

PROFESSIONAL RECRUITMENT AND CAREER CHANGE: What Are My Options?

Are you unhappy with your current job or looking to change careers? Even if you enjoy your current job, you may notice that you are increasingly disenchanted with the long hours, amount of time spent traveling and the frantic pace. If that's the case, it may be time to consider your options. Every year in America hundreds of thousands of workers change jobs or leave their industry altogether in search of a new career. Employers are looking for strategists and leaders who have the skills and expertise to make an impact on the company and improve its performance, so a career change requires careful research and planning. But don't be afraid...if you want to follow your heart and change jobs or career, there are several methods to help you in your transition. Make your plan --- stick to it --- and don't lose sight of your goal!

- **Ask yourself why you really are thinking about leaving**
Before making the decision to leave, identify your key motivating factors by writing down what it was about your position that you do not like such as the wages, job duties, personal conflicts, career progression and benefits. From this, identify attributes that the new position must possess. Candidates often lost their focus through the job-hunting process and wind up applying for roles that were not a significant improvement on the role they would be leaving. For instance, an employee may identify the key reason they are leaving their current employer as a lack of career progression opportunities but then become dazzled by factors like higher salaries and apply for roles that once again offer them no career progression at all. Use this method to make sure you're not leaving your current job due to a knee-jerk reaction such as a conflict with your boss or a coworker. The big question that needs to be answered is: 'Will moving to a new role resolve or eradicate my current concerns?' Take an honest inventory of your likes and dislikes, and evaluate your skills, values, and personal interests. Many people who are looking to change careers do so to find a balance between their personal and professional lives, to accomplish the right mix of meaning and money. You may want to consider consulting a WorkSource Career Counselor and scheduling an appointment to take a career assessment test.
- **Develop a clear-cut plan**
It is imperative that you do your research before making the decision to switch jobs so be sure to examine all possibilities before attempting a career jump. Get a feel for the field that interests you by reading industry journals and trade magazines, attending business and industry conferences, and talking to people in the desired profession about what they do. Learn whether your target industry has growth potential. Talk to people in your network, read career and job profiles and meet with a career counselor or recruitment professional. The more information with which you arm yourself beforehand, the more successful you will be. The smartest move

that you can make is to carefully map out an effective career-change strategy. This should include a detailed action plan that takes into consideration finances, research, education, and training. Keep in mind that a successful career change can take several months or longer to accomplish, so patience is the key. Understanding the current and future trends within an industry or occupation will help identify what employers are hiring, what skills and occupations are considered 'in demand', what salary levels are paid historically within any given occupation and what jobs are available in your area. It's also important to realize that many industries follow a cyclical hiring patterns and hire new employees or fill vacancies only during certain times of the year. You may access current labor market information at www.lmci.state.tx.us. For individual assistance, or if you do not have computer access, contact the WorkSource Career Center toll-free at 866.765.5038.

- **Be honest with yourself**

Do you have the necessary experience and education to be considered a qualified candidate in your desired career field? If not, you need to find a way to bridge the credentials gap. This might mean making your goal more long-term while you go back to school or receive additional training. As a potential job seeker, you should also understand which of your current skills and experience will transfer and ensure you possess a plan to gain the necessary skills that you have not acquired. Consider attending a community college or university to attain specific occupational training certifications, targeting employers who traditionally provide structured training or who offer internship or apprenticeship programs.

- **Consider alternative employment before you make the plunge**

In order to test out a new role before permanently committing to it, consider taking on part-time or unpaid, voluntary work in the industry or occupation in which you are most interested. This will not only help you decide if the job is what you're looking for but also help you gain the necessary skills.

- **Be considerate to your current employer**

If you feel comfortable letting your current employer know you are seeking other employment, then by all means do so. It would be beneficial for your employer to agree to providing you a letter of recommendation. For most, however, this is not an option. As you discreetly seek other opportunities, avoid at all costs using company time to explore work in other industries or professions by using lunch breaks, vacation time, weekends or holidays. Do not use medical/sick leave to begin your search for a new job or career.

- **Don't job hop**

Unfortunately, the corporate restructuring, buy-outs and downsizing that leads to lay-offs looks to be more than just a phase of the times... it is becoming a permanent feature of our economy. Recruiters across the nation hear stories on

a regular basis of an applicant's lay-off experience. However, there is a difference in being laid-off and jumping from job to job to job. Job hopping can occur when employees lack the commitment to remain loyal to an employer, or possess traits that leads them to being terminated repeatedly. Recruiters are trained to look out for these. Being laid off three times does not mean you lack skills or loyalty, it means you have been incredibly unlucky. You have nothing to apologize for. So be confident and firm and concise when you tell employers about your situation, and resist the urge to over-explain. Your background checks and references will back you up.

- **Establish a clear-cut set of criteria and do not consider applying unless the job meets those criteria**

The best time to consider a new career is when you are safely ensconced in your existing position. It goes without saying that a steady paycheck can relieve a lot of pressure. Often, the downside of a change is starting again at the bottom of the ladder in a new job. Consider the financial implications. There's a good chance you would be on a lower salary initially, so can you afford to make that change? If you can't, you may have to consider some lifestyle changes. You may actually choose to accept the lower-level position if the company structure offers a number of career-ladder opportunities. Don't expect to begin at the same level of seniority in your new career that you held in your old one. It will take time to move up the ranks, but if you find a new career that you absolutely love, it will be worth it. Additionally, people seeking something new should try to find an industry that is in some way similar to their current job so that they can use some of the skills they already have. Look at skills and experiences that you've gained that may be transferable to a new career, as you will maximize your success rate if you choose a job that builds on your current career base. Always consider those elements of the transition that may affect your lifestyle, such as extended commute time and limited child care options. We recommend visiting a WorkSource Career Counselor if you are struggling to decide on your direction.

- **Build a professional network**

Build some bridges from the your current career to a different career by building a professional network. Begin nurturing professional friendships early and maintain them regularly. Register as a recruit candidate on Texas' largest online job matching system www.WorkInTexas.com, develop a business portfolio on a popular web-based network like Facebook.com or MySpace.com, participate in events hosted by your local Chamber of Commerce and civic organizations, attend local job and career fairs and join local business and professional associations.

- **Begin the search**

In today's technology-based economy, your options to locate the right company or job are limitless. Of course, there is the traditional method of

searching the local newspapers or business journals. But studies show that more and more employers are posting their jobs online. Check the company's human resources website for online job postings. Another effective option is to consult your local WorkSource Career Center and register as a recruit candidate on www.WorkInTexas.com, Texas' largest online job matching system. As you begin this process, ensure you identify primary keywords as these systems typically match the employer's criteria with the applicant's qualifications. Examine your current mix of education, skills, and accomplishments and make a list of the words and phrases that best describe your strengths. Then, take a look at some of the jobs that interest you. Make a list of some of the common skills that these jobs require. Once you have these two sets of words and phrases look for areas of overlap and focus on the areas where you want your next career move to be. Remember, you do not need to include all your diverse skills sets, only those that you want to continue working with. Some also choose to register at a local fee-for-service employment agency. And, of course, attend every job and career fair scheduled in your area - - - this allows you the opportunity to market yourself to potential employers, identify what companies are hiring and helps you build your professional network.