



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 4

In part 4 we now turn to formulating a career change plan; knowing your passions is one thing, knowing what to do with them may not be immediately obvious. Below are a few suggestions to help you consolidate your plan.

Talk to an expert

*Linda and *Neo consulted a careers expert; *Khadija researched the alternative career paths available to her as a business and counselling graduate. She also tried to figure out ways she could combine her past experience in business with counselling and contacted people in the field, subscribed to professional associations and newsletters. She also kept up to date with new developments in the field and subscribed to academic journals and in the process built a professional library and tools. This took a few years to accomplish. To this day she still reads counselling related research, books and articles even though she considers counselling a hobby.

Talk to people in the field you want to be in

*Linda chatted to a few professionals who gave her solid advice and new insights. Identify the companies that you would like to work for or professionals doing the kind of work you are looking to transition into and set up informational interviews. If possible you might even want to do a bit of job shadowing. Start with something as basic as a Google search and also tap into your existing network to help connect you with the relevant people.

You need an exit strategy

*Neo cautions those thinking about a career change not to go in headlong but to rather take an incremental approach towards their goal, *“it usually takes longer than you think. If possible stay in your current job and start building towards your career change while you are in that job, even if its half-day. For example start doing courses and gathering the experience you can. Save as much money as you can to give you the freedom to accept opportunities that may offer valuable experience but not necessarily the money you want.”*

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As a rule of thumb, give yourself a year to leave your current career and use this year to put a solid career and financial plan in place. A nest egg will come in handy because you will likely have to take a few steps down the career ladder while trying to establish yourself anew.

Retraining and/or Re-skilling

My **plan involved pursuing post-graduate studies in Industrial Sociology at UCT. I carefully examined the curriculum and decided on an emphasis in Human Resource Development. I resigned from my academic job in order to study full-time and put myself in a position to acquire new skills and look for opportunities in HRD. Your new career path may not require acquiring a new qualification however; you may decide to apply for an entry-level position in your new field to gain experience first.

My advice would be to get as much practical experience as possible in your new field and do as much independent research as possible on current developments in the sector.

**with the benefit of hindsight and some really harsh, but valuable, lessons, now that I am a certified Life Coach specializing in career and executive coaching, I know for a fact that my “plan” was, at the time, suicidal and misguided. I had no professional guidance and I now know that I could have done far better and saved valuable time and money. But I did do the best that I could with the available resources and I did eventually land on the right spot. So I entertain no regrets and I am only too happy to help others avoid the same pitfalls.

*not their real names