

Firm Taps Talent Pool of Seattle Women Who've Taken Time Off

By [Karen Matthee](#) | November 2, 2016

Wanted: Seattle's best and brightest professional women who've taken a voluntary career break and are ready to return to work.

Boston-based [reachHIRE](#) is partnering with leading Seattle companies to retrain and find jobs for highly educated and experienced women wanting back into the workforce and is combing clubs, PTAs, social media and other venues to find them.

"We've been doing a lot of grassroots outreach, looking for great people very creatively," said reachHIRE CEO Addie Swartz. An information session set for 10 a.m. to noon Nov. 9 at the Impact HUB in Seattle will introduce attendees to the Seattle program and its three-week intensive skills training starting in January.

"There are 2.6 million women with advanced degrees and years of on-the-job experience who take time off, and 1.6 million of them are looking to get back to work now," Swartz said. "Why leave all that talent on the sidelines, and why have women who can offer so much be stymied by that?"

The career re-entry course is open to 20 women and focuses on polishing professional, or personal, brands; and updating business

and technical skills, which includes reviews of current methods and tools needed to be successful in today's job market. The training includes 60 hours of live instruction from reachHIRE staff and visiting experts, as well as online training and homework.

The good news for Seattle enrollees is that the program, which Swartz estimates to cost about \$4,000 per person, is completely paid for by reachHIRE and the businesses that have signed on to hire some of the women who complete the training. Currently, 15 jobs are earmarked for program graduates, but the participating companies wish not to be named until they've had a chance to fully test the partnership. The placements generate revenue for reachHIRE.

Fidelity participation

But companies that have been with reachHIRE since it began in Boston in 2013 are happy to publicize their involvement. One is Fidelity Investments, which has hired 26 women through reachHIRE and is continuing the relationship by bringing on 10 women in Texas through a 16-week internship-like effort called "Fidelity RESUME Program, powered by reachHIRE."



Addie Swartz, CEO of reachHIRE, wants to bridge the gap between talented women returning to work and innovative firms willing to hire them. | Photo courtesy of reachHIRE

“We are leveraging reachHIRE’s expertise in ensuring women coming back to the workforce have the training, mentoring and support they need to be successful, while Fidelity provides the on-the-job direction, learning, and experience,” said Ann Lorbes, director of diversity and inclusion for Fidelity Technology.

Lorbes said reachHIRE gave Fidelity a channel to connect with women who had left the workforce to raise a family, care for elderly parents, or address other needs. “We knew we were missing out on some potentially great talent.”

In the past three years, reachHIRE has partnered with firms and conducted training sessions in Raleigh, N.C. as well as Boston, and is now adding Seattle and Dallas to the mix. “We’ve had a great response in that 88 percent of the women we’ve placed back in the workforce either in a permanent role or a contract position have stuck,” Swartz said.

The model has evolved, she said, depending on the individual needs of the firms doing the hiring. “More and more of these organizations choose to underwrite the training fee to further their commitment to supporting gender diversity.”

Intensive sessions

The training covers a lot of ground, Swartz said, not only getting women up to speed on the latest and greatest technology but also coaching them on presentation skills, team dynamics and navigating generational differences in an office environment. One example: “There are now four generations in the workplace. How do you work successfully with folks who are much younger than you?”

Many reachHIRE women are hired by corporations as project managers, internal consultants, analysts or mid-level managers of some type, Swartz said.

About eight months ago, Suzanne Perkinson completed the reachHIRE training in Boston and landed a job at IPREO, a global provider of financial services technology. “I had been out of work for a decade,” said the mother of two.

After graduating from the University of Massachusetts with an English degree in 1991, Perkinson pursued a career in customer service management and worked for nearly 16 years until the birth of her first child. “I was an older mom, and we were fortunate to have the flexibility and freedom for me to stay at home.”

When her youngest son entered first grade and her husband simultaneously decided to pursue a career change, Perkinson felt it was time for her to return to work. She found reachHIRE through social media. “It provided not only a good deal of training and mentoring, but also a lot of support both via the people doing the training as well as the other people participating in the cohort.”



'Attitude and aptitude'

Even with a Harvard MBA, a mathematics degree from Yale, and several years of experience as a group manager in marketing at IBM/Lotus Development Corp., Anne Stuart Hoffman was not prepared for how hard it would be to find a job after taking a career break to raise her children. "I can't tell you how many times I thought I might never work again," she said.

In 1999, she began picking up part-time high-tech gigs amid challenging market conditions, then tried subbing in the schools before taking on volunteer consulting to nonprofits in 2008. By 2012, she was actively looking for full-time employment and decided to enroll in reachHIRE's inaugural cohort in Boston.

"To have an independent voice out there advocating for you made all the difference in the world," Hoffman said. She was hired by EMC, which was acquired last year by Dell Technologies, first on a contract basis and then as a permanent full-time employee.

Perkinson and Hoffman are exactly the kinds of women reachHIRE is looking to recruit, Swartz said. "Someone who has a good education, solid work experience, and is analytical but is also a change agent, somebody who has the attitude and aptitude to be a great team player."

It's a win-win for the companies and the returning women, said Hoffman. "Women like us are motivated and ready to pivot, ready for the next season in our life. We want to prove that even though you take a break, it doesn't mean you don't have a lot to bring to the table."

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