

How to ensure a successful career transition

By Beth Braccio Hering

For many workers, a career transition is approached with a mixture of both excitement and fear. Whether contemplating a new position in the same industry, the same job in a different industry, or a complete career change, questions about doing the “right” thing and how such a movement will pan out are bound to be paramount.

While there is no crystal ball that can let you view the exact outcome of your decision, there are ways to make the process less daunting. Experts agree that thoughtful contemplation and motivated investigation *before* transitioning are keys to a smoother experience.

Examine Your Reasons

Understanding why you want to make a career move can be the first step towards success. Joel Garfinkle, a career coach at [Dream Job Coaching](#) and author of *Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level*, suggests thinking about the reasons your current job isn't satisfying. “Is it that you don't like what you do? Is it difficult for you to apply your personal gifts or talents at work? Have you become bored with your job? The answers to these types of questions will help reveal what's not right with your current situation, so you can make sure your career transition is successful.”

Adds Tiffani Murray, a résumé writer and career consultant at [Personality on a Page](#) and author of *Stuck on Stupid: A Guide for Today's Professional Stuck in a Rut*, “Motivating factors will play a role in how dedicated you are to the transition. If you want to make a transition because you hate your boss, if after the first two interviews you don't land a job in the new area you are interested in, you may give up. It is better when the motivation for a career transition is pure.”

Murray likewise cautions that the desire for a fatter paycheck doesn't always lead to long-term contentment. “You also want to have a passion for the work. If you move just for the paycheck into a new professional arena, after you've purchased the new car that you previously could not afford, the shine of the extra money may wear off -- and you might be left with a new career path that you honestly are not that in love with.”

Look at the Timing

Transitioning may come more naturally at certain times in a person's life. Workers who have lost jobs often find that they want to seek employment in an area different from the one they just left, either for personal reasons or because of increased opportunities.

Sara LaForest, cofounder with Tony Kubica of [Kubica LaForest Consulting](#) a management consulting and performance improvement firm, notes that preretirement is another common time for change. “This is when people are retiring from their long-time career/role and are looking to not simply retire but to do something more meaningful and inspiring to them. We see many people at this point moving from organizations and the corporate world into starting their own businesses.”

Learn Before You Leap

Some people contemplating a transition fall prey to a “grass is always greener” mentality, envisioning the potential job only as they would like it to be. Others imagine roadblocks to success that in actuality do not exist or are easily overcome. The cure for both types of tunnel-vision is knowledge.

- **Find out the basics**

Learn what skills, experience, qualifications, and talents are needed in the new career. Such information will help you decide if you are already a good candidate for the position or if additional training will be necessary before you can realistically expect someone to hire you.

- **Get the inside scoop**

What does someone who currently holds this job actually do on a day-to-day basis? What is her background, and what road did she take to this position? LaForest suggests finding someone who has been successful in the career you’ve chosen to pursue to be a mentor, advisor, or coach who can help you navigate the transition.

- **Examine the market**

“This is not to discourage you, but you need to realistically look at the job market to determine if this is a saturated area. Will I be able to find employers with this need? Even if you still move forward with a career change, it is helpful to know going in what your hiring odds might be,” Murray notes.

- **Develop a plan**

“Don’t leave your current job until you have a plan,” Garfinkle says. “What do you want to do? How long will it take for you to start doing that new job? How much money will you need in the bank to let go of your current job? You don’t want to leave your current job without having a clear and intelligent game plan that makes the career transition as easy as possible.”

Added Measures for Success

Career transitions that are thought out in detail often have the best track record. Making time for contemplation now can reap large dividends later on.

It can be difficult to commit time to thinking about a job while working full time. “Schedule daily appointments with yourself to take time away from your busy life and become clear on where to direct your energy and time,” says Garfinkle. He also suggests finding support, whether that be friends and relatives who can help hold you accountable so you make smart decisions or perhaps a career coach who can provide guidance and a step-by-step process.

And be honest with yourself. If you just can’t muster the energy to go back to school to get the added training you need for this new position, perhaps your heart really isn’t in it. Likewise, while the opinions of others are bound to be influential, it might be worth turning a deaf ear on naysayers if you’ve found an area that sparks passion inside of you.