

In 2022, mum of three Rekha felt demoralised and desperate. She had applied for hundreds of jobs after her maternity leave and was shortlisted 10 times, but could not seem to get past the final interview. After yet another knock back a recruitment consultant suggested she reach out to Smart Works.

A week after visiting Smart Works she was shortlisted again for an accountancy role. She is now working as an accounts payable clerk and is saving for a deposit towards her first home.



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This is Rekha's Story



My husband encouraged me to start studying as a mature student because I had given up my university studies when we had married. When the pandemic came along I was in my final year of a finance degree. Suddenly I was home-schooling my two older children and taking care of my newborn baby while studying in the evenings.

I got a first class degree in finance, but I was exhausted. My career advisor suggested I take a break for maternity leave until my older two were settled back in school. I'm glad I did that but when I started to look for jobs, I had a huge gap in my CV which I struggled to explain.

I didn't have any clothes to wear for interviews because all of my wardrobe was maternity wear. I once turned up for an interview in a long Salwar dress which I usually wore to weddings, which was several sizes too big. It was so embarrassing, but I had nothing else to wear.

People like me need a push to keep us moving forward. I had to go to the open day for my university course three times before I worked up the courage to apply. When I started looking for work, I kept on getting shortlisted but I didn't know what I was lacking.

No one could tell me what my weakness was. Always it felt like I had something missing. I was losing my hope, my confidence both physically and mentally. Having a job meant that things would not be so difficult for us financially. I want to build the best life for my children.

When I came to Smart Works they were so friendly. They set me up with a mock interview and it was the first time I got constructive feedback. The woman who did that interview gave me everything. She showed me when I was nervous I was speaking so fast that it was masking my words. She told me to practise looking an interviewer in the eye using a mirror; she showed me how to sit and stand more confidently.

She then went through my CV and explained that I needed to tailor it to each job I applied for. I had been sending hundreds of identical CVs to all the jobs I could find. No one had ever told me not to do that. It's such a small detail but it has made such a big difference. When I was asked a question in an interview I always gave a short answer, but Smart Works helped me understand that I needed to give more detail.

Then I went to meet the dressers and they made me feel so special. We picked out a beautiful dress and it is now my lucky dress because I wore it to the next interview I was shortlisted for and I got the job!

Now anytime I need luck or it is a special occasion I wear that dress. I came back for my second dressing with Smart Works after I got the job and chose another five dresses. Every week I wear these to work. When I put on one of these dresses on a Monday, it reminds me of how far I have come. It reinforces for me that I can be a confident working mum, who is making things better for all my children.

We are now saving to buy our own house because for the first time in a long time we are financially stable. When I was studying my daughter used to bring me cups of milk and she was such a big motivator for me to try and make things better. She has seen what I have gone through and now she tells me she wants to work in finance or business. I have big dreams for her and they wouldn't have been possible without Smart Works.





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