is that the office is all women. To top that, the timings are totally flexible and they do not have to meet fixed targets every month.

Simple infrastructural tweaking such as providing a crèche facility, the option of having groceries and laundry delivered, have also made working from office convenient for these women.

The agents too could not be happier. For many, it is a first regular earning opportunity.

Krushangi Shah, 36-year-old single mother from Ahmedabad, struggled to support herself and her two-year-old son after separating from her husband.

Shah, a B.Com graduate who would earlier support herself by making jewellery, is now earning around Rs 8,000-12,000 a month. “Earlier, I would have to go from one house to another to sell jewellery. My arthritis would make the work difficult. However, now, since working as an agent, I have the flexibility of time due to which I travel only when I have to and give time to my home,” says Shah, who's been working at Bajaj Allianz for the last two years.

She says her life changed when she started working as an agent. It also helped her finance her son’s education. “He is studying in a government dental college,” she says proudly.

Unatti Bhosekar, a 31-year-old agent from Pune, discovered the joy of being financially independent after she started her partnership with Bajaj.

She came to know about the all-women branches two years ago from a friend after her husband and she faced financial losses in their business and struggled to find investment to start afresh.

Unnati, who is able to earn a maximum of Rs 50,000 a month, says working after marriage brought back her self-confidence and has led to personal growth. "I feel so much more confident and a positive change in my personality," she says. Her accomplishments at work have made her husband, mother-in-law and six-year-old daughter extremely proud. "I can take care of all my expenses," she says.

She says that the crèche and other infrastructure available at her office have made it easier for her to work and balance her household commitments. But she is most happy about the fact that how her own transformation affected her daughter. "Children look up to their parents and my daughter can see her mother's growth success and will emulate it."

Shah also says that her son feels extremely proud of his mother and speaks to his friends about his 'working mother.'

Bajaj Allianz's initiative does not need to be an isolated success story. Statistical data has shown that women are eager to work but face roadblocks such as travel, right opportunities and infrastructure.

As per National Sample Survey (NSS) data, 31% of women who spend the majority of their time performing domestic duties would like some kind of a job.

According to **IndiaSpend**, "closing India's **gender** gap in labour-force participation would generate a 27% net increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)".

An ample incentive for our country's employers to work in this direction.