

# One year later: what I have learned about working, motherhood and everything in between

An Article of the Swiss Association of MBAs

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A year ago, I wrote *From a career bet to a working mother* (<https://swissmbas.com/public/blog/details/from-a-career-bet-to-a-working-mother>). At the time, I was standing at the edge of a big transition, full of questions, hope and a fair amount of respect for what lay ahead. I wrote about trust, timing and the belief that it should be possible to build a meaningful career and become a mother without having to give up one for the other.

When I wrote that first blog, I was still on maternity leave, just before returning to work. Now, one year into working motherhood, I can say this: some of my expectations were confirmed. Others were gently, and sometimes not so gently, challenged. And many things turned out to be more complex, more emotional and more human than I could have imagined.

## 1. Returning to work and being trusted again

I returned to work 4.5 months after giving birth and stepped back into the Executive Search team at Kienbaum, where I was offered the role as Co-Lead. What mattered most to me was not just the role itself, but the signal behind it. Shortly after my maternity leave, the company entrusted me again with responsibility, visibility and expectations.

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That trust mattered. It sent a clear message that becoming a mother had not reduced my professional value or ambition in the eyes of the organization. At a moment when many women quietly redefine themselves, this trust reinforced my own confidence.

## **2. Timing, hindsight and reality**

Looking back, 4.5 months was early. For me. At that stage, I was still physically recovering, hormonally adjusting and getting to know a very small human who depended on me in ways no job ever had.

What helped was that my husband was at home for another month and took over the daycare settling-in period. Knowing that our son was with his father during that sensitive phase made a real difference.

Personally, six months at home would have felt right. It would have given me more space to arrive in this new role as a mother before stepping back into professional life. And even then, six months is not a point of full recovery. The female body needs significantly more time to heal, physically and hormonally, after pregnancy and birth. This reality is often underestimated or simply ignored. In Switzerland, women are still not particularly well supported by the state in the transition back to work after childbirth. As a result, many return earlier than their bodies and energy levels would ideally allow.

## **3. Energy, ambition and learning where the limits are**

I returned to work highly motivated. Maybe too motivated. I wanted to show that nothing had changed. That I was still reliable, driven and capable. That motherhood had not softened my ambition or reduced my performance.





At first, it actually went well. I felt energized, focused and proud of managing this new reality. But around six months in, I reached my limit. Not suddenly, but gradually. The summer was intense. Work, a move, my husband changing jobs, no real holidays, a daycare change. Everything happened at once. Looking back, it is no surprise that it became too much.

What I learned during that phase is something many mothers struggle with: asking for help. Or even accepting it when it is offered. There is a deeply rooted belief that we should be able to manage everything on our own. That needing support is a weakness. It took me time to recognize that this belief is neither fair nor sustainable

#### 4. What really made a difference

Several things helped me navigate this first year.

- The **flexibility and tolerance** of my employer. Being trusted to leave early because daycare closes without having to justify my commitment. Continued trust in my role and responsibility, not despite being a mother, but alongside it.
- The **support of my team**. Small gestures, understanding reactions and honest conversations mattered more than any policy on paper.
- **Sharing care work equally** with my husband was foundational. It felt normal for him to leave work when our son was sick or to pick him up from daycare. Not as an exception. Not as “help”, but as part of being a parent. As long as it is implicitly expected that mothers step out and fathers support, true equality remains theoretical.
- And finally, the **help of family and friends**. Accepting support does not mean giving up control. It means recognising that no one thrives alone.

## 5. Looking ahead

Next year, I will take on the overall leadership of our team. For the first time, this step feels aligned not only professionally, but also personally. Our everyday life is more stable now. Our son is settled and genuinely happy in daycare, something I feel deeply grateful for. This stability creates the mental space needed to lead, decide and focus.

## 6. A closing thought for organizations

For companies, the lesson is simple. Trust and flexibility are not nice-to-haves. They are decisive for attracting and retaining talent, especially experienced professionals who happen to be parents.

On a personal note, I feel grateful. For the trust I was given. For the support around me. And for the growing confidence that a fulfilling career and a fulfilling family life can coexist, not perfectly, not effortlessly, but honestly.

One year in, I am still learning. Still adjusting. But I am also more grounded, more realistic and quietly optimistic about what lies ahead.

### **About the Author**

*Fabienne Bezemer is a seasoned HR and executive search professional based in Zurich, currently serving as Head of the Executive Search team at Kienbaum Switzerland. With deep expertise in leadership hiring, performance management and client-centered consulting, she helps organizations identify and secure top leadership talent to drive strategic success.*

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