

Assess

Career Planning and Assessment



Managing Career Transitions

Should You Change Careers?

Are you dissatisfied with your current job? Are people in your profession being replaced by technology

or overseas workers?

Have you reached your maximum potential in your career? Is there another career that interests you more than your current career? Are you looking for lifestyle changes that are not possible to achieve while you are in your current career? Is your current career in decline?

Are you relocating to an area where your current position is not in demand? Have you completed a course of study and desire to pursue a career based on your new education? Are you restless in your current career? Do you seek new challenges above and beyond those that you typically encounter in your current career?

Is your tour of duty in the military almost over and do you want to return to civilian life? Are you getting ready to retire?

If you answered Yes to these and similar questions, then you should consider changing your career. Some writers have estimated that the

average professional will change careers between 5-7 times during their work life. The key to accomplishing a successful career transition is careful planning. In your planning, include the following: a thorough, initial evaluation of the reasons for changing careers, a clear understanding of the effects of a career change, in-depth research into the outlook and requirements for your new career, and a plan for identifying and acquiring new skills you will need.

“Are you restless in your current career?”

Career Change Evaluation Process

First, analyze your motivation for changing careers. Compile two lists – one with your anticipated advantages (“Pros”) of a career change and one with your anticipated disadvantages (“Cons”). Here are some example advantages and disadvantages that may apply to your career change:

Advantages

- Higher salary
- More responsibility
- Less responsibility
- Better working conditions
- Better job security
- More interesting work
- More valuable work
- Higher job satisfaction
- Greater potential for professional growth
- More free time
- Better benefits
- Greater demand for workers

When considering a career change, you need to anticipate and prepare for the effects that you will encounter.

Disadvantages

- Lower salary
- Less responsibility
- Feeling of “starting over”
- Degree of uncertainty
- Educational/licensing/certification requirements

After compiling your lists, review them to determine if you have identified the major advantages and disadvantages for changing careers. Frequently refer to these lists as you proceed to plan your career change. You can use your lists as checklists for each new job opportunity that you consider.

Effects of a Career Change

When considering a career change, you need to anticipate and prepare for the effects that you will encounter. First, there will be personal, emotional changes in your life. You will be entering unfamiliar territory. Your usual routine and environment will be disrupted. Strengths that you have developed in your previous careers have to be reapplied in a new setting. You will encounter completely new situations and challenges. These changes can cause anxiety, uncertainty, and stress. Plan strategies to manage the changes and build a support system to help you succeed.

One of the support elements in your life can be your family and friends. Involve them in your planning process. Share your anxiety, fears, and concerns with them so that they will understand the process you are undertaking and will be able to provide some support. Your career change may directly impact your immediate family as your work routine changes, your attention strays, and your stress level increases. You may need to delegate tasks to devote time to advance your

skills and education or conduct your job search. One important function your family can fulfill is to help you relax and reduce the stress that a career transition can create.

Of course, the greatest effect will be the effect to your career. If you have carefully identified the advantages and disadvantage or your new career goal, you will be able to see the ultimate effect of the changes you are making. In the process, however, you may encounter obstacles to your plan that challenge your decisions and test your resolve. For example, if

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you are changing careers due to foreseeable downturn in your current position, that downturn may occur before you have completed your career transition. If that occurs, you may be laid off from your current job before finding a new position. Your career will seemingly stall. When this happens, stay focused. Your full-time job now becomes your career transition and job search. Put all of your energy into a successful career transition and don't waste energy in unproductive anxiety and stress.

How Should You Manage a Career Change?

Research New Careers

When you have determined that you should consider changing careers and have evaluated the advantages, disadvantages, and effects of this decision, you need to start managing the process. Your next step is to determine a target career.

There are a number of tools to assist you in this process. You can consult career counselors – schools and government employment agencies

offer services and there are private counselors as well. You can use technology tools, such as the Career Planner™, to help you identify potential new careers. Discussing options for family, friends, and colleagues is also helpful. Compile a list of promising careers and positions for your next step.

As mentioned elsewhere, conducting informational interviews is a way to gather rich information on the specifics of a profession. Unlike traditional job interviews, informational interviews are occasions when you ask questions about the targeted career and position. You are on a fact-finding tour of a profession.

In addition to the information that you gather in informational interviews, you should also research the forecasted job outlook for your targeted career and position. Is there growth in this area? Is the area subject to overseas outsourcing? Will professionals in the field be replaced by enhanced automation? Will there be a steady increase in the demand for professionals in the field?

As you review the job outlook, also note the popular locations for your targeted position. Have these types of jobs moved from inner cities to suburbia, from urban areas to rural areas, or from the north to the south? Perhaps your targeted position is in equal demand wherever you are located. Consider location as one of the factors when planning and managing your career transition.

Evaluate Education and Skills Needs

When you have identified the positions you will seek in your new career, compile a list of the job requirements for those positions. Collect this

information from your informational interview notes, career profiles, and position announcements. Organize the requirements and then ask a professional in the field to review your list. Make sure that you have identified the major requirements of your targeted position.

Next, based on your latest resume, identify your current skill set and educational background. Include specific skills and training as well as more general traits and educational attainments. When considering a career transition, many people ignore their more general, transferable skills and focus instead on their lack of specific experience in the new career. By identifying general traits, you can apply these to the specific requirements of a new position by relating the underlying commonality. For instance, if the new position requires you to manage the order processing system, you can relate this requirement to the organizational skills that you developed in your previous career when you maintained your student's academic records.

With the list of job requirements and your list of skills, you can conduct what is known as a gap analysis. In this process, you match your skills to the job requirements. After the initial comparison, review the job requirements that did not match one of your skills. Is there an underlying skill or trait that you have which relates to the job requirement? If no skill matches the requirement, then this identifies a gap in your profile. These gaps are indicators that further training is necessary. ■

The final step to prepare for your career transition is to enhance your skills and education based on the gaps that you have identified in your profile. There are many options for this step. You can attend training courses – instructor-

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led, on-line, self-paced, or computer-based. You can volunteer or serve as an intern to learn on the job. For more formal learning, you can enroll in a certificate, license, or degree program in which you will complete a series of courses. With these new skills in your profile, you are ready to launch your new career.

The following sections provide you with special considerations for making a career transition.

Military to Civilian Transitions

One of the challenges in returning to civilian life from the military is mapping your military skills to civilian job requirements. Some military positions have fairly close civilian counterparts, but many times you will have to adjust your military skill to one that matches a civilian job requirement. For example, if you were a specialist in maintaining weapons systems, you might consider a career that involves the maintenance of complex machinery and the management of hazardous material.

Related to skill mapping is the necessity of translating military terminology into civilian terminology. Anyone who has served in the military understands that there is a unique language associated with almost all aspects of military operations. If the person screening you for your targeted civilian position does not have experience working with military terms, he will not understand your background. You are responsible for providing the translation of the military terms to civilian terms. For instance, when discussing your skills, do not refer to your primary MOS – instead explain that the military carefully classifies skills and describe your specializations in civilian terms. Using military jargon and acronyms will only confuse your civilian interviewers.

Similarly, you will find that military organization structures and decision-making processes differ to a great extent from civilian structures and processes. During your tours of duty, you have learned to work within the military system. The transition to civilian employment is no different. You will have to understand and adjust to the civilian systems.

Public Sector to Private Sector Transitions

When moving from the public sector to the private sector, you must convert the skills you've developed in building constituency relationships and support to those needed to work successfully within corporate managerial structures. For example, the organizational skills necessary to conduct an election campaign can translate to those needed to launch a new product.

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Another technique that will help with this type of transition is to analyze the skills required for the public service tasks you've mastered and identifying the general traits that underlie these skills. For instance, you may have been involved in reviewing development proposals as a member of the planning commission. Underlying this task is the ability to organize complex documents and analyze complicated projects for potential obstacles. This general skill is required in many private sector careers.

In the public sector, great attention is devoted to managing public resources responsibly. In the private sector, more attention is devoted to profit generation as a measure of success. Understanding this difference in goals will not only help in your career transition but will also help you set your priorities in your new position.

Teacher to Private Industry Transitions

Successful teachers develop a wide range of general skills that are transferable to many other careers. One technique to prepare for a career transition from teaching is to relate the classroom management skills you've developed to private industry job requirements. For example, the skills required to develop individualized daily and weekly learning plans for students are based on the same underlying skills that are required to develop and manage the daily and weekly performance goals for clerical workers, sales staff, or maintenance technicians.

While working within a large, complex system with hierarchical reporting relationships as well as cross-functional teams, teachers often enjoy a certain degree of autonomy and self-direction in managing student learning. These skills compare most directly to skills needed for management roles in private industry.

Instruction is another area where a teacher's skills can translate directly to skills needed in private industry. A teacher who has developed a lesson on effective writing techniques, delivered and refined the writing lesson over a period of years, and coached students to acquire the target techniques will be ideal to mentor new employees, explaining company procedures to them and coaching them on effective job performance.

Part-time to Full-time Transitions

The transition from a part-time position to a full-time position may not be an actual *career* transition. In other words, you may be staying within your current career and just increasing the amount of time you spend working. Even if this is the case, you still need to manage the transition

and be prepared for some changes. Chief among those changes is the impact of a longer work day or work week on your current lifestyle. Prepare yourself to be more organized with household management chores and errands. Anticipate ending your day and week with less energy and a greater need for relaxation. Prepare yourself and those around you for a greater amount of stress in your life.

When transitioning to full-time employment, ensure that you clarify your motivation for the change. Do you need to earn more money? Are you returning to a previous career to continue a career path that you may have interrupted? Are you bored with too much free time due to working a part-time schedule? Whatever your motivation, keep reminding yourself of the reasons that you are changing from part-time to full-time employment to help you cope with the effects on your lifestyle.

*“Do you
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Full-time to Part-time Transitions

Comparable to the effect of moving from part-time employment to full-time employment on your lifestyle, changing from full-time employment to part-time employment can also have significant effects. Perhaps the most obvious effect is a decrease in salary and benefits, but you may not anticipate a lower corporate status and less job security. Part-time employees can easily be ignored or excluded from company functions, communication, and programs. If a company experiences a drop in profits, part-time employees are usually the easiest ones to dismiss. ■

As you transition from full-time to part-time employment, you will have more time available for other activities. A challenge that you might encounter is a need to balance your other

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activities with your part-time work schedule. Even though you are no longer a full-time employee, your company has expectations and job performance standards that you must meet.

Consulting to Traditional Employment Transitions

The lifestyle of a consultant often differs from that of a traditional employee. Among the changes that you should anticipate involve adjusting to your employer's setting and structure, adopting your employer's procedures, and modifying your work schedule to meet your employer's needs. Balancing these issues are other aspects that you no longer need to manage, such as marketing your services, billing and collecting fees, and managing your business finances.

Another adjustment for a consultant is that of accepting increased oversight and direction both on projects and on regular tasks. As a traditional employee, your work is usually more continually reviewed than it was as a consultant.

Your former consulting clients will also need to be managed. Unless you have made arrangements with your employer, you probably won't have the time to keep providing services to your former clients. They will have to arrange for consulting services elsewhere. One way to manage this transition is to gradually work up to full-time status with your employer while finishing projects with consulting clients or helping them locate other assistance.

Traditional Employment to Consulting Transitions

When you decide to assume the role of an independent consultant, you should have developed a preliminary group of clients. Marketing yourself to potential clients is an ongoing task for most consultants. They need to plan continuously for their next contract as they complete their projects. Identifying the marketing and client management requirements is essential to achieving a successful transition from traditional employment to independent consulting.

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As you work with a variety of clients, you will have to address issues of your professional loyalty and manage any conflicts of interest. For example, if you are providing advice to help develop the marketing campaign for a new product, you cannot let the information you gather working on the campaign influence your work with competing companies.

Working as a traditional employee in a company gives you a certain degree of security that is no longer an aspect of your consulting business. Among the transition plans you need to make is one for the ongoing funding of your business, especially in your early years of consulting. Anticipating lapses in revenue will help your business weather rough economic times.

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