



How to Successfully Navigate a Career Transition

Ready to take steps in a different direction? Not sure where to begin?

Get started on the path to greater career fulfillment with a few helpful hints.



SO YOU'RE READY FOR A NEW JOB...ONE THAT YOU ACTUALLY enjoy! Imagine how great it will be to look forward to getting out of bed in the morning. Now comes the big question—what's the best way to successfully navigate your career transition? That is, how will you go after your dream while being practical and taking care of your needs at the same time? As a certified career counselor who has helped many through their own career transition, I'm here to allay your fears and help you get on the path to greater career fulfillment.

Realize It's a Process

When it's time to make a change, people understandably get antsy and sometimes anxious. Change is scary for us. The stress of the unknown can leave us stuck in fear. Know that this is okay, and that the discomfort you're experiencing is actually a good sign because it means you are making a change and starting to step outside your comfort zone toward a more fulfilling career path.

Amidst the anxiety, there is typically also a sense of excitement. You're ready to make the change, so let's get to it! Embrace that motivation, tap into it to keep you moving forward, and realize that this is a process that can take some time. Be willing to be patient with it, and with yourself. The more patient you are, the more opportunities and ideas can flow to you and the more open you will be to them. So when that impatience about wanting to move forward more quickly rears its ugly head...use it as a motivator, not a force that will push you into a decision more quickly than you are comfortable with just because you want it to be over.

Develop a Transition Plan

Of course you'd create a transition plan to help you move through other changes in your life...right? So, it makes practical sense to develop a plan for your career future. Yet sometimes we get so excited and caught up in the moment that we tell ourselves we're going to outline a step-by-step process and then quickly forget about it, as we're so busy reacting to whatever is happening around us.

Before you can move past the point of vague possibilities and enter the throes of a serious career change, you must develop a plan so you are covered in the financial, mental, and emotional aspects of your life and your future. The basics of your career transition plan should look something like this:

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- 1. Financial:** Taking care of your bills, yourself, your family, and any other obligations. Making cutbacks where necessary; starting a savings plan that is devoted entirely to your new professional endeavor. These are just a few of the many ways to keep your finances in order while you restructure your life.
- 2. Mental:** Coming up with ways you can keep those negative voices at bay. Developing a plan for learning the skills you may need in your new career. Rewarding yourself for milestones achieved along the way. This is a time for encouragement, confidence, and a can-do attitude, and it helps to “feed your hungry mind” what it needs to help you grow—spiritually, intellectually, and professionally.
- 3. Emotional:** Identify ways to overcome the fears you may have. You'll need a cheerleader to help you continue on and move past the potential obstacles in your way. Find or ask for emotional support from friends, family, or a coach who can help steady your course as you make the transition in your career and life.

Set Goals

When the time comes to set goals, make sure they are specific, tangible, measurable, and include a time frame. Your goals should be realistic, yet also a stretch so you're pushing yourself beyond what you would normally do to move forward.

Take Care of Yourself

Again, transition can be stressful, no matter what kind it is. Make sure you take care of yourself, especially during this time. Physical exercise, healthy eating, at least eight hours of sleep, and a balanced lifestyle are all things to consider and pay attention to when you are navigating an adjustment in your life. Make sure you also schedule time to have fun. Often we leave out that part of the equation—enjoying ourselves along the journey is the best part of all.

Remain or Become Financially Stable

Before I work with someone on changing career paths, I talk to her about her financial situation. It's hard to dream and plan for

the future when you're heavily focused on or worried about paying the bills. While it's important to dream about your career possibilities, you need to be practical as well. What are your options for becoming financially stable? Perhaps you can stay in your current position and work on the next career step after hours, or find a part-time job that pays the bills and allows you greater freedom to pursue your passion. Another option is to begin to set aside savings that will allow you to cover six to 12 months of living expenses. Remember, this process can take time. It took me about three years from leaving my full-time position to creating a full-time coaching practice. I encourage you to start now!

Dream First

While financial stability is the foundation of your future, you also need to do some dreaming here. Therefore, once you have a plan to meet your basic financial needs, it's time to take off your practical hat, put on your dreaming glasses, and dream big.

When I work with career clients, I ask them to dream first and worry about the specific logistics of how they're going to make the change later on. What I find is that people tend to focus so much on the practical side of “how will I make this work” that they squash any creative idea or thought that may have merit—or may lead them to something they'd love to do. While practicality is important, it can also be limiting. So, notice when you're getting too caught up in the practical side and not doing enough brainstorming or dreaming. Ideas are expansive and can be “trimmed and shaped” later to fit into your personal scheme as needed. Therefore, before you set a new career plan in motion, you've got to start with the dream and then brainstorm ways to make it a reality. What is your dream?

Share Your Dreams and Plans

Share your dreams and plans with people who are going to be positive and supportive—those who will inspire and encourage you. If there are people in your life who tend to be negative, point out why you shouldn't do something or can't, or something along these lines, wait a little while to tell them your dream. Sometimes holding back until you're really solid in your dream and how you are going to make it happen is the best way to go.

All the best for a rewarding and fulfilling career doing what you love! **CM**

About the Author

HALLIE CRAWFORD, M.A., CPCC (Certified Professional Co-active Coach) has her own coaching practice, *Authentically Speaking*, and is also an affiliate with the Center for Balanced Living. For tips, tools, and expert advice on finding a career you're passionate about, visit her Web site at halliecrawford.com. Send comments about this article to cm@ncmahq.org.