The 7 Biggest Myths About Changing Careers

Regardless of how big or small your desired transition is, here are some of the biggest myths people believe about changing careers.

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It is estimated that people change careers five to seven times during their lifetime. There is, however, no standard definition of what constitutes a career change. Is working in the same field but a different industry a career change? Is becoming a business owner a career change if you are doing the same job you were doing as an employee? Or is a career change only a radical move across field and industry?

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Regardless of how big or small your desired transition is, here are some of the biggest myths people believe about changing careers – and what the reality is.

1. There's one foolproof way to change careers

Countless books are written on the topic of how to make changes in life, including how to change careers. I like to read as many as I can and often find great ideas. Yet changing careers, like all transitions, is still a very personal experience. What seems difficult to you could be very easy for

another person, and unexpected circumstances can derail the best of plans. Take the advice, for example, of building a side business while you have a job, so you can then transition out of it into the security of your own new enterprise. Some companies include a clause in their employment contracts that prevents employees from starting a side business, or you might feel so down after coming back from work you don't like that you feel too demoralized and too insecure to start a new venture. It's not that the advice is bad – working on building your business while being fully employed is a great suggestion! – it's just that not one piece of advice fits everyone's situation.

Don't look for one foolproof way of changing careers – focus instead on creating *your own* path to a new career based on what you find most helpful.

2. Personality tests, journaling or reading a book are the secrets to success

Nothing happens just in your head. While writing, meditation and personality tests can give you some new insights and ideas, if you have been stuck and unable to change careers for a while, the answers you seek are either buried too deep or are *out there already* – most likely both.

We react to our *perception of reality* – not reality itself. Because of this, each one of us has formed a number of beliefs about ourselves and the world that we mistake for the truth. Some common beliefs I see with my clients are that they are not good at something, or too old to change or bad at money, etc. Even with lots of journaling, the deeper and more ingrained your belief is, the most likely it is that you will not to be able to recognize it for what it is – a *belief*, not the truth. If you suspect this is the case for you, working

with a coach will help you unearth what is driving your behavior unconsciously, and once you see your belief for what it is – just a belief – you will be able to choose what to do with it. “I am bad at money” might simply become “I need to learn how to negotiate my salary better.”

The other very common situation is that you have no idea what jobs are out there. I am always curious about what kind of work people do, and am often surprised to find people have professions I didn’t know existed. For example, a lot of people don’t know what a technology or developer evangelist does. Nope, it’s not a religious order! Here’s a handy definition from Wikipedia: “A technology evangelist is a person who builds a critical mass of support for a given technology, and then establishes it as a technical standard in a market that is subject to network effects. An evangelist promotes the use of a particular product or technology through talks, articles, blogging, user demonstrations, recorded demonstrations or the creation of sample projects.”

If you have technical skills and love people and content, this might be a dream job, yet so many people don’t even know about it. There are many more professions that are not very well-known, and this is why a huge part of you looking for what to do next has to include talking to people in the field.

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3. You need to have everything planned out

Some lucky people decide they want to do something different, research different options, find another job they like and voilà – they make the transition. For most of us, things are a bit more messy. Very often, people start exploring a different career, and something happens: They cannot transition into it,

end up not liking it or discover something they like even better. There is no way for you to choose a new career until you try it out. The fastest way to find what you want to do is to try what seems like a good idea: job shadow, do it on the side, take a class (not an entire new degree!). You will discover that the journey will determine the destination, and not the other way around.

4. Changing careers is only for rich people

While it definitely helps to have a partner, tons of savings or a lucrative job to support you during your career transition, people change careers regardless of how much money they make. In fact, if you don't like your job and on top of it you are making very little money, you should run, not walk, toward a new career! You are not doing yourself any favors by staying stuck and broke. We are incredibly lucky to have access to more information than ever, from finding free information online to the library (of which I am a huge fan!), to talking to people you meet at events, friends of friends, Linkedin… the sky is the limit! You can do a lot even with no budget, so don't let lack of money stop you from doing what you want. Be resourceful and use it instead as a motivation to take the leap.

5. You need a degree to change careers

Sometimes we form ideas about how things are and give up before we have time to check if they are really true. If you find yourself thinking you need a degree to change careers, do lots of research. Some jobs do require degrees and licenses (e.g. medical doctor, psychotherapist, etc.), but many more jobs do not require a degree by law. The most important thing

employers want is to know you can do the job. If there is no regulation saying you have to have a specific degree, some employers ask for a degree because they see it as proof that you know what you're doing. Can you prove yourself without going back to school? More and more colleges now also offer specialized courses and graduate certificates to provide people with specific skills without the time and money investment necessary to get a whole new degree. Look at all your options, and then decide what would work best for you. In many cases, you will be OK without having to go back to school for years. And if you find you really need that degree, you will have made an informed choice.

6. You need to be a business genius to start a company

Psst… I have a secret. Very few people are "good at business" when they start. Most people have no idea how to run a business and have to learn as they build it! This is why there are so many online courses to teach people how to market their work, get their first clients, etc. Don't let your lack of knowledge stop you. Take it instead as an imperative to learn more about it. And if you can, start your business on the side and learn by doing. Then, when you're ready, you can take the plunge and go full-time.

7. If changing careers doesn't work out, your life will be ruined

When I lived in San Francisco, I took a four-month-long class through a nonprofit to learn everything about operating a business. I used to joke it was the cheapest MBA ever, and even got my friends to take it. The amazing thing? After graduation, some of the students founded highly successful businesses, some started pretty good businesses, some started

a business and failed and some realized having a business was not for them. *Everyone,* though, learned enough new skills and developed such a deeper understanding of how a business works that they could leverage their new knowledge into a better business, job or salary. Some ended up getting better jobs instead of becoming entrepreneurs. In other words, when you embark on your journey to change careers, you will grow so much that you will be able to use what you learned no matter what.

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It might not be what you expected, and you might experience a lot of heartbreak, failure and discomfort along the way. But if you stay open, challenge yourself to learn new things and put yourself out there, you will eventually be able to do something you find fulfilling.

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