

# How to Conquer Career Transition

Written by Leah Shmerling CMF

Susan felt fulfilled in her last role as a vocational trainer. She enjoyed working with her colleagues in a positive workplace, and the challenge of training and seeing participants learn and develop. Her role brought her career and personal fulfilment. Despite her success, Susan was disappointed that her contract could not be renewed due to funding. She was left disillusioned and her confidence was affected. Six months later, she is still searching for a new role.

As people are at different life stages and their situations are unique, their experience with making a career transition will vary.

For some, the transition may be *voluntary* as individuals consciously make the decision to make a change. It may start years before taking the first step. Examples are a parent raising a family and seeking to return to the workforce, a promotion within the organisation into a new role or a new company that the individual has planned and worked for over many years, or to change careers to reflect a new life stage and changing interests.

Career transition is the close of one life stage and shift in career path, and the process of finding and moving into a new career. This is true for a student at school or university when their course of study has finished and they are seeking their first job, usually a first full-time role.

A transition can be *involuntary* as organisations downsize or globalise and move jobs overseas. This sees employee retrenchment which is often difficult for individuals and their families. It impacts on an individual's psychological well-being that results in loss of confidence and self-esteem.

Making a career transition can be challenging, as we let go of our old situation and journey into the unknown...

A successful transition requires an individual to adapt to the new situation. For some, it is easier when the change is planned. For others, the emotional response can bring fears of what lies ahead, letting go of relationships that have taken time to build, confronting personal fears such as self-esteem and confidence that can be impacted, and performance issues of one's ability to undertake a new role. Financial responsibilities with the loss of a regular income when caring for a family can exaggerate the transition.

A career transition journey has several stages that individuals will go through. The length of these stages varies amongst individuals and their circumstances. These stages are a normal reaction to job loss.

The Transition Model, 1991, developed by William Bridges highlights three stages of transition that people go through when they experience change. Individuals jump backwards and forwards between the stages. These are:

## ENDING, LOSING AND LETTING GO

The old situation is over, and an individual is confronted with change. This stage is often marked with resistance and emotional upheaval because people are being forced to let go of something that they are comfortable with.

As the individual transitions to accept that something is ending, there may be resistance throughout the change process before they can begin to accept the new state. At this stage, individuals may experience the following:

- Fear
- Denial
- Anger
- Sadness
- Disorientation
- Frustration
- Uncertainty
- A sense of loss

## THE NEUTRAL ZONE

This phase is the bridge between the old and the new, and is the 'cold' zone. In this stage, the individual is often confused, uncertain, and impatient. Individuals will be attached to the old, while they are also trying to adapt to the new. At this stage, the individual might experience:

- Resentment towards the change initiative
- Low morale and low productivity
- Anxiety about their employment situation, status or identity
- Scepticism about the future

To rise above these feelings, it is a good time to work for professional renewal to build one's identity and occupational commitment and develop skills and knowledge.

## THE NEW BEGINNING

The last transition stage is a time of acceptance and energy. The individual has begun to embrace the change. They are building skills for work, and are starting to see the benefit from their efforts.

At this stage, the individual is likely to experience:

- High energy
- Openness to learning
- Renewed commitment to one's role

## Seven Career Transition Tips

To maintain a positive momentum from the career transition, here are some tips to help the journey ahead.

**1. Develop career goals-** Think about what you want from your career, and how it fits into your life. Establish the steps to attain the goal.

**2. Exercise to get fit-**A transition is usually a stressful time. Use the time to develop your physical fitness by exercising and walking. The benefit is that it will reduce your stress, improve your mental well-being, and become fit.

**3. Use the time for your professional development** - Enrol in a course to upgrade your skills and qualifications. Your course will transition you into work, and you will meet like-minded students. It will stand you in good stead with your job applications and in your new role.

**4. Find a career coach or mentor-**Talk with a trusted professional who can support you during the transition and time of change. They will provide valuable assistance and support you to work through the challenges and issues that you face.

**5. Volunteer-**Volunteering is a good opportunity to use your skills and a great way to meet people. It closes time gaps in your resume, and it may lead to employment. Importantly, volunteering and being involved is a good way to get you out of the house and be helpful to others. Giving to others is the first principle of finding personal happiness.

**6. Gain support from positive people-**Be honest with positive people such as your family and friends and let them know what you are going through. They can lift your spirits and provide the personal nourishment that is often needed.

**7. Gain perspective** -Recognise that your transition is a temporary stage in your life that will pass and does not define your life. The process often builds character, resilience and empathy for others

***It's not the mountain we conquer but ourselves.** Sir Edmund Hillary*



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