



CAREER CHANGE CORNER

Note: I wrote this series in 2014¹ while in the process of implementing my career switch; I was so challenged by what I was witnessing and experiencing that I decided to put pen to paper and record it. I also reached out to others who were going through or had gone through more or less the same experience. Some of my views have since evolved, some have remained the same and I have since developed more expertise in the career change niche.

Changing careers mid-life: risks and opportunities

Part 2

In part 1 of this series on changing careers midlife, I introduced the concept of midlife career change. I also introduced the 4 mid-life career changers who shared their experiences with me, Evangelos Doucas, a former commercial lawyer who is now a successful realtor for Remax Living in Cape Town, *Linda, *Neo and *Khadija.

In part 2 I explore one of the main reasons why mid-life professionals contemplate changing careers i.e. the disconnect between academic qualifications and the real world of work and how this results in feelings of alienation from one's chosen profession.

Academic qualifications, disillusionment in the real world

It comes as a surprise to some what a huge disconnect there is between what we study at higher education institutions and what we see in the real world of work. And that's where the disillusionment begins.

**Linda had chosen a career in law but theory failed to connect with the practice in her case, "I was miserable in law. I had loved the law degree itself and was driven to study law through a sense of justice and wanting to help people. I just felt that I was not able to do this in a big corporate law firm environment and in the end got quite despondent wondering how I could change careers in my early thirties when I was trained up in such a specific profession."*

**Neo, a tax lawyer who embarked on a career change at the age of 41 experienced the same unease as *Linda with regard to the practice of law in a corporate environment, "Over time, I found that I was inspired less and less by it till I eventually got to the point where I was just getting through my day. I found that tax law does not have much of a connection to who I am. In addition, very importantly, it offers little room for creativity. I felt I needed something more strategic, creative and tangible, and which has more of a human connection."*

Why do we choose the professions we do?

It is important when considering a career change to cast a look back at the time when you were filling out tertiary application forms, why you chose a particular programme.

¹ First published in Skills Portal and Finite Magazine



CAREER CHANGE CORNER

Was it pressure from your parents to choose a respectable and stable profession or your peers? Was it media images painting a glamorous but unrealistic picture of a particular career?

Or did your teenage self genuinely believe that by choosing a particular profession you were on the road to fulfilling your passions and purpose in life?

Was it lack of information? Remember that some of us did not receive career guidance counselling in high school so we literally plucked careers out of nowhere.

If your profession betrays who you really are, at some point, no matter what you have achieved and how hard you have worked, feelings of discomfort and dissatisfaction might begin to emerge.

*not their real names