

**STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL
CAREER CHANGE**
By Leslie B. Prager, M.A.

Career change is a fact of life in the nineties, and it is here to stay. The current trend is toward an individual's having several different, or related, careers during one's lifetime, whether by choice or due to downsizing. Therefore, effective career planning and career change strategies are a necessity. This article will review the following components of career change and career planning: self-assessment, motivation for career change, internal and external barriers, researching career options, skills transferability and goal setting.

The job search process consists of three separate and distinct categories. First is the normal career path progression, which includes individuals seeking positions within an occupational area in which they have experience and education. Second is the re-entry individual, who is returning to the workforce after an extended period of voluntary unemployment, due to reasons such as marriage, raising a family or other personal reasons. Third (and the category that we are concerned with here) is the career changer. The career changer is an individual who had established career patterns, and for either voluntary or involuntary reasons, now chooses to change career direction.

The reason for career change are numerous. Here is a brief overview of the many and varied reasons which individuals of all ages and career paths have indicated: involuntary reasons (downsizing, lay-offs and staff cutbacks); desire for increased financial reward, basic job dissatisfaction; "discovery" that one is in the wrong occupation; technical obsolescence, severe job-related stress; an intentional plan to alter one's life (often motivated by personal trauma or crisis); retirement (normal, early or forced); and turning a hobby or avocation into a career (entrepreneurship).

The career change process begins with an honest and thorough self-assessment. This is the stage where one reassesses work experience, abilities, likes and dislikes, and other job-related aspects of one's personality. The increased self-awareness makes one more self-confident and helps one to choose a more compatible occupation. The benefits of self-assessment include identification of one's transferable skills and abilities, as well as improved job-person fit.

The career research and exploration phase should follow the self-assessment. This phase will include both library research as well as information interviews for a first-hand look at "other" careers.

Some of the questions that will be answered at this point will be:

What options are open to you with your unique combination of skills and experience?

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What is the marketability of your new career including industry trends, job availability?

Are your career targets compatible with your personality, interests and values?

What are the educational requirements of your target career?

Is entrepreneurship a viable option for you?

The career changer should be aware of the internal and external barriers that may exist. Internal barriers include factors such as time, money and family constraints; lack of the necessary education or credentials; and a tight job market. Internal barriers include one's negative attitudes and beliefs such as being too old to change; unable to learn the new technology; believing that it is impossible to change careers or that it is too late to start over.

Goal setting is critical since "if you don't know where you're going, you may end up somewhere else." Goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and tangible. A goal-setting statement should include both short-term and long-term goals, the steps necessary to accomplish these goals and target dates of attainment of these short-term and long-term goals.

In order to change careers, it is necessary to identify one's transferable skills. These are the skills that one can "transfer" from one job or career to another.

Transferable skills can be "discovered" in several ways. They can be discovered by identifying every responsibility that you had in a particular occupation and then analyzing each task. Each task involves one or more skills and areas of knowledge. Transferable skills can also be found by looking at one's accomplishments, both at work and in one's personal life.

Career change is a process that does work if one "sticks with" the following strategies: self-assessment; discovering and working from one's strengths to make the smoothest transition; identifying and conquering both internal and external barriers; speaking with successful career changers to see how they did it; and becoming involved in one's chosen career. Becoming involved is crucial and can be accomplished in ways including networking, joining professional organizations and attending their meetings, reading trade journals and learning the jargon, and by getting to know people in the "new" career so that you become an insider.

It is important to realize that changing careers is a process that takes time and one must believe in oneself. The end results are worth it!

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