Making career comebacks easier for former execs

UBS-SMU course lets them update knowledge and strategies before re-entering workforce

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WHEN Ms Regina Tan, 36, a mother of two, decided to return to full-time work at Swiss bank UBS after a three-year hiatus, she was overwhelmed by the massive changes in the corporate world.

"There were changes in business technology and trends, different clients and new products and this made the transition from being a full-time housewife to being a banker very challenging," recalled Ms Tan, who had eight years of banking experience with JPMorgan and UBS under her belt before she took a career break in 2001.

At that time, she left her job in UBS Singapore's fixed-income distribution department to accompany her husband to Arizona in the United States, where he was posted for work.

There, their daughter Rachel, now four years old, was born.

In 2005, Ms Tan rejoined UBS on the same employment terms she had enjoyed previously, in line with the bank's culture of supporting diversity in its workforce.

"The great support from my line manager and team members helped to ease the transition back to work," she said. "But I wish there had been resources available then to help me refresh my business and technical skills."

Recognising the challenges faced by former professionals making a comeback after a career break, such as Ms Tan, UBS has launched a first-of-its-kind programme to address their needs.

The bank has tied up with the Singapore Management University (SMU) to offer a Career Comeback programme, specially designed for those who have taken a career break of between 18 months and seven years.

The programme includes a comprehensive overview of the technological, corporate and regulatory changes in the past few years, particularly in the financial sector, as well as networking opportunities, said Associate Professor Annie Koh, who teaches finance at SMU.

The 30 to 35 participants will also receive individual mentoring by UBS executives, who are called "peer coaches".

"The participants can draw on these resources as well as peer support to become confident and psychologically prepared to re-enter the rapidly evolving corporate world, explained Ms Koh.

The programme, which had already been launched in the US, Australia and Hong Kong over the past year, allows the industry to recruit prospective employees from this "relatively untapped" pool of talent, said Ms Leona Tan, UBS Singapore's diversity adviser. For instance, UBS hired three of the 60 participants of the US programme.

The course, which will be held on April 17 and 18, is offered free of charge. This is part of UBS's efforts to support women -- and men -- who may have stopped working for several years to pursue other interests but still have great talent and experience to offer, said Mr Gerald Chan, UBS Singapore's country head.

Indeed, many men who took a sabbatical have been attracted to the comeback programme. Four of the 36 participants at the Hong Kong course are male.

"This programme is particularly relevant in Singapore, where the pace of change is so fast. It is in the best interests of the industry, as it helps to maximise the contributions of professionals here," said Mr Chan.

Candidates must have at least five years of professional experience in any industry. They are required to have a bachelor's degree, and a master of business administration or another post-graduate degree is preferred. Successful applicants will be notified by April 4.

For more information, you can go to http://www.smu.edu/08/executive_education/programmes/2008/acc08/index.asp.

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