



[DR. SHIRLEY'S CAREER CORNER]

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Making a career transition: Five steps to success

Changing careers is one of the biggest decisions job seekers can face. Just thinking about the process can be overwhelming. It is a turning point, a time where the changes you make will reshape your career path in a new direction. Keeping this in mind, a career transition usually means a transition in other parts of your life as well, such as additional education/training, relocation or a change in lifestyle.

There are three basic ways to make a career transition. Probably the most difficult way, yet the path many people choose, is to change professions entirely — both the job and the field. Another course to take is to move to a new position in the same industry. And finally, the third option is finding the same position in a new field.

Almost certainly, the biggest mistake you can make is attempting to change careers without a plan. A successful change may often take months to accomplish when you have a strategy. So, as you might imagine, without a plan you could end up drifting for an even longer period.

There is no “one size fits all” strategy for making a career change. However, there are five fundamental steps to success to consider when making a career transition:

➤ Determine the “why.” Avoid rushing into the change. You should ask yourself what you are seeking to accomplish and why. Do you want to change careers because you dislike your job, your boss, the company culture? Do you want more money/benefits? Try not to confuse disliking your current situation with disliking your overall career. Take the time and effort to analyze whether it's just the job/boss/company

that you're not happy with, or whether it's the career/skills/work that you dislike. Whatever you conclude, keep in mind that it's best to maintain your current job, if possible, until you have an action plan in place for finding a new career/job.

➤ Assess likes and dislikes. Analysis can be a useful activity. It helps us to better understand ourselves. In most cases, determining your dislikes on the job is the easy part. A key question to ask yourself is what do you really like doing when you're at work? What gets you excited and enthused? What do you have a passion for? If you're not quite sure, consider completing a few online career assessments to help you get a better understanding of your “likes.” Another option is to visit with a career professional who can administer the appropriate assessments as well as interpret them to best meet your specific needs, and help direct your career transition.

➤ Research other careers. Examine the possibilities. Avoid jumping into a different career field before you spend some time researching the careers that center on your passion, including fields you may never have considered. Network with your contacts and read career and job profiles. Great career information and skills-matching services can be located via the Internet on Web sites such as www.online.onetcenter.org. The more information you have about various career choices, the more successful you'll be in making a career transition.

➤ Evaluate transferable skills. Many people already have a good amount of skill and experience that is transferable. Consider your communication skills — oral, written, interpersonal and presen-

tation — and your skills in leadership, planning and organizing, information technology, and customer service. Once again, it's important that you keep in mind the fact that you may need additional education, training or certifications in order to effectively transition into your new career and to enhance your credibility.

➤ Find a mentor. Changing careers is undoubtedly a challenging undertaking. So, you need to have someone to assist you through the difficult times and help motivate and keep you focused

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on your goal when you become discouraged. There will be times when the insecurities and lack of confidence set in. When seeking out a mentor, look for someone with whom you can build a relationship, someone who will advise you, someone who has a solid network of contacts, someone who can add to your current level of wisdom and, finally, someone who doesn't just encourage you, but will also be direct and frank with you when you're moving in the wrong direction.

Finding a new job is tough. Making a career transition is even tougher. Yet with a strategic plan and a bit of creativity, you can surely be successful and make it happen.

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