

## Changing Careers? Proceed with Caution! –Lessons From a Pro

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To change or not to change? With career change come excitement, adventure, and variety. New beginnings, challenges, and opportunities. New people and procedures. Without change, on the other hand, there's the same-old/same-old staring at you day after day.

What if changing careers isn't worth the time and energy? What if you can't make enough money? What if there isn't anything you'd rather do, or anything you're good at? What will the family say? Why not suck it up, like many others have before you—unsatisfied, unfulfilled, discouraged, disillusioned, and/or depressed?

The career transition path (or initial career selection, for that matter) can be long and winding, yet will end happily once you find the kind of work that launches a satisfying, meaningful, and rewarding career.

Perhaps what's less apparent, however, is that the odds of success are often determined by how well you research and plan, and then execute what you planned. Good planning will help you make the right, smart decision in the first place, as well as help you later on if and when you're facing another transitional period.

Otherwise, you'll be on a professional treadmill like most other people, moving from job to job and career to career five to ten times—without a clear understanding of self, a comprehensive plan, or the ability to benefit from lessons learned.

Take my word for it. Over a 20-year period, my quest for the ideal job has taken me from teacher to trainer, writer/editor, education consultant, manager, and now career coach. Five career changes before I got it right! And now that I've landed in the perfect place, I want to share a few hard-earned secrets to help others get there, too—more quickly and easily than I did.

*The Career Counselor's Handbook* (Figler & Bolles) suggests three keys to developing an efficient and effective career transition plan. They are, in fact, answers to the following questions:

1. What do you want to do?
2. What's stopping you from doing it?
3. What are you doing about it?

Easy enough? Maybe not. Each question turns out to be more complex than meets the eye, and is answered best after attending to three other sets of related questions. Question 1 ("What do you want to do?") is based on:

What makes you tick (i.e., what are your values, interests, and motivators)?

What activities cause you to lose track of time while you're working?

What are some things you still want to do in your life?

I've known since my teaching days that my ideal job needs to measure up in five areas, one of which is service. That is, I want what I do to be useful to others and make a difference in their lives. Over time jobs or careers have failed this acid test and I've moved on to something better. What makes a job meaningful to you?

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Previous question number 2 (“What’s stopping you from doing it?”) is related to:

What do you see as standing in your way (i.e., is it time, money, fear of the unknown, family, status, health, or education—potential roadblocks all, real or imaginary)?  
How motivated are you to overcome the things standing in your way?

I once took a job because I was afraid to say no, afraid that no other suitable position would come along. This proved to be a shortsighted, ill-conceived plan of action on my part because I failed to consider all of my job-satisfaction criteria. Sure, the job paid the bills, yet failed to deliver on everything else—variety, challenge, and service/making a difference. I stayed four months, and had to go back to square 1 in my planning and job search—all over again.

Finally, question 3 above (“What are you doing about it?”) is the gut-check question, which, in turn, generates a box-full of additional interrogatives, starting with:

How do you test assumptions (about what you can or cannot do, what you do or do not need, etc.)?  
What can you do to increase your applicable knowledge, skills, and experience?

As a result of my experience working in a career center, I decided to develop my own career coaching practice. To test my assumptions and the viability of my plan, however, I first conducted a three-month, full-scale test. And, to improve my knowledge and skills in this field, I enrolled in a career coaching certification program (completed April 2004).

Have you answered similar questions related to your own lifelong career development? Have you taken into consideration the four pillars of smart career planning?

Life purpose  
Values  
Interests and motivators  
Abilities, talents, and special skills

Okay, proceed now—with caution!

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**John Wojcio** is a Certified Career Coach with *Advantage Training & Development*. In the past two years he has worked one-on-one with hundreds of clients, helping them align who they are with what they do, in order to feel satisfied and successful in their careers. Contact John at 607-754-0008 or [john@advtrain.com](mailto:john@advtrain.com) for a complimentary 30-minute phone consultation.

***“Invest 30 minutes of your time, benefit from 30 years of mine!”***