

POSITIVE TIPS FOR THE JOB MARKET

CHANGING CAREERS- PART I

WHERE EXACTLY DO YOU STAND?

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Many studies show that people will change careers, not jobs, several times throughout their lifetimes. A career change may be necessary for a variety of reasons such as dissatisfaction with your current employment situation, company layoffs, or simply a loss of interest, to name a few. Once you have made up your mind to embark on a new career path, life can get pretty stressful. The best way to make this process as smooth as possible is to be proactive and be well-prepared. Don't overwhelm yourself by rushing through the career-changing process!

Clearly, it is best to be financially prepared should you suddenly need to switch careers. It's best to have some sort of a long-term savings plan with approximately six months worth of your salary in it. This will alleviate the pressure should you unexpectedly find yourself out of work.

Now, if you're simply considering a career change, it's essential to first analyze your current employment situation. A strategic positioning tool called a SWOT Analysis, which is often used by management to make critical business decisions, may be tweaked to be used by anyone who wishes to gain a better perspective about their employment situation. S-W-O-T stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. **Strengths** and **Weaknesses** are your internal positive and negative traits which you have control over. Positive traits may involve your character, skills, knowledge, experience, education, a strong network or passion for your field. Conversely, negative traits include poor work habits, no direction/ focus, or a lack of education and skills. **Opportunities** and **Threats** are uncontrollable external events which work towards or against your advantage. These may include current industry trends, the economy, special job openings, new technology or a great contact. On the negative side, you must consider industry restructuring, a changing market, reduced demand for your skills, technology that you cannot keep up with or an emerging competitor.

To conduct your own SWOT Analysis draw a 4x4 grid and in each quadrant jot down your specific ideas in point-form. Your analysis should allow you to have a crystal-clear view of your current employment situation.

Next, you have four options to entertain:

1. You could add skills or training to your Strengths quadrant.
2. Attempt to minimize and remove as many Weaknesses as possible.
3. Pursue any interesting Opportunities.
4. Lastly, defend yourself from possible Threats.

A clear understanding of your current position is an excellent jumping-off point for further career changing exploration. We will discuss the next steps necessary for successful career-change planning in next week's column.

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