

Career Transitioning Made Easier

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A plan to guide your transition to a career opportunity in a new industry or function can prove invaluable. It will help you achieve your goals with greater assurance and better results.



Aiming at a Change? You are Not Alone!

By almost all measures, a hefty percentage of people in the workforce intend to change jobs within a year. The ten-year high of workers hunting for a job reached 28% of respondents according to a 2024 survey by the Federal Reserve Board of New York. Workforce changes, which are often due to technology restructuring and options to work remotely, suggest a continually fluid job market.

People transitioning in their careers are motivated by a variety of reasons. Transitioning job seekers are typically concentrated among people who are:

- Returning to careers after a work gap of from one to several years
- Switching from a freelance or entrepreneurial venture to employment status
- Aiming to uplevel in career after completing an academic degree or job training milestone
- Employed in mid-career but lack advancement possibilities with their current organization
- Experiencing a change in interests that prompts them to seek a new career direction
- Advanced in careers with experience handling major responsibilities, but now want use their expertise in a less demanding role

Challenges of Career Transitioning

If you fit into or more of the above situations, you will be evaluating your career prospects, and you will face challenges in making a transition to a new role or industry.

A common belief among job changers is that they will be able to find their way into a new job area by leveraging their transferable skills. The logic of using transferable skills as a wedge to open new doors is appealing and has some merit. The problem is that although a candidate has extensive capability that supports a claim of potential to achieve outstanding performance in a new area, recruiters and human resources professionals tend discount this claim.

In the thinking of these “gatekeepers,” the most viable candidates have recent and direct experience in the industry and role that closely matches the job requirements. Be forewarned that the apparent logic of leveraging your transferable skills may not work as effectively in opening new doors as you had expected.

Consider a likely scenario during the interviewing process, even after you have advanced to the final round of interviewing. Let’s examine the challenge of the hiring manager who is considering five candidates. Suppose two are applying from inside the company. One of



them is attempting to advance into the position. Another employee is trying to enter from a role in an adjacent function. Two more candidates have worked at a competitor company doing exactly the same job. And then there's you added to the mix, asserting your qualifications based on your transferable skills. The career transitioning path is daunting, yet many job changers have overcome the obstacles. Your success, though, may take more patience, effort, and time than anticipated.

During my work with job applicants I have seen many successful career transitions, including:

- Retail Associate to a Pharmacy Technician in a hospital setting
- Political Campaign Manager to a Launch Manager of a Streaming Service for a large entertainment company
- Accountant to a Product Manager
- A Personal Health and Exercise Trainer to a Sales Associate



Prioritizing Your Target Job Positions

A significant percentage of job candidates I speak with state they need help in knowing where to start in rejoining the workforce or transitioning to a new industry or role.

Job candidates may need to get new perspectives on alternative career paths. Here's a straightforward approach to help with crossroads career evaluations. Make 6 lists:

1. What you enjoy doing most (Career satisfaction)
2. Your top 6 transferable skills (Functional expertise)
3. Industries closest to your current one (Terminologies and jargon you know)
4. Growth industries and emerging jobs – lots of research (Future prospects)
5. Your values, preferred work environments, and criteria including career growth, commutes, and compensation (Passion and practicality)
6. Training requirements and networks in prospective jobs (Readiness and access)

You need to test your choices further, though. Review your lists to identify your most viable job categories and then confirm by pursuing additional input:

1. Collect and analyze job postings in your preferred job categories (roles and industries)
2. Talk to people who work in a job you have prioritized
3. Set up informational interviews
4. Shadow a few people as they work if you can
5. Volunteer in a role close to the position you are targeting for your career transition
6. Complete training and certifications that help qualify you for your target position and demonstrate your commitment
7. Network with others. Consider joining a professional association in your preferred job area

Candidates will improve their chances if they align themselves with a priority job focus, or closely related cluster of two to three job categories. It is critical to identify key words and requirements of job postings in the selected job categories. Close analysis of these words and phrases will strengthen your resume's prospects of surviving the digital scanning, which is pervasively used in recruiting.



Insights Into Successful Career Transitioning

As I have worked through career quandaries with clients, I have applied a helpful model that shows transition paths and offers insights into the preparation you will need. Note the cell colors, which are modeled after street signal colors: Green—Go, Yellow—Caution, and Red—Stop.

Easiest

Old Role to Old Industry

Your resume needs refreshing to reflect key words and changes in requirements. You will have an advantage over many other candidates from other industries and functions.

More Difficult

Old Role to New Industry

You will need to learn new terminologies. Conduct research on industry trends, competitors, trade shows, and media.

Even More difficult

New Role to an Old Industry

Learn new software and requirements for effectiveness in the new function. You may need training and a new certification.

Super Difficult (Proceed after extended preparation)

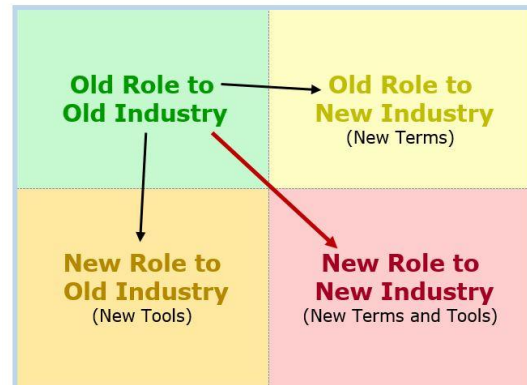
New Role to New Industry

Ensure your new employer has an onboarding training program in place. Prepare to initiate your job search after volunteering in the new function and industry, taking classes, and attending networking meetings.

Additional Considerations

Career level. Transitioning in career is a goal of many job holders at midpoint and advanced levels of their careers. A question that arises is “Do I need to go back to entry level when making a career transition?” This is usually not required unless your preferred job requires a highly specific skillset. The experience, knowledge, and capabilities you already have should elevate your job positioning above entry level.

Hard versus soft skills. As you have matured and advanced through your career, your soft skills have continued to develop. These skills include communication, interpersonal relationships, negotiation, and problem solving. One tactic that benefits people in career transition is to focus on jobs that require high proficiency in soft skills. Look for jobs that require coordination, team management, independent thinking, judgment, and the ability to assess situations based on experience.



Complexity – small to large. A challenge in transitioning to employment for freelancers or operators of a small venture is to gain familiarity with the software used by large employers. The challenge is caused by the difference in scale. At small scale you can get by with home-grown applications. As scale increases, even simple processes need digital solutions. Applicants unfamiliar with software required in job postings can become conversant with their purpose and features by viewing YouTube videos as well as watching short video-based courses from Udemy.com, for example, and accessing tutorials on software publishers' websites.

Down scoping – large to small. You may be a highly qualified leader or specialist who has carried impressive responsibilities. Now you are targeting lower level jobs that have less responsibility. Although it is logical to anticipate you will be perceived as highly qualified as you move down the career ladder, the volume of competing applicants increases at lower levels. This ensures an abundance of applicants and can mean your competitors have skills and more recent and relevant qualifications and experience than compared with yours.

Adjacent functions. You may know more about functions adjacent to your past positions than is apparent to you. This familiarity makes it gives you an understanding of a wider range of workflow processes, terminologies, and software applications than you acquired in you previous positions alone.

Emerging jobs. Generative AI, for example, is being adopted at record pace. Becoming an expert in using AI prompts can be a valuable skill. AI and other developing tools may open doors and act as career hedges against skill obsolescence.

Internal transfers. At times, accepting an easy-to-get job at a large organization can position you to apply for better jobs inside the company later. The same tactic may apply to contract and temporary-to-permanent jobs.

Hobby or special interests. In addition to transferable skills, a special talent and skillset may be included on your resume. Your experience with travel, volunteering, and developing additional interests can offer more complete insights into your personality.

Summary Advice

Be sure to understand your assets (talent, training, knowledge, and effectiveness) and all of the value you can offer. Study the job postings and find the closest matches. Prepare a resume that is relevant to the job requirements. Emphasize your achievements and willingness to learn. Research the company and try to get insider information from online sources and networking. Express your interest in learning more about the position and organization.

Good luck!

