

SPOTLIGHT ON

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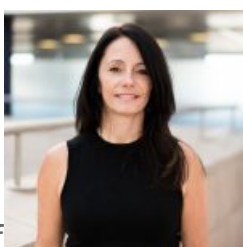
# Female returner to work: Debbie Friend

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DEBBIE FRIEND, MEDIA EXECUTIVE, MBA 07 FEB 2018

This week we caught up with Debbie Friend, one of our female returners to work. Debbie is a Media Executive in the MBA department.

How long were you out of work before deciding to return to work?



I was away from the workplace for 24 years, although during that time I renovated and developed properties and sold my art from home, as well as raising my two

boys, I just didn't work in a traditional office. I retrained in social media management with a company called Digital Mums, who train women with a current and relevant skill to enable them to return to the workplace after a career break. After working briefly for a tech start-up, managing their social media, I attended a returnship day hosted by MediaCom and was lucky enough to gain a place on the returnship programme. I started in September 2017.

### How do you feel your career break has helped shape your life?

I was extremely fortunate to be able to leave the workplace and dedicate time to bringing up my two sons. I never yearned to be back at work and thoroughly enjoyed every second. The time out also allowed me to attend illustration courses and develop my art and computer skills so it was a very valuable career break. Having autonomy over my own life also increased my confidence and allowed me to analyse what I would really like to do once I returned, as I'd never found my ideal job before leaving to have children.

### What were you doing before your career break?

I had a variety of jobs from my teens until my late twenties when I left work, from shop work to signwriting haulage trucks. Latterly, I temped in secretarial and document production around the city, mainly for large investment management companies and broking houses. It wasn't what I really wanted to do but it paid well and at least with temping I had the flexibility to work when and where I wanted and had the opportunity to learn new systems. Ancient technology such as telex machines, electronic golf ball typewriters and word processors were a massive step up from the manual typewriters I'd trained on at school. Microsoft Word was still relatively new when I left!

### What is your current role and what does it contain?

The returnship programme at MediaCom enables returners to learn how the agency works, whilst at the same time supporting them with additional training and insights into media as a whole. I have been spending time with different teams, initially in the organic social team and now with the SEO team. I'm currently using my social media knowledge to add value wherever I can.

Why did you choose to come back to work at MediaCom?

Although I was trained in social media it was primarily from the viewpoint of someone who manages all aspects of a company's social media, from auditing and strategy to day to day management across platforms. I wanted to learn how these tasks were handled in a large agency for large brands. Most of the tasks are split such as organic social, paid social and content production. This has been a fantastic insight into how large media agencies work.

Use 3 words to describe your experience of working at MediaCom.

Exciting, Stimulating and Eye-opening

What advice would you give to other women who are contemplating getting back to work after a period of time off?

I'd say bite the bullet and go for it. Find something that really interests you and if possible do some retraining first, it'll help with assimilating back into the workplace. Age or time away from the workplace has no bearing on your ability to retrain and absorb new technical skills. I know more about social media now than my two sons of 23 and 21, age is irrelevant. Passion and interest are the most important skills you can return with. Systems haven't changed that much, work practices haven't either and in no time at all, you'll wonder why you put it off for so long.

The only major change I've noticed is that the world has been abbreviated in my absence. Perfectly ordinary terms have been replaced by abbreviations or creative office speak but some things never change. Commuting is still the bun fight it always was, the trains still don't run on time, but I've loved being back in civilisation and If I can return after 24 years and not spontaneously combust then anyone can.

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