

Moving into a New Profession

Hate Mondays? You're not alone. Surveys show that the trend in job satisfaction is steadily declining (not too surprising in today's economic crisis) and that less than half of all workers are satisfied with their jobs.¹ Did you really have a childhood dream to become a Document Control Specialist? Probably not, but planning a second career can actually be easier than diving into your first choice because you now have the benefit of experience on the job and in life.

So what's holding you (and everyone else) back from making the move to your dream job?

A lot of reasons come to mind, including inability or unwillingness to work for lower pay by starting at the bottom of a new profession, fear of change, apathy, or thinking that it is impossible to make a major career switch.

Some good news. These transitions are not as difficult as you may think, as long as you approach them from a logical and carefully planned point-of-view. Here are some basics.

1. Identify your target field.

Hopefully, if you are reading this you already know what you want to do - it should be your passion - a childhood dream you never pursued for whatever reason (parent disapproval, presupposing it was impossible to achieve your lifelong ambition, or simply "taking a job" to pay the bills and never revisiting your dream).

If on the other hand, you don't have a coveted vocation, but just know you want to / need to do something different, start by taking a few career-oriented personality tests to help pinpoint your ideal occupations. One tool you may consider is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which is a time-tested assessment designed to measure psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions. Among other things, MBTI assessment results align occupations to personalities.

2. Understand the skills needed for your targeted field / targeted position.

Some of this will be logical, such as being detail-oriented and good with numbers for an accounting job, and some not so apparent, like needing IV compounding experience for a pharmacist position.

But no matter how obvious you may think are the core skills for your targeted job, always do research.

- ▶ Start by browsing job ads and writing down the required skills and qualifications. Note that not every hiring company will require the same skill set, but if you surf a good number of ads you will see a pattern develop.
- ▶ Network into your desired field and ask experts.
- ▶ Read as much as you can.

Shadow professionals in your targeted field if possible, or volunteer and freelance to learn the necessary skills firsthand and gain experience at the same time.

3. Find the skills you need in your background.

Look past your job title - job titles tell little about how and how well you did your job(s).

Dissect your job(s) to discover the skills used to perform them.

Tasks	Skills Used to Accomplish Tasks	Level of Proficiency

You'd be surprised at how many skills are transferable.

4. Look for ways to develop missing skills.

- ▶ Pave the way for your career change by looking for opportunities to develop the skills you need for your new job...in your current job. Offer to help others or take on different assignments that will help hone these new skills.
- ▶ Volunteer. Need to develop sales skills...? Volunteer as charity telemarketer. Need to develop bookkeeping skills...? Assist the PTA Treasurer at your neighborhood school.
- ▶ Take on part-time jobs to develop these skills.
- ▶ Enroll in evening or weekend classes - you won't get firsthand experience, but you will gain academic knowledge and that's a start.

5. Consider a functional resume.

Structure your resume and cover letters in such a way that downplays your existing industry, yet relates your transferable skills to your targeted industry. In other words, present your qualifications in a way that will prevent the reader from tossing your application during a quick "resume triage," i.e., yes, no, maybe.



Submit a resume that boasts 20 years of banking experience for a position in health care management and it immediately gets tossed. Rewrite the resume in a totally different format, downplaying the banking lingo, and at least get promoted to the "maybe" pile or better yet, get called in for an interview.

6. Solicit resume critique from experts in your targeted field.

Network in your targeted industry and find a few trusted advisors with whom you can share your newly-revised resume and ask their opinion. Be ready for all forms of criticism, but take it all constructively. After all, they are in the field to which you want to move - you are not.

Remember - networking can lead to a job, but don't approach it from that point - simply ask for resume advice. The persons with whom you are meeting know what you really want and if they have or know of a job that fits your background, you will know about it.

7. Approach interviews from the values of your targeted industry / company.

Approach interviews solely from the point of your previous experience, without demonstrating traits valued by your target industry or company, and you've lost.

Learn what is critical for your targeted industry, and bring this out during the application stage and in the interview. For example, is cultural fit more valuable than a 100% fit on skill?

Networking will help you understand what is valued within your targeted field. Small companies versus large companies. For-profit versus non-profit. Private versus public. Private versus government. While there is no hard and fast rule of what each segment values more, there are general patterns of values within each unique sector. Non-profits, for example, almost always want people who radiate passion for their cause. If you achieved decent sales growth in your previous position, but really care about protecting the environment, you probably will do better in your telemarketing position with Rainforest Alliance than the applicant who always won salesperson of the year but with reckless abandon for how s/he achieved these numbers.

8. Know where you are vulnerable.

Identify skills needed for your targeted field that are critical, yet you do not possess, then do something about it. Take classes, read books, attend conferences, etc. In this way, when you are successful in landing the interview, and the interviewer hits you with questions about lacking these key skills, you have an answer in your back pocket....*"Funny you should make that observation. I agree with you, and here is how I have been working to fill that gap."*



This shows you did your homework, and took initiative in acquiring these needed skills.



Need inspiration for your career move? Jeff Bezos worked as a financial analyst for D.E. Shaw & Co. before founding Amazon. John Grisham went from attorney to legislator to best-selling author. Martha Stewart went from a model to a stockbroker to entrepreneur, Arnold Schwarzenegger went from bodybuilder to movie star to California Governor, Ronald Reagan went from movie star to President of the Screen Actors Guild to President of the United States, and George Foreman went from Olympic gold medalist to heavyweight boxing champion to author and successful businessman. So what's holding you back?

© Dennis Abenanty: 2010

1 Van Horn, Carl, Ph.D., and Cliff Zukin, Ph.D. "What a Difference a Decade Makes. The Declining Job Satisfaction of the American Worker." *John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey*. 15 December 2009.