

*Sharon Good's
Seven-Point Plan*



*for
Successful
Career Transition*

Why So Many of Us Are Changing Careers

In these changing times, many people are going through career transition, whether by choice or necessity. These transitions can take place at any time in someone's life, from their twenties until well into their later years.

Many twenty-somethings are experiencing "quarter-life crisis"—the career they went to school for didn't turn out to be all they expected. Thankfully, rather than suffering for another twenty or thirty years, they're making a course correction two or three years out of college.

On the other end of the spectrum, older adults are facing a longer work life. Perhaps they're either aging out of a career—they either don't have the physical stamina to keep going, they don't want to continue a high-speed career or they're encountering ageism in their industry. Or maybe it's a case of "been there, done that"—they're ready for a new learning experience or the opportunity to pursue a dream that wasn't feasible when they were raising kids and putting them through college.

And in between, many people of all ages are being impacted by seismic shifts in the economy. Industries that were once thriving have had the rug pulled out from under them. The transition into a global economy is shifting many jobs offshore, and people are being forced to retrain for a new career.

When we're young, we often make career choices based on something we're good at, but don't necessarily love, or get on a career track based on a job that falls into our lap after graduation. When we need to make a change, it's often done in a state of panic, without a lot of time for thoughtful consideration of our choices. While there's value in having "learning experiences," why not make your career change as smooth and effective as you can?

Whether your next step is a new job or your own business, implementing the following seven steps will help you to be more effective with your career change and pave the way for success.

The Seven Steps to Successful Career Change

Whether you're pursuing the next level of your career or making a radical change, whether the change is by choice or necessity, there are seven things you can do to maximize the success of your career transition.

1. Know yourself

Before you make a change, spend some time getting to know yourself. I mean, really know yourself. Not who you were before or who others think you are, but the real you and the parts of yourself you want to develop more deeply in your next stage of life. What your secret longings are. What you would do if anything were possible and there were no obstacles at all.

If your budget allows, working with a career coach is a worthwhile investment. A coach can help you to uncover parts of yourself that may have gone underground. She can help you see the possibility of turning something you love into a career when you can't see a way to make it happen. If your budget just won't allow it, invest in one of the many career books that help you to explore your talents, skills, values and passions, and spend the time to work with it.

2. Do the research and make a plan

Once you've gotten some ideas, do your research. We all have impressions of what a particular career might be like, but until you check it out in the real world, it's all fantasy and supposition. Talk to people in the field. Go to industry meetings and conferences. Spend a day or two with someone who has your dream job and "shadow" them. It's important to discover both the good and the bad, so you know what you're getting into.

Once you've made your choice, make a plan. Most people change careers in small steps. Figure out what you need to do to transition—acquire new skills, revamp your resume, start a business on the side—and take those steps in a sensible way to minimize the risk.

3. Deal with the feelings

In the process of making a career change, there are a number of feelings that come up. It's crucial to deal with those feelings. If you don't, they will, at best, make the path one of struggle or, at worst, stop you from pursuing it at all.

Let's look at some of those feelings.

One of the most common reasons I hear for not pursuing one's dream career is **fear**. Of course you're scared! You're moving into new territory. You're giving up a "sure thing" for something that's completely unknown. Perhaps you're taking a financial risk or changing your lifestyle in the process.

But aren't you also excited? That "sure thing" may also come with boredom, resentment, dread and a number of other unpleasant feelings. What a relief to walk away from that!

As you grow older, you'll find the only things you regret are the things you didn't do. ~ Zachary Scott

As scary as a career leap may be, it can bring you new challenge and aliveness. When you try something, whatever happens, you don't have to live with the regret of what might have been. Even a "failure" can break the stalemate and lead you to a more positive and exciting direction.

Another feeling that may come up is **confusion** or **doubt**. I often hear my mature clients saying they can't change careers because they don't know anything else. But you can always learn something new, at any age! Even senior citizens attain college degrees. And with longer, healthier lives, along with shifts in the job market, *many* older adults are beginning new careers.

The good news is, confusion and doubt are often alleviated by acquiring new skills and knowledge. Continuing education programs are filled to the brim with adults of all ages who are training for a new career path. Having a credential, along with a new skill set and knowledge, can be reassuring as you reinvent your career.

Sometimes people get stopped from making a change by doubts about "wasting" their previous education and experience. But why continue doing something that makes you miserable? In many cases, you can transfer skills from your previous career into a new one that's more fulfilling.

I also often hear people claim to be confused when, in truth, they know what they would love to do, but don't think it's possible or don't know how to make it happen. Whatever you want to do, there's probably someone out there who's already doing it. Get in touch with them and ask for an informational interview to find out how you might move into that career. If it's still not feasible, find some aspect of that career that you can express in your personal or professional life, so you can fulfill that part of yourself.

One other feeling, or perhaps a conglomerate of feelings, is **impatience, discomfort and uncertainty**. You may be in a job that's unbearable and can't wait to jump ship. Or you may find the uncertainty of an undefined future uncomfortable and want to leap on the next available opportunity, whether it suits you or not.

By jumping too quickly from an uncomfortable situation, you short-cut the creative process that a new career is. You may find it difficult to be a novice in a new field and want to move up the ladder as quickly as possible, or you may find it difficult to wait out the time it takes to make a new business profitable. As a result, you may retreat into a job in your old, undesirable field just to relieve the tension.

We would all love a guarantee that our choices will work out, but that just doesn't happen. We need to prepare as best we can and then take calculated leaps of faith. If you can develop the discipline to endure the discomfort, you'll find yourself with a much wider range of choices and a huge sense of satisfaction when your new choice comes to fruition.

One final note on this: While you don't want to get yourself into another unpleasant situation while you wait for the best new opportunity to come along, it's fine, and often practical, to maintain a flow of income with a job that doesn't take a lot of your time and energy. Look at your skill set (including hobbies you're proficient at) and see where you might get a low-key, short-term job. If you jump into another sixty-hour-a-week job, you won't have the time or mental focus to prepare for your dream career. Be practical, but think ahead and keep aiming for your true target.

4. Have the right attitude

Your attitude can make or break you. I see many people defeat themselves from the get-go by expecting to fail. Be unwilling to quit until you reach your dream, even if the form is different from the one you originally imagined.

Here are some strategies to help you do that:

- **Monitor your self-talk**

Aside from giving in to fear, the way that people most often sabotage their success is by listening to their negative self-talk. Use positive affirmations to shift your inner dialogue toward a more positive direction. If you don't believe it at first, "fake it till you make it." As you begin seeing small successes, your attitude will naturally take a more positive swing.

- **Manage your expectations**

Another way people sabotage their success is by clinging to a certain expected outcome and not being willing to be flexible and go with the flow. As you begin to take steps toward your ideal career, opportunities and connections will show up that you couldn't have manufactured sitting at your desk and creating your vision. Keep an open mind about how your path will unfold.

Be willing to let go of your perfect vision. While you don't want to take just any opportunity, by turning down anything that doesn't fit your ideal picture, you may ignore possibilities that will lead you down a wonderful new path and give you valuable experience that will lead to something even better.

And don't wait for guarantees. They don't exist. At some point, after you've laid your foundation, you need to take a leap of faith. The paradox is that often, new opportunities won't open up *until* you take that leap. You can't see what's over the horizon by standing on tippy-toe on the shore.

- **Be committed and persistent**

I often hear people say, “I hope this works out.” Don’t hope — *make* it work out! The universe loves commitment. When you become committed and don’t give up, success will eventually come your way.

“...the moment one definitely commits oneself then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred.”

~ W. H. Murray, *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition*

There’s a myth that when you’re doing your “right work,” it will always be effortless. Sometimes it is, but usually, your path will come with detours and challenges. Life is not about coasting, it’s about growing through facing those challenges. When you’re doing that in a career you love, it can be exhilarating, rather than discouraging.

- **Be a contributor, not a taker**

In looking for their dream career, people tend to look for, What will I get from this career? Certainly, you want to choose a job or career that feeds your soul, but also look at, What can I bring to this job? Underneath, we all long to contribute. Be creative in what and how you can do that.

In his book, *Test Drive Your Dream Job*, Brian Kurth tells of a gentleman who got his “dream job” as program director for a non-profit that served stroke patients and their families. His passion was to educate people on how to prevent strokes, but he found that the job was about helping people who had already had a stroke. He considered looking for another job, but realized that this job gave him the credibility to do what he really loved. He stayed in the job and started teaching classes in patient care and stroke prevention at a university extension program.

- **Get support from people who believe in you**

One of the best ways to stay positive about your new career path is to surround yourself with people who believe in you and support what you're doing. Starting on a new career path can bring up self-doubt and uncertainty. You need people around you who will remind you of your strengths and talents and how capable you are of making this change.

If people are giving you negative feedback and discouraging you, consider not talking to those people about your career aspirations. You can reveal them once you're well along the path, succeeding. Surround yourself with positive, successful people, and it will motivate you to be more like them.

5. Update your skills

The world is changing at a rapid pace. Whatever stage your career is in, chances are you will need to enhance your skills or add new ones. Many people in midlife are finding they need to reinvent themselves to transition to a new career or start a business, or even to maintain their current career path. The people who get ahead are the ones who are willing to keep learning. It's the old dogs who are unwilling to learn new tricks who have a hard time moving into the next stage of their career.

If you're transitioning into a new career or industry, do some research to see what skills you'll need. Assess your skill set and take some classes to fill in the gaps, or go deeper by enrolling for an advanced degree or a certificate program.

If you are considering an advanced degree, go back to step 1. Many people enroll in a masters program because they don't know what else to do. That's a costly way to find yourself. Instead, invest a few hundred dollars to work with a coach to clarify what you really want to do *before* you enroll. You may find that a certificate program, or even buffing up your transferable skills and targeting your resume, will suffice to get you on a new career path—and save you a ton of money.

6. Get connected

The best way to move into a new career or industry is to connect with the people in that industry. Most jobs are found through personal connections, rather than the want ads. Get out and network at industry meetings and conferences. Contact key people at companies that appeal to you and ask for an informational interview. If you can, make “warm” connections through people you know or by using your LinkedIn and Facebook contacts.

7. Be prepared

Once you define your new career path, get yourself ready. Along with updating your skills:

- **Update your resume**

Your resume is a marketing tool; it needs to be targeted. Start by having a clear Job Objective, targeted for each job you're applying for. If you're changing careers, feature your transferable skills, rather than your employment history. If you don't know how to write an effective resume, get some current books or hire a professional resume writer. It will be money well spent.

- **Keep networking, even after you get the job**

Stay connected in the industry. That way, when opportunities arise, your colleagues will think of you. If you need a job, your connections will already be warm. It's hard to approach someone for a favor when you haven't spoken to them in years.

- **Shore up your cash reserves**

Having enough money in the bank to support yourself for six to twelve months while you transition gives you a lot of freedom. It's hard to risk quitting your job or taking the time to develop a new opportunity when you're living paycheck to paycheck.

Now, Take Action!

These seven steps are powerful, but only if you take them. True, we're in a challenging job market, but people are getting new jobs and finding new opportunities all the time. Go back and review the seven steps, so you can move ahead with confidence. Turn off the negative self-talk and get going!

Lay the groundwork, and then get out there and let people know what you want. Deal with your fears and be persistent. Former president Calvin Coolidge said it best:

"Nothing can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are the omnipotent."

Resources

What Color Is Your Parachute? . . . Richard Nelson Bolles

Test-Drive Your Dream Job . . . Brian Kurth

Do What You Are: Discover the Perfect Career for You Through the Secrets of Personality Type . . . Paul D. Tieger & Barbara Barron-Tieger

Love Your Job: The New Rules for Career Happiness . . . Kerry Hannon

The Complete Job-Search Handbook: Everything You Need To Know To Get The Job You Really Want . . . Howard E. Figler, Ph.D.

Professional Association of Resume Writers . . . www.parw.com

About the Author

Sharon Good, BCC, ACC, CLC, is president of Good Life Coaching and a certified Life, Career, Creativity and Retirement Coach based in New York City. She coaches adults of all ages and from all walks of life to find exciting new careers, explore meaningful retirement activities and create lives they love. She trains coaches for the Life Purpose Institute and is an adjunct instructor at New York University. Sharon is the author of several books, including *The Tortoise Workbook: Strategies for Getting Ahead at Your Own Pace* and *Creative Marketing Tools for Coaches*.

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