

A Step-by-Step Guide for Anyone Looking to Change Careers

At one point or another, the thought of changing careers has probably come to mind. Maybe you no longer feel passionate about what you're doing or you find it too difficult to balance work and family. You could even feel undervalued in your current role. Whatever the reason, you just want to make a change.

For most, however, that's often where it ends — at a thought. You start creating a list of reasons why you can't make the change. Money, skills, experience, and time often top the list.

Though there might be a kernel of truth to those reasons, they shouldn't be enough to keep you from doing something you really love.

Here's what you should do if you want to change careers effectively:

Take a step back.

You're about to make a big change in life, which deserves time and attention. Take a step back and think about your interests, values, ideals, and priorities. So many professionals jump into a field without ever really questioning these things. If you take the time to get to know what makes you tick, you've now got the foundation to build not just a successful, but an enjoyable career.

Inventory your professional prowess.

Most people undervalue themselves. Don't fall into this trap. It'll keep you from moving forward in a career change. Devote some time to inventory your experience, skills, and successes. Take an honest look at what you've contributed, accomplished, and excelled at in the



workplace. Seemingly small “wins” can be huge in another field. If it's something you can measure, even better.

Gather info on that new career.

Get to know everything possible about the field. Do the same for your desired role in that field. Talk to friends, family, and colleagues who may be in a similar role. Dig deeper than the job description to determine what it takes to excel in the industry and the position. Sometimes soft skills can make up for any gaps in experience. In fact, many leaders would rather hire someone with less experience if the candidate offers intangibles that can't be learned.

Compare your skills with the requirements.

Look at your top skills in comparison with the “required” skills for the new role. Think about your skills in terms of what the employer is looking for in a candidate. Given enough thought, you may just find that a number of your skills already align — these are your transferrable skills. Then, consider how these skills might apply to this

new industry and think of examples that demonstrate those skills. Take it one step further, and practice explaining those examples.

Freshen up your skill set.

Just because you're hoping to make a move doesn't mean you can't freshen up your skills while still working at your current employer. Look for ways to bolster some of the skills you may be lacking. Volunteer for special projects. Take on additional tasks and responsibilities. Consider enrolling in an online course or two to build up some of those skills essential to a new career. You want to plug as many holes as possible before applying for a new position in a new industry.

Leverage your network.

As with a "traditional" job search, your network is an essential part to landing a new role. If you know people at a particular company, reach out to them. Schedule a lunch. Let them know what you're thinking about in terms of a career change. People already working in an industry can often identify positions — and open ones, at that — you're perfectly (or almost perfectly) suited for, so get those feelers out. Most people will be more than willing to help.

Develop a SMART plan of action.

If you don't develop an actual plan, there's no way of getting to where you want to be. Think of it as a roadmap, of sorts, with a series of specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely milestones. In other words, make them S.M.A.R.T. What do you need to do to get from point A to point B? What about from point B to point C? Be deliberate and logical as you map out what it'll take to get you to where you need to be. Once you know the path, the journey isn't as daunting. It'll also allow you to become a true match for your new career.

While the process of changing careers isn't an easy one, it should never dissuade you. Just keep in mind that it'll take time, energy, patience, and a great deal of commitment to see it through. But in the end, you'll find yourself in a meaningful career that you love, which will make the journey all the more worth your effort.

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