

How to approach a career change

Although a career change can be stressful and even frightening, approaching it with a plan can turn it into a positive experience.

Have you decided to finally go after the career of your dreams? Or maybe you've been forced into making a career move before you were ready? You may feel excited, worried, or even frightened. Whether you're making a career change by choice or out of necessity, it is possible for this turning point to be a positive experience.

One of the most important things you can do is to take stock of what you want and what it will take to get you there. Building and following a plan will help you overcome any anxiety and turn this experience into an exciting, rewarding one.

Your first step is to take an honest look at your likes and dislikes. Think about your previous jobs, hobbies, volunteer work, etc. What did you enjoy doing most? What did you like the least? It may help to make a list of each and keep it somewhere prominent while you think about your new career. It is also the right time to consult a career advisor.

Once you've chosen one or more likely choices, do some research on the field. If possible, schedule an appointment with someone in that field to discuss what that job is really like. It's also important to learn what the prospects are over the next few years as well as salary expectations and education requirements.

Now that you know what you're interested in doing, you'll need to take an inventory of your skills and experience to determine if you'll need to spend time getting additional training. Look for local college and adult education programs that may help. Also look for online classes. All of these are excellent ways to brush up your skills.

If you feel you already have the skills you need for your new position, then all you need is to prove it to a prospective employer. Put together a list of what you've worked on, and for whom. If possible, get a few letters of reference from your clients. If appropriate, put together some work samples. Nothing shows a prospective employer your skills, and your determination, like concrete examples of what you've done for others.

After you've gathered this information, it's time to take a realistic look at what you're willing to do. Ask yourself questions like these:

1. What salary do I need to make?
2. Am I willing to attend training or go back to school?
3. How much time and money am I willing to invest in my training?
4. How long a commute is feasible for me?
5. Am I willing to relocate?



It's likely that you'll narrow down your choices as this process progresses. By now, you should have an excellent idea of what jobs you're interested in. It's time to begin the job search.

One of the most important things you can do from the start of your search is to let people know you're looking for work. Talk to professional recruiters in the industry and anyone who'll listen, and tell them what type of job you're looking for. Get yourself noticed.

Polish your resume and cover letter. If possible, have a professional work with you to develop both. This is your first impression on a prospective employer, so spend as much time as you need to get it just right.

Setting goals, planning and putting that plan into action can turn a frightening experience into an exciting one. Your career change can be an opportunity to pursue a more rewarding, fulfilling career and lifestyle.