

The 10-Step Plan to Career Change: How to Successfully Change Careers

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How does it happen? Perhaps you just begin to lose interest. Perhaps you find something that interests you more. Perhaps your company is downsizing. These are just some of the numerous reasons people find themselves on that precipitous cliff looking back on their career just as the dirt begins to crumble beneath them.

Are you facing that career change plunge? Do you wish you were? Take it slowly and make sure what you really want to do is change careers. Then use this 10-step plan, and you will be on much more sure footing — and on a path toward career change success. Finally, remember that career change is a natural life progression; most studies show that the average job-seeker will change careers (*not jobs*) several times over the course of his or her lifetime.

Step 1: Assessment of Likes and Dislikes. A lot of people change careers because they dislike their job, their boss, their company. So, identifying the dislikes is often the easier part of this step; however, you will not know what direction to change your career unless you examine your likes. What do you really like doing when you're at work, when you're at home — in your spare time. What excites you and energizes you? What's your passion? If you're really unsure, consider taking one of more of these career assessments. The key is spending some time rediscovering yourself — and using your self-assessment to direct your new career search.

Step 2: Researching New Careers. Once you've discovered (or rediscovered) your passion, spend some time researching the types of careers that center around your passions. Don't worry if you're feeling a bit unsure or insecure — it's a natural part of the career change process. How much research you do also partly depends on how much of a change you're making; for example, changing from a teacher to a corporate trainer versus switching from a nurse to a Web designer. You can find some great career information and a skills-matching service at O*NET Online from the U.S. Department of Labor and basic job information from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbook.

Step 3: Transferable Skills. Leverage some of your current skills and experiences to your new career. There are many skills (such as communications, leadership, planning, and others) that are transferable and applicable to what you want to do in your new career. You may be surprised to see that you already have a solid amount of experience for your new career. Read more: Strategic Portrayal of Transferable Skills is a Vital Job-search Technique .

Step 4: Training and Education. You may find it necessary to update your skills and broaden your knowledge. *Take it slowly.* If the skill you need to learn is one you could use in your current job, see if your current employer would be willing to pick up the tab. *And start slowly.* Take a course or two to ensure you really like the subject matter. If you are going for a new degree or certification, make sure you check the accreditation of the school, and get some information about placement successes.

Step 5: Networking. One of the real keys to successfully changing careers will be your networking abilities. People in your network may be able to give you job leads, offer you advice and information about a particular company or industry, and introduce you to others so that you can expand your network. Even if you don't think you already have a network, you probably do — consider colleagues, friends, and family members. You can broaden your network through joining professional organizations in your new field and contacting alumni from your college who are working in the field you want to enter. A key tool of networking is conducting informational interviews.

Step 6: Gaining Experience. Remember that, in a sense, you are starting your career again from square one. Obtaining a part-time job or volunteering in your new career field not only can solidify your decision, but give you much needed experience in your new career. You might also want to consider temping in your new field. Work weekends, nights, whatever it takes to gain the experience.

Step 7: Find a Mentor. Changing careers is a major life decision that can get overwhelming at times. Find a mentor who can help you through the rough patches. Your mentor may also be able to help you by taking advantage of his or her network. A mentor doesn't have to be a highly placed individual, though the more powerful the mentor, the more success you may have in using that power to your advantage.

Step 8: Changing In or Out. Some people change careers, but never change employers. Unfortunately, only the very progressive employers recognize that once happy employees can be happy and productive again – in a different capacity. It's more than likely that you will need to switch employers to change fields, but don't overlook your current employer. Remember not to start asking about a job switch until you are completely ready to do so.

Step 9: Job-Hunting Basics. If it's been a while since you've had to use your job-hunting tools and skills, now is the time for a refresher course. Consider spending some time with one or more of our tutorials.

Step 10: Be Flexible. You'll need to be flexible about nearly everything – from your employment status to relocation and salary. Set positive goals for yourself, but expect setbacks and change – and don't let these things get you down. Besides totally new careers, you might also consider a lateral move that could serve as a springboard for a bigger career change. You might also consider starting your own business or consulting as other avenues.