BE A MUM AND HAVE A CAREER

UBS, SMU seminar coaches professional women on going back to work and finding work-life balance

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AFTER spending three years away from work to take care of her three children, Madam Clara Low (picture), 48, is getting restless being a stay-at-home mum.

"I miss the sense of achievement and that sense of belonging at the workforce," said Mdm Low. "I can’t sit at home all the time. I’m not that homely, although I want to have time with my kids."

Even though Mdm Low had 23 years of experience in the banking sector prior to her career break, she is nervous about returning to the workforce.

"I don’t know if my previous experience and skills are still relevant because technology has changed, the economic outlook has changed. I’m also not sure if I can cope with the working stress," said Mdm Low, sharing her experiences at the UBS Career Comeback programme on Friday.

This programme, jointly organised by the Singapore Management University (SMU) and UBS, is aimed at helping people make that transition.

The two-day-long programme saw 40 people participating in seminars that provided them with motivational talks and updates on the current business landscape.

The Government is keen to tap on a huge pool of professionals, who stop work for child-care reasons, to bolster Singapore’s workforce.

"It’s a terrible waste," said Mdm Halimah Yacob, NTUC deputy secretary-general. "Here, we have many companies screaming for manpower, needing talent. Yet, we have people, who are so talented, who have all the necessary skills but are not able to get to back to the workforce easily because of stereotypes and other difficulties."

Given that this workshop was oversubscribed with 170 applicants, she noted that there are many who want to start work again.

However, there appears to be a disconnect. Women here are often faced with narrow choices. Usually, it’s down to choosing between their careers or their families. Employers are being urged to be more flexible to help accommodate both.

"Work-life harmony frequently gets tripped up not by the lack of a formal work-life strategy within an organisation, but rather, the unwillingness of supervisors and peers to accommodate," said Senior Minister of State for Finance and Transport Lim Hwee Hwa.

One in eight women in Singapore will drop out of the labour force to start a family.

Unlike their counterparts in Europe, Korea, Japan and the United States, “our women do not subsequently return to work on the contrary, more of our women are so talented, who have all the mism for doing the politically right thing. Forget about being politically correct, it just makes plain old business sense.”