

THE JOB HUNT

TRANSFERRING SKILLS: THE KEY TO NEW EMPLOYMENT

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As the weak economy rages on and the talent pool becomes considerably larger, many talented job seekers from one industry – especially the financial sector – will most likely broaden their searches to include new fields. Job seekers who have all of their working experience in one industry need not limit their job search to that industry because they can often transfer their skills to other areas of employment.

Transferring skills is a much more productive solution to the job problem than changing careers. It is also a more productive solution than trying to stay in the same industry where prospects are unfavorable for finding new work.

Job seekers may believe that because of long exposure in a specific industry, they must remain there even though the outlook is bleak for getting a new job. That is a self-imposed limitation which tends to consign the person to a sometimes depleted job market.

If the individual looks at his or her background from the functional standpoint, a much broader range of opportunities may be opened up, for virtually any functional-area skills are transferable among industries.

For example, a stockbroker is essentially a salesman. He does not have to limit his job prospecting to financial services because sales skills are in demand throughout business and industry. An accountant who works in the steel industry may consider himself or herself as a "steel person" first. The fact is, though, that accountants are needed by all businesses and industries. The same applies to bookkeeping, data processing, manufacturing, marketing and a number of other skills.

Employers, for their part, are looking for people with experience and will regard the industry switcher as experienced in that line of work, although not in the particular industry. The industry switcher will be welcomed as an expert and the only requirement is to apply that expertise to a new product line, whatever it may be. Granted, some degree of adjustment and reorientation is required when one changes industries but there should be no insurmountable problems.

The job seeker is staying in his or her area of expertise and is not trying to do something completely different.

The thing to avoid is the trap of "either-or" thinking where the person rejects his or her former responsibilities but does not see any alternative other than a career change.

Often, an individual who is discharged may feel that he or she was unchallenged, unsuccessful or unappreciated in the last job. Because of an impression perceived of these problems in the prior work environment, the person may reject his or her former responsibilities.

The person who may feel, "I never want to do that again," runs the risk of nullifying the most saleable commodity, the individual's expertise. Instead of pinpointing particular circumstances as the target for blame, the industry may be condemned along with job-related conditions. Rejection of that kind may lead to extreme avoidance in which the person not only disavows the former industry but former job functions as well. The individual mainly desires something which is unassociated with what went before.

Any employment decision which is formulated from only a "black or white" perspective can lead to a poor job choice. The premise, "There is nothing for me here," may seem to lead to only one or two paths -- to stay or to go -- when other options exist.

Many job seekers may feel that they should pursue a drastic alternative to what was previously done. They may be attracted to exotic options, prospects which may seem considerably more colorful and glamorous than what they have been accustomed to doing. With an attitude, "Farther fields are greener," the job seeker may be swayed by emotional considerations rather than a logical appraisal of how fertile these other fields may really be.

For some job seekers, a 180-degree career switch may seem attractive. Being released from a position may seem to afford the opportunity to "do what I've always wanted." However, jumping at jobs which are unrelated to what the individual has done cannot only be unreasonable but can ensure a long and disappointing employment campaign. Such a job seeker is proceeding from an untenable position, competing against others who are already experienced in that area.

From the employer's standpoint, there may be little contest between the job seeker who has the desired experience and the one who only has aspirations. The company seeking a sales manager is not likely to hire someone with the background of manufacturing manager to fill that position. Since any business is run with an eye toward obtaining people with the right skills, the job seeker's only real currency in the marketplace is based on his or her experience.

From the monetary standpoint, changing careers will result in a dramatic salary loss of 20 to 50 percent. It will probably take the career changer five years or more to equal his or her last salary.

That is why careful consideration of the options is required. Our experience has shown that the individual is far better off in the long run to capitalize on the basic experience and expertise by either staying within the primary industry or transferring skills to another industry.

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