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Career transition: Taking the leap

Do you feel overworked and underappreciated? Are you bored, unchallenged by your work or just ready to try something new? Were you recently laid off because of a company merger, company relocation, job outsourcing or implementation of new technology? If any of these situations apply to you, perhaps you are in the throes of a career transition.

View making a career transition as a personal turning point. It can also mean a transformation of other parts of your life — additional education/training, relocation or a lifestyle shift.

There are three key strategies for considering which course to take. Probably the most ambitious action, yet the path many people choose, is to change professions entirely — both the job and field of endeavor. Another direction to take is to move to a new position in the same industry. And, finally, the third option is to find the same position in a new industry.

Conceivably, the biggest mistake you can make is attempting to change careers without a plan. A successful change may take months to accomplish when you have a strategy. Without a plan, you could end up drifting for an even longer period of time.

To get you started, here are five key steps you can take to increase your chances of success:

1. Identify the “why.” Avoid rushing into the change. You should ask yourself what you are seeking to ac-

complish and why. Do you want to change careers because you dislike your job, your boss or the company culture? Do you want more money or better benefits? Try not to confuse disliking your current situation with disliking your overall career. Take the time and effort to analyze whether it’s the job, boss or company you’re not happy with, or whether it’s the career, skills or work you dislike. Whatever you conclude, keep in mind it’s best to maintain your current job, if possible, until you have an action plan in place.

2. Determine your career likes and dislikes. Analysis can be a useful activity. It helps us better understand ourselves. In most cases, determining your dislikes on the job is the easy part. A key question to ask yourself is what you really like doing when you’re at work. What gets you excited and enthused? What do you have a passion for? If you’re not quite sure, consider completing a few online career assessments to help you get a better understanding of your “likes.” Another option is to visit with a career professional who can help guide you through the transition.

3. Explore career possibilities. Avoid jumping into a different career field before you spend some time researching the careers that center on your passion. Network with your contacts, conduct informational interviews and read career/job profiles. Additional career information and skills-matching services are available online. The more information you have about various career

choices, the more successful you’ll be in making a transition.

4. Assess your transferable skills. You probably already have a transferable skillset. Consider your communication skills — oral, written, interpersonal and presentations. Other skills may be troubleshooting, problem solving, project management, operations, team leadership, computer proficiency, customer satisfaction, etc. Once again, it’s important you keep in mind you may need additional education, training or certifications to effectively transition into your new career.

5. Choose a mentor. Changing careers is undoubtedly a challenging undertaking. You need to have someone to assist you through the difficult times, motivate you, and keep you focused on your goal. There will be times when insecurities and lack of confidence set in. When seeking out a mentor, look for someone with whom you can build a productive relationship, who can add to your current level of knowledge and, finally, who doesn’t just encourage you but is also direct and frank with you when you’re moving in the wrong direction.

Finding a new job is tough. Changing careers is even tougher. Yet, with a strategic plan, lots of resourcefulness and commitment, you can be successful and make it happen.

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