

Career Transitions

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Six Reasons to Make a Career Change

You Should Consider a Career Change If...

- **Your Life Has Changed:** When you chose your career your life may have been different than it is today. For example you may have been single then and now you have a family. The crazy schedule or the frequent travel that is typical of your career may not suit your new lifestyle. You should look for an occupation that is more "family friendly."
- **The Job Outlook in Your Field Has Worsened:** Things looked promising for your field when you entered it. Due to changes in technology, the economy, or the industry you work in, job opportunities are no longer plentiful. You should look for an occupation that has a better outlook.
- **You Are Experiencing Job Burnout:** Once upon a time you loved going to work everyday. You no longer feel that way. You can't stand doing your job anymore and changing employers hasn't helped. It could be time to find a career that will inspire you.
- **Your Job is Too Stressful:** Some occupations are inherently stressful. After a while the stress can become too much to handle. To preserve your mental and physical health, you may have to find a career that is less stressful.
- **You Find Your Work Boring:** When you did your initial research, the occupation you ultimately chose had a lot of advancement opportunities. Now that you've been working in that field, you've climbed as far up the ladder as you can go, and you miss the challenges you once faced. A career change can provide you with the challenge you crave.
- **You Want to Earn More Money:** You may be surprised to learn that money isn't at the top of the list when it comes to job satisfaction. Therefore, don't be surprised if a career that will bring you higher earnings isn't one you will find particularly satisfying. That said, if other reasons are leading you to consider a career change, higher earnings should be something you consider when you choose a new career.

A Four Step Strategy for Changing Careers

Is a more meaningful job or a new career in your sights this year? It's unrealistic to expect a role you may have once loved to remain a perfect match. When your position becomes unsatisfying, it's time to make your New Year's resolutions a reality.

Many executives and professionals experience an inner tug-of-war about making career and job changes. They vacillate between nightmares about jumping ship and daydreams about work that's heaven sent. Perhaps your heart is whispering, "Time to start over with something better."

Before you can discover your perfect job, you must find courage to dream a bigger dream. Explore the possibilities. What if you could earn a living doing something you've always wanted to do? What if you choose a job that's fun, instead of demanding?

"Ask yourself the questions you're most afraid to ask, and go after answers, even if it's one baby step at a time," says Pat Schuler, president of Gemini Resources Group, a sales and business-development coaching firm based in Minneapolis.

Are you ready to find a more meaningful job that's a better match for your skills and interests? Here are some tactics to help you make the change:

1. Face your fears.

You'll be leaving your comfort zone as you explore new directions. You'll need to develop short-term, intermediate and long-term goals, and decide on the steps you'll need to accomplish them. Break these into smaller steps so your quest seems less frightening.

"Even the strongest of us can find ourselves bitten by the fear bug," says Ms. Schuler. "Understand that fear isn't a signal to stop, a red light. It's a yellow light, telling us to proceed with caution."

Learning more about your options can help reduce your fear. Ask yourself: What is within my ability to change, control or influence? Then give yourself permission to stop worrying about things you can't control, so you won't be devoured by fear.

Controlling your thinking also helps ward off the fear that accompanies moving into the unknown, Ms. Schuler says. It's easy to anticipate the worst: My family will starve, we'll lose the farm, I'll never work in this town again.

But by controlling your thinking, you also can visualize the opposite outcome -- that you might gain pleasure and earn more money to do the things you love and care for your loved ones and have a more balanced life, she says.

There's no yellow brick road leading to exciting new jobs, but you can choose to use strategies that can help you make a career change, however uncomfortable.

"Recognize that change often looks and feels like chaos, especially at first," says Ms. Schuler.

2. Separate pipe dreams from realistic goals.

Learn about marketplace and hiring trends. Identify expanding industries, downsizing patterns and outsourcing practices. Analyze how changing business practices affect job choices. According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, eight of the top 10 fastest growing jobs in the next five years will involve computer skills; in contrast, projections indicate bank teller, ranching and farming and basic office jobs will diminish.

Be sure your desired field will support your standard of living. The BLS's Occupational Outlook Handbook is a good place to start your research. To learn more about pay and employment trends, find out what's happening within and outside your company, speak with co-workers, read industry publications, and even consider volunteering in the new career or industry.

Be creative and design your dream career. Perhaps you're meant to do more than one new thing simultaneously. "People will continue to have portfolio or potpourri careers where they may have two or three jobs at the same time," says Leslie B. Prager, a career counselor and senior partner with the Prager-Bernstein Group, a career-counseling and outplacement company in New York City. These can tap your

skills, energize you with new opportunities, and help you combine what you love with how you earn a living.

3. Create stepping stones.

Consider taking assessment tests to discover your hidden talents and jobs that fit them, says Ms. Prager. Leading tests include the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Strong Interest Inventory and Campbell Interest & Skill Survey.

You'll likely find many ways to transfer your competencies and skills to your new role. Create a resume that clearly shows how your abilities apply to the job you want. "A generic resume probably will be highly ineffective in helping the job seeker switch careers or industries," says Liz Spears, a resume writer in Arlington, Texas. She encourages career changers to do their homework to determine the skills they need to qualify for a new job or enter a new industry. Network with business contacts, attend professional meetings and conduct other industry-specific research.

On your resume and in interviews, highlight personal and job-related skills that employers need. You'll need to speak the jargon of the job and industry. And it's always a good idea to cite your interpersonal, management, technological and communication abilities since these are always in demand.

If you lack required credentials, seek the training you need to bridge the gap. A willingness to learn new skills shows initiative. Since most jobs change constantly, emphasize how your work history, flexibility and creativity can help companies reinvent their own business strategies.

Emphasize unique skills that add value, says Ms. Schuler. Ask yourself: What would a new company get from hiring me? Would it get leadership, someone calm under fire, or a person gifted in guiding difficult transitions? Write an "elevator speech," a 30-second personal introduction that sums up what you can do for employers. "Practice it so it becomes as natural as ordering a cup of coffee," she says.

4. Stay tuned into your needs and goals.

Expect to redefine your perfect job and career path as your personal circumstances change. "Life is a journey of change. We can either wait for the universe to thrust a needed change upon us or we can be active agents of change in our own lives," says Ms. Schuler.

Instead of job security, think job resiliency. Career management nowadays means developing the skills and flexibility needed to quickly respond to shifting employer requirements. "Pursue what's meaningful," says Brenda Shull-Miller, a former outplacement executive in Colleyville, Texas, who's switching to a career in leadership development.

You don't have to make a dramatic change overnight. However, postponing pivotal career decisions too long makes them woulda-coulda-shoulda decisions.

What's Next?

To relinquish security and embrace the unknown, you may need to make a leap of faith. But be prepared. Your initial changes may catapult you into cycles of interesting new possibilities.

Liz Leeds, a human-resources consultant in Boston, discovered this firsthand after she moved to Miami for a job as an HR consultant with a major national accounting firm. She had lived in the Boston area for 24 years, and the change was scary and exciting. But her employer closed a year and a half later, and she was out of work..

Evaluating her options, she decided to earn a master's degree in business administration. She took an interim position at a local medical school while studying at the University of Miami. In 2003, with her new M.B.A. in hand, she landed her dream position as a compensation consultant with Watson Wyatt Worldwide in Coral Gables, Fla. The job allows her to travel and work in different environments. Starting over is more difficult than starting a new job, but it's also more interesting and rewarding. Take a deep breath, and imagine what type of job you'd really like to be doing before too long. Pursuing it is the first step in making your resolutions come true.

Reference:

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