

Managing a successful return to work after a fatigue-related absence

Q&A capture following the main webinar

Held on 16th February 2026

1. Reaching Out to an Employer After a Long Absence

The Question:

How do I get back in touch with my employer after a long time off, especially when it feels awkward or embarrassing?

Summary of My Answer:

First of all — those feelings are completely normal. When more time has passed than we originally hoped, it can feel uncomfortable to re-open contact. But awkward doesn't mean wrong.

My advice was to keep it simple and high level. You do not need to justify your recovery timeline. You do not need to give a detailed medical explanation. You do not need to account for every month you've been away.

A gentle structure might look like:

- A warm hello
- A brief acknowledgment that recovery hasn't been linear
- A short positive update about recent progress
- An optional invitation to chat

The key is resisting the urge to over-explain. When we feel embarrassed, we often try to compensate with too much information. But a calm, brief message is often more powerful.

And for anyone who hasn't been in touch for a while — it truly is never too late to re-open communication.

2. Managing Stress at Work Without Triggering a Crash

The Question:

When even one stressful situation can lead to a crash, how do I manage that and pace better?

Summary of My Answer:

Stress is often more destabilising than the actual workload. One intense interaction or urgent request can have the same impact as working far longer than planned.

The biggest theme here was: build in pause.

When something stressful happens:

- Don't make decisions immediately.
- Don't respond from urgency.
- Don't automatically say yes.

A simple sentence like, *“Thanks for thinking of me — can I get back to you?”* creates space. And that space is gold. It allows your nervous system to settle before you commit to anything.

We also talked about how many people with fatigue are highly conscientious, capable, kind humans — which unfortunately can mean we struggle to say no. Boundaries are a muscle. They feel uncomfortable at first. But they strengthen with practice.

Consistency also matters:

- Be clear about your working hours.
- Put them in your email signature if needed.
- Block your diary when you're not working.
- Stick to what you've agreed.

Start as you mean to go on. Small boundary leaks become big problems over time.

3. Why Can Returning to Work Sometimes Improve Function?

The Question:

Why do some people actually experience an uplift in function when they return to work?

Summary of My Answer:

This is such an interesting one — and something many clinicians observe.

There are several possible reasons:

- Less time to overthink symptoms
- A renewed sense of purpose and contribution
- Achievement and structure
- Social stimulation
- Being physically in a different environment
- Positive biochemical shifts (dopamine, endorphins)

When we're at home for long periods, our brains can start associating that space with illness. A change of environment can genuinely benefit the nervous system.

We also discussed the human need for contribution. For some people, knowing they are giving something — being useful, being part of something — is a core psychological driver. When that need goes unmet for a long time, it can quietly affect wellbeing. (This is the Basic Needs test I mentioned, which can help you spot how much of a driver this is for you: <https://www.tonyrobbins.com/quiz/driving-force>)

Returning at the right time, and in a well-managed way, can sometimes create an upward spiral rather than a downward one.

4. Should I Return Before I'm Ready — or Let the Job Go?

The Question:

If I don't feel fully ready, should I still try to return — or is it better to let the job go?

Summary of My Answer:

This is the million-dollar question. And there isn't one universal answer.

Yes, some people return earlier than ideal and make it work. But it's tough. Often something else has to give — social life, hobbies, joy, rest. Work becomes the main focus for a period of time.

So the questions to ask yourself are:

- Am I willing to make work my primary focus for a while?
- Would returning mean removing the very things that are helping my recovery?
- Can I treat this as a trial, with a clear “exit strategy” if it starts harming my progress?
- Am I protecting the gains I've already made?

We also discussed something important: letting a job go is not failure. I've seen many people part ways and experience an unexpected uplift. Sometimes removing the pressure creates space for real progress.

And if you do eventually apply for new roles — your recovery journey has built extraordinary skills:

- Resilience
- Problem-solving
- Prioritisation
- Boundary-setting
- Perspective

These are strengths, not liabilities. Use them to impress future employers!

5. Self-Employment vs More Predictable Employment

The Question:

If I was self-employed, should I relaunch slowly — or seek a more defined, lower-stress employed role first?

Summary of My Answer:

Both approaches can work. It really depends on your nervous system and your financial context.

Self-employment offers flexibility — which can be wonderful. But it can also bring unpredictability. That “feast and famine” cycle can be stimulating for some and destabilising for others.

Employed roles may offer:

- Predictable income
- Clearer hours
- Defined expectations

We also discussed voluntary work as a helpful bridge:

- Lower pressure
- Flexible commitment
- Confidence-building
- Something meaningful to add to your CV

Ultimately, it's about choosing the option that feels most regulating and sustainable for you right now — not necessarily forever.

6. Consistency vs Flexibility in Work Scheduling

The Question:

Should I keep fixed working hours, or move work around depending on how I feel?

Summary of My Answer:

In general, consistency is incredibly supportive. Our bodies love predictability. It signals safety.

That doesn't mean rigid, identical days. Life isn't like that. But steady patterns help prevent boom-and-bust cycles.

For example:

- Avoid working three intense days and then collapsing for two.
- On non-work days, maintain a baseline of activity rather than total shutdown. (If you find you have to spend non work days resting, this is a form of 'booming and busting' and indicates you're possibly trying to do too much)

That said, if you're having a genuine blip and you have flexibility to move work within the same week — that can be helpful. The key is intentional flexibility, not reactive overcompensation.

And when you're testing your capacity, approach it with curiosity.

Instead of:

"Can I do this or not?"

Try:

"I wonder how this will go?"

"I wonder how much I can manage today?"

Curiosity reduces pressure. It turns everything into information rather than pass or fail.
