

Certain situations warrant making changes in a career

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So, you think you want to make a career change? At this point it's time to take a reading and get your bearings. A great many people think changing jobs is pretty casual stuff. But professional experience has shown me that making a career move is like buying a house or getting married; a mistake or misjudgment can be very costly. Before launching yourself into this energy-consuming activity, the first step is to take a closer look at why you are considering this at all.

What is pushing you to make a change? What forces are you really responding to? Are you dissatisfied with your present work accomplishments? Are you able to write a novel during work hours, and still get your job done with excellent reviews? Has your daughter just gotten accepted by her dream Ivy League college, and now you need to follow through with your promise to her? Have you just completed your MBA? Perhaps you just found out the job you had your eye on for years was given to an unexpected outsider or less competent colleague. Maybe you're feeling old and bored.

There may be a host of good and valid reasons why you might be considering a change. Wisdom suggests knowing which reasons are valid so you'll avoid a serious mistake. From my experience, people often seem to make changes because of emotional responses to situations. For example, you go out to water your lawn on Sunday morning and see your neighbor, Charles, coming back from church in his new red Ferrari. You go over to congratulate him, and he tells you he just got a big promotion. Although you are happy for him, your eyes suddenly glaze green with envy. Rushing out on Monday morning to the nearest management recruiter is not likely to be a good career move. There are many reasons which are not good enough in and of themselves to warrant making a change.

Often, when a conflict in your relationship, marriage or family becomes difficult to cope with, it is easy to project these frustrations onto your work situation. You may think that your life will be easier and less stressful once you change your career. But the real problem will remain; therefore, no significant resolution can occur. Perhaps you are bored with your work. Exploring the possibilities of creating new opportunities within your current situation might solve your unrest. When you hit the "midlife crisis" there is a tendency to look back in time and reevaluate your career. Sometimes the critic in you is so strong, you tend to discount past accomplishments as meaningless. This can propel you to disassociate yourself from these heartfelt work achievements and act rebelliously. You search for a new work identity. If this is done impulsively you may regret it.

There are, however, some scenarios that may warrant change:

- ◆ **Company acquisition** - Suppose Company A is going to acquire Company B. Despite all assurances to Company B's senior managers, there is always the likelihood that there will be plenty of changes made. A prudent manager would begin exploring his or her options.
- ◆ **Company in financial trouble** - The scene: an executive committee meeting of a small manufacturing company. The financial vice president is reporting on the first nine months of the company's new operating year: "Sales are down dramatically. It's clear we are going to have to cut back on costs and expenses, and in overhead, which includes, as you all know, senior management of this company." This also is a good time for managers and supervisors to examine their career paths.
- ◆ **Burn out** - This woman is a nurse. She is exhausted from 20 years or working 12-hour shifts in the same hospital, caring deeply for patients who die painful deaths, and getting little or no support from supervisors and doctors. There is no reward for weathering out the storm, since her meager salary will never significantly increase. This kind of situation warrants careful career option evaluation.
- ◆ **Loss of enthusiasm** - This man is a computer systems engineer. He rose through the ranks because of his competitive spirit, perceptiveness, curious intelligence and competency. After 15 years in this career, his desire to get up in the morning and go to work is greatly decreased. His past enthusiasm and commitment are not there. He notices an increase in the number of articles he reads on his favorite leisure activities while on the job. He finds himself playing racquetball, bicycling, and running so much that he no longer has time for his family, or energy during work hours. Clearly, there has been some significant shift in his "work self" (the part of one's self that wants to be fulfilled in the world), yet he's afraid to lose his comfortable income. These are serious signals of career dissatisfaction. The part of the man that was content with the computer industry 15 years ago may be different now.

There are a variety of career change options. Each has a different degree of alteration from your current job. Typically, as the degree of variation increases, the time needed to plan and implement the change also increases.

- ◆ **Career revision** is when you alter some factors within your current job title, thereby increasing career satisfaction. For example, you might take on new tasks or responsibilities with the same job title, or you may revise your schedule to four-day week, or work at a different company. Lateral moves fall in this category.
- ◆ **Career modification** means that you remain in the same field, but change job titles, such as moving from teacher to principal, or any vertical career move on a career path.

- ◆ **Career change** is when you alter the field you work in as well as the job title. For instance, from a geologist to a journalist, or an engineer to a management consultant.

Since the question of changing careers is complex, especially in the recessed economy, it may be beneficial to seek professional career assistance to unravel the many intricacies involved. Your company may provide career development seminars or classes, or you may choose from the many career counseling/coaching resources in the area.

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