



# THE NEW MOMMY TRACK

Women who opted out of the workforce  
are looking to get back in.  
Help is on the way.

BY LINDA FORMICHELLI

## There are many names for it:

Off-ramping. Sequencing. Opting out. But for Diana Allan, it meant one thing: Putting her career as a vice president and deputy manager of the Los Angeles office of Banque Nationale de Paris on hold when the pressures of having two kids and a two-income household became too much to handle.

After leaving her job, Allan had another child. She participated in volunteer activities over the years. Then, when her youngest child got his driver's license, she decided to re-enter the workforce. But instead of working proactively towards her dream career, Allan reacted to opportunities that came her way from old bosses and colleagues. "The offers didn't feel like they were the right fit for me," Allan recalls. Then, a year ago, she was reading the Wall Street Journal and saw an article about programs

like Tuck's Back in Business program. "I thought it would give me a real seriousness of purpose and make me more marketable."

It did. After attending the 11-day program offered by the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College, Allan was on fire. In April, she started to reactivate her Los Angeles network of colleagues and contact recruiters. She turned down one opportunity that wasn't quite right for her, and "I've had several inquiries from people I know, and I'm much more clear on what's a good fit and what isn't," she says. "I'm actively exploring the consulting world as well as some nonprofit areas where I think my skills would be applicable." The Back in Business program helped Allan clarify her goals and attract the kind of career she wanted after opting out of the workforce for more than 15 years.

Many women are looking to merge back into a career after taking time off — and many are finding it more difficult than they expected. According to the Center for Work-Life Policy, while more than one-third (37 percent) of highly qualified women off-ramp for some period of time, the vast majority (93 percent) want to return to work. However, only 74 percent succeed in rejoining the workforce and only 40 percent return to full-time jobs.

The reasons women leave the workforce and then decide to return are as varied as the women themselves. While many leave work to raise children and then go back when the kids are in school or at some other milestone, others leave to take care of elderly parents or a sick spouse. “There is no typical scenario,” says Allison O’Kelly, CEO of Mom Corps, a professional staffing solution that supplies experienced professionals to corporations while helping employees find flexible jobs.

Corporations fear an impending talent shortage as Baby Boomers retire, and smaller businesses often can’t afford to hire experienced employees full-time — so the influx of talented employees looking for flexible options after having opted out of the workforce can be a boon for businesses large and small. Yet in many cases, businesses are blind to this wealth of talent. “In some cases, businesses do believe in on-ramping and getting mothers back on track, but that’s mothers who worked for them at one time,” says Meghan McCartan, co-founder of Detours and OnRamps: A Forum on the Issues Facing Mothers in the Workplace. “They can’t just go into their alumni pool, they have to reach out.”

Here are more details on three organizations that are helping women blast past the barriers that hold them back when they’re looking to on-ramp back into the workforce.

## Detours and OnRamps: A Forum on the Issues Facing Mothers in the Workplace



Detours and OnRamps is a one-day conference that helps moms re-enter into the workforce after opting out. The co-founders, Meghan McCartan and Kirsten Ly, are marketing profes-

sionals and moms; McCartan has three kids and Ly has two. As they bounced from full-time jobs to part-time consulting work and back, McCartan noticed a need for information of use to on-ramping women. “There are a lot of resources out there on the company and recruiter level, but I live in suburban New Jersey and a lot of my friends are stay-at-home moms who have no idea that any of this is going on,” she says. “There was a disconnect between all the things that are happening and the actual people it could happen for. We put together the forum to fill that gap.”

The first forum, which will take place on October 8 in New York, will include a keynote from Janet Bodnar, deputy editor of *Kiplinger’s Personal Finance* magazine; panelists including recruiters and successful entrepreneurs; a closing session presented by Carol Fishman Cohen, co-author of *Back on the Career Track: A Guide for Stay at Home Moms Who Want to Return to Work*; and networking with ten to fifteen hiring companies.

“We have two main goals,” says McCartan. “One is practicality: The idea of every session is that if you’re planning on going back to work in three months, six months, a year, or whatever, you’ll get something out of these sessions to get to the next level. Our other goal is camaraderie and networking, because it’s a huge benefit to be able to look around and say, ‘There are 150 other people here who are really smart and had good jobs and they’re in the same boat as me.’” McCartan and Ly plan to offer forums in Boston and Washington, D.C., in the spring of 2008.

### Mom Corps

Mom Corps is an employment agency whose mission is twofold: To provide businesses with professionals—from accountants to lawyers to strategy consultants—who have opted out of the

traditional workplace, and to let employees work in their own fields in a flexible position that lets them meet their family needs. Since it officially launched in July of 2005, Mom Corps has amassed more than 10,000 professional candidates and supplied more than 100 companies with employees.

One of those employees is Katherine Hanniford. Hanniford had been working in healthcare marketing for IBM for 15 years when she decided to take time off to have and raise her two kids and work on volunteer projects. When her younger daughter turned four, “I knew that, come the summer, she would be in school five days a week for six-and-a-half hours per day, and I wanted to be able to fill that time with something productive versus sitting at home and playing tennis,” she recalls. A friend told Hanniford about Mom Corps, and she sent in her resume. She decided she would re-enter the workforce only for a job she was passionate about, and Mom Corps found just the thing for her: a position as director of marketing and business development with The Stress Institute in Atlanta. Hanniford now works half the time in The Stress Institute’s offices and half the time at home.



For O’Kelly, a CPA by trade, the business built organically from her experiences. She opted out of the workforce when she had her first child four years ago, but continued to take on contract work. When she started getting more projects than she could handle, she outsourced some of her work to friends. “Before I knew it, I was doing this business a little bit, just with my group of friends and just in accounting,” she says. “I decided a year and a half into it that I was going to open it up to many different kinds of industries.”

According to O’Kelly, there has always been a need for such an organization, but two happenings have made this the perfect time for Mom Corps: “One is technology, because a lot of our positions have the flexibility to let employees work part-time in-office or totally virtually,” she says. “The other thing is that businesses have started to take

notice that Baby Boomers are starting to retire, and they’re trying to figure out where they’re going to find talent. So they’re willing to be more flexible than they had in the past.”

## Tuck’s Back in Business Program



The Back in Business Program at Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College arose from a conversation between the then-CFO of CitiGroup and Tuck’s senior associate dean. “They said that many talented people leave the workforce for various reasons, and it was a shame that business schools weren’t doing something to bring them back into the workforce,” explains Anant K. Sundaram, Ph.D., faculty director of executive education at Tuck School of Business. The business school spent two years planning the program because at the time, there were no other models to emulate. Says Sundaram, “We did tons of interviews, held focus groups, scanned the literature in the field, and talked to people who have been writing about the phenomenon, as well as organizations that have sprung up to help deal with this, and pulled it all together into a course.”

The result: An executive education program designed to help professionals re-enter the world of business. The program is offered in three modules in New Hampshire and New York City, and includes about 55 class sessions over 11 days. The first program, which piloted in the fall of 2006, had 41 participants, of which 35 were women and six were men. Fifty to 60 percent of the participants had MBAs, and the others had substantial experience in the corporate world.

Besides updating their business school knowledge, refamiliarizing themselves with business analysis, and revamping their career search skills, students had to complete a final project where, working in groups, they analyzed an acquisition—such as Disney’s

acquisition of Pixar—and presented their results in front of the other participants.

Allan is just one participant who got a lot out of the program. “I absolutely loved the academic piece, the phenomenal array of great professors was a real treat, I got enormous value out of the

career development piece, and I’ve remained in contact with my peer group from the program,” she says. Sundaram hopes that programs like Back in Business will soon become the norm. Says Sundaram, “I hope in ten years this becomes part and parcel of the curriculum of every business school in the country.” 📌

## Resources for On-Ramping Women

**Tuck’s Back in Business Program:** [www.tuck.dartmouth.edu/exec/targeted\\_audiences/back\\_in\\_business.html](http://www.tuck.dartmouth.edu/exec/targeted_audiences/back_in_business.html)

**Mom Corps:** [www.momcorps.com](http://www.momcorps.com)

**Detours and OnRamps:** A Forum on the Issues Facing Mothers in the Workplace: [onrampsforum.com](http://onrampsforum.com)

**The Center for Work Life Policy:** [www.worklifepolicy.org](http://www.worklifepolicy.org)

**Mommy Track’d:** [www.mommytrackd.com](http://www.mommytrackd.com) - a site that helps stay-at-work moms juggle home and job with tips and humor.

**Flexperience:** [www.flexperiencestaffing.com](http://www.flexperiencestaffing.com) - a firm that connects experienced marketing, human resources, and finance professionals with opportunities for part-time, flex-time, or project-based work.

**Moms-for-Profit:** [www.moms-for-profit.com](http://www.moms-for-profit.com) - an organization for member moms who own or aspire to own their own business and for professional women turned stay-at-home moms who provide services to those members.

**On-Ramps:** [www.on-ramps.com](http://www.on-ramps.com) - a recruiting and consulting firm that helps companies use flexibility as a key component of recruiting and retention efforts.

**A New Path:** Setting New Professional Directions, at Harvard Business School: [www.exed.hbs.edu/programs/alum\\_pp/](http://www.exed.hbs.edu/programs/alum_pp/) - a program designed for women who are ready to re-enter the workforce after having reduced their career commitments to raise families or to pursue personal interests. Now in its second year, the program is being offered to Harvard alumnae and alumnae of other leading business schools.