



## Was that me?

*In an additional feature to this issue's Mums in Business, Helen Slingsby of Career Breakthrough, looks at ways of giving your confidence a good boost.*

IT MIGHT seem like a small task but, to many women, simply picking up the phone and asking for work, a pay rise or even advice, can leave them quaking in their boots. Lack of confidence is a key factor stopping women from returning to work after taking time out. And, according to employers, it also stops them from doing as well as they should in the work place. Losing the ability to take on the world is accompanied by a very specific type of amnesia that makes us forget who we once were, ie "Was that me?" It can take a lot to remember who we used to be in our pre-children lives: "Didn't I used to be that thrusting marketing manager with advertising executives eating out of my hand?" "Didn't I used to have 30 five year-olds hanging on my every word?" "Wasn't that me presenting the long-term benefits of Corporate Bank's personal pension plan?" It sounds like a million years ago doesn't it?

From the career workshops I run to help get women back to work, it is clear that many clients divide their lives into 'BC' and 'AC' - *before children* with a job or career and *after children* bringing up the kids and continuous domestic chores. The AC world can be glorious and as challenging as any previous career but, immersed in family life, many clients have forgotten their 'BC' persona and this can reduce confidence levels further. To help bridge the gap between BC and AC and re-acquaint yourself with who you really are, it may help to know that confident people aren't born, they are made. According to the **Women Returners Network** ([www.women-returners.co.uk](http://www.women-returners.co.uk)) it is a skill that can be acquired and learned. If we understand that confidence helps us to speak up for ourselves and cope with stress; it increases self belief and makes challenges seem less daunting; and even that it's fun; then it's a pretty good skill to have. Not only at work but also with our family too. If this has resonance, here are some confidence-boosting exercises that should set you on the way to improving self-esteem and taking away the fear.

- Remember an occasion when you were 'at your best' and felt you were firing on all cylinders. It might be work-related or centred around the family. How would you have looked to the fly on the wall? Happy, confident, in control? Make a list of all these feelings. What resources were you using: persuading skills, the ability to bring people together, for example? Recall how it felt to be in full flow and absorb that feeling.
- Be positive. Find ways to say 'I can' and not 'I can't'. Make a list of things you would like to do but feel you can't because of circumstances or lack of confidence. Revisit these things and turn them into 'I can' statements. For example, change 'I can't go back to work because of the school holidays' to 'I can go back to work if I find the right childcare'. Make a note of how you would feel if your life changed in this way.
- Make a list of the skills you use daily. Read persuading a toddler to eat his or her tea as negotiating skills, organising a birthday party as events organising etc. Many of the skills you use are transferable to the work place and will include organisational skills, problem solving, interpersonal and creative skills.
- Learn to say no in certain situations. It's good self-management and enables you to exercise control over your life.
- Believe in yourself and spend time making yourself look great - it will do wonders for your confidence.

*If you would like more information about Helen's workshops or about one to one career coaching, then call 0118 984 4962, email [Helen@careerbreakthrough.co.uk](mailto:Helen@careerbreakthrough.co.uk) or visit [www.careerbreakthrough.co.uk](http://www.careerbreakthrough.co.uk)*