

# How to Go From the Job You Have to the Career You Want

A GUIDE FOR CHANGING CAREERS



# Changing Careers: Facts and Fundamentals

“WHERE DO YOU WANT TO BE IN FIVE YEARS?”

While it's a standard question in job interviews, it's also the question you ought to be asking yourself today. How can you know if your current job has you on track for the career you want?

As you consider the merits of your current position, think about whether you like where you're headed. Are you positioning yourself to end up where you want to be in five or 10 years? One prominent survey of American workers recently found that 59 percent of respondents would choose a different career if they had the opportunity to start again. If you feel the same way, it's not too late to chart a new course.

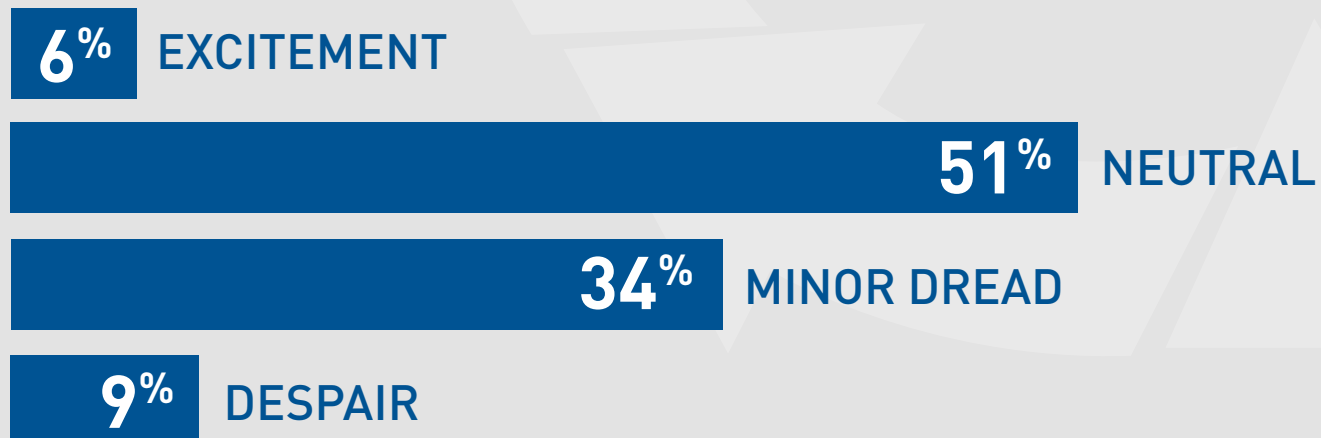


**Over 26,000 people shared their attitudes toward work.  
Here's what they said:**

If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same career you're in now?



What best describes your mood on Sunday night?



## SETTING THE RIGHT DIRECTION FOR YOUR CAREER

### PERSONALITY ASSESSMENTS

Considering your future career can be daunting. Some people have a clear vision of what they want to do from an early age, while others don't. If you know you need a career change but haven't chosen a specific path to take, career and personality testing might help steer you toward fields for which you have an aptitude as well as those you are likely to enjoy.

Some commonly used tests include the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Strong Interest Inventory, and those based on Holland's typology. These assessment tests can be found through private career counseling providers; if you're currently pursuing a college degree, the career services office at your school may also be able to guide you through the assessment process. Keep in mind that personality and skills tests will not tell you what your specific career goals should be, but they may offer ideas about occupations that are likely to suit your interest and personality.

### SKILLS ASSESSMENTS

In addition to having an interest in your job, you also need the ability to do it, and do it well. There are two types of skills employees need to be successful in the workplace: hard skills and soft skills.

Hard skills are what you usually think about when you describe the things you know how to do. These are easy to measure and judge because they are readily observable. Do you have special licenses or certifications? Experience with specialized equipment or software? You will want to know what your hard skills are so you can highlight them in the best way in your search for potential jobs and careers.

Soft skills are more difficult to observe. They involve the skills of interacting with people, such as maintaining relationships, demonstrating leadership skills and collaboration. The first step toward building better soft skills is to understand what soft skills you lack. Talking with friends and associates can be a good place to begin this discovery process.



### Some Important Soft Skills That Employers Value

- Time Management
- Flexibility
- Working Well Under Pressure
- Self-Motivation
- Strong Work Ethic
- Communication Skills
- Coachability
- Critical Thinking
- Leadership
- Working Well With a Team
- Problem-Solving



## Be Serious About Soft Skills

44 percent of senior executives cited soft skills—intangibles such as communication, creativity, collaboration and critical thinking—atop the list of skills lacking in today's job candidates.

Source: "State of the Economy and Employment," Adecco Staffing US, 2013.  
<http://blog.adecousa.com/the-skills-gap-and-the-state-of-the-economy/>

# Laying the Groundwork

Finding and landing the right job to set you on a new career path takes time and effort. Deciding what positions to pursue takes research, and informational job interviews can be an instructive place to start.

## THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

At its core, an informational job interview isn't a job interview at all; rather, it's a chance to gain insight from someone experienced in your industry of interest. Typically, you're the one who makes the first step, whether it's reaching out to a professional you know directly or contacting someone you're connected to indirectly.

Once you've scheduled a meeting, follow these steps for a successful informational interview:

- **Prepare questions:** Think about the information you hope to capture and how it will help you succeed. They should be questions that can, in turn, help you land the job you are pursuing. However, this is also an opportunity to ask questions about anticipated salary, benefits and vacation time.
- **Be professional:** While it may seem obvious, dress professionally and arrive on time. Remember, an informational interview is also an opportunity to hone your interview and communication skills.
- **Don't misrepresent your intentions:** You're here for information, not as a pitch to get hired. They've lent you their time—it's your job to make the most of it.
- **Follow up:** Be sure to send a thank you note, letting the person you met with know you value and appreciate their time and insight.



## Informational Interview Questions to Ask

- What's the typical path to getting started in this industry?
- Are there specific must-have skill sets for this field?
- What is the competition like in this industry?
- What are some good resources to help me learn about this field?
- What would be a reasonable salary range to expect?
- Based on my experience, for what types of positions am I qualified?
- Who else do you recommend I speak to?



## RESEARCHING POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS

Researching a company before you interview—or even before you apply—helps you relate your experience and skills to the specific mission of that company as well as to the job opening they’re advertising. You can then answer questions and give detailed examples showing how your experience connects to the company’s needs and objectives.

The first step for most research nowadays is an Internet search. You can immediately pull up a company’s website, along with news, reviews, and other information. Here are the key things you’ll want to find out before the interview:

**What the Company Does:** Never, ever walk into an interview without being able to sum up the company’s central mission in a short phrase.

**Key Personnel:** Most company websites will have an “about us” section that offers biographies of key executives or managers.

**The Company’s Size and Status:** If the company is publicly traded, they need to produce quarterly financial statements for public viewing. Financial statements can tell you a lot about a business’s size, scope, and operations.

**Key Products and Services:** Be able to name the company’s main products or services, especially if the role you are competing for is at all involved with making, selling, or managing them.





# Building Experience

As you research your new career path, you'll likely find that many positions require some related experience. Don't view this as an insurmountable obstacle if all of your current experience is in a different field. Here are a few ideas to help you get your foot in the door:

## **FOCUS ON YOUR QUALIFICATIONS**

Research and apply to positions for which you are mostly qualified (if you meet at least 75 percent of the requirements). If the positions you search for still require a few years of experience, search with additional keywords that tend to be entry level. For example, if you are looking to get into human resources, try searching for the phrase "human resources" along with terms such as "assistant," "clerk," "junior," etc.

## **KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR SMALLER COMPANIES**

Be open to any positions they have, even if the specific position isn't in your degree area (secretary or office coordinator, for example). In smaller offices there is a better chance of cross-training or "wearing more hats," which can provide valuable experience.

## **VOLUNTEER**

Gain experience and build your resume while making a positive impact in your community. Depending on the field you're interested in, nonprofit organizations may have opportunities to put your new skills to use.

## **NETWORK**

There's a reason for the saying "It's not what you know, but who you know." While your knowledge and skills matter, often having the right connections can help you get your resume in front of the right person, especially if your background doesn't look like an obvious match on paper. Look into networking events in your area and utilize platforms such as LinkedIn and Google+ to network online.

## **INTERNSHIPS**

Positions may be paid or unpaid, but either way, internships can be a great way to help you bridge the experience gap, and they look great on your resume. Internships can also lead to full-time, permanent positions if the company feels you are a good fit.

## **CONTRACT OR TEMPORARY POSITIONS**

These may sound scary, but in today's job market, many employers are moving toward either temporary-to-permanent positions or hiring short-term employees for specific projects.



# Building Your Brand

To earn a job offer, you need to set yourself apart from the competition. To do this, you need to understand and be able to “sell” the unique mix of knowledge, talent and personality you bring to the table—in other words, your personal brand. Creating and promoting your personal brand means developing a consistent, positive image so that employers will know to expect a consistent, positive experience when they hire you.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF A DEGREE

The knowledge piece of your personal brand includes the right combination of experience and education. In many cases education, whether it includes a bachelor’s or master’s degree, can be a tipping point when it comes to a job applicant’s success. For example, the unemployment rate for Americans over 25 with at least a bachelor’s degree is less than half that of those with only a high school diploma.<sup>1</sup> And a recent study shows that by 2020, 65 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education.<sup>2</sup>

When looking for a degree that will help get you where you want to be on your career path, it’s important to seek out a university that offers specialized programs with faculty who are industry specialists. If you’re concerned about how to fit school into your schedule amid the demands of work and family, an online program can offer the flexibility to work with your schedule. Some online programs even have customized learning platforms that let you skip over what you already know and focus on what you need to learn.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ONLINE

Whatever your career goals, online profiles are a popular and effective way to promote your personal brand and help gain the attention of potential employers, network with others in your industry, and advance your search for career success. For many fields, job candidate searches for entry-level positions are completed almost completely online. Not having an online presence—or having an ineffective one—can really hamper your job search.

<sup>1</sup>Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2013. [http://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empsit\\_10222013.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empsit_10222013.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Source: “Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020” June 2013. <http://cew.georgetown.edu/recovery2020/>

39 percent of employers check out job candidates on social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and 43 percent have found information that caused them not to hire a candidate.

Source: Study conducted by Harris Interactive on behalf of CareerBuilder, February–March 2013

<http://www.careerbuilder.com/share/aboutus/pressreleasesdetail.aspx?sd=6%2F26%2F2013&id=pr766&ed=12%2F31%2F2013>

## CREATING AND MANAGING YOUR ONLINE PROFILE

When creating a brand strategy, you need to decide how you will present yourself. If you have existing profiles on online professional and social networks, do a careful review to make sure all the information you're presenting is consistent and paints you in a positive light for prospective employers. Check your privacy settings as well to make sure you know which of your profiles and posts can be viewed publicly.

Whether you're updating an existing online presence or just getting started, follow these key guidelines:

- If you establish a profile on multiple websites, **make certain that key information you are sharing is consistent** across all sites.
- If you join a professional online community, **be active in the group and establish online contacts**. The more contacts you have, the greater the chance you have to access information that can lead you to a job.
- **Practice tact, patience and professionalism**. Networking is first and foremost about creating and building relationships, not squeezing information out of people you barely know.
- **Optimize your profiles with keywords** that reflect knowledge and skills in demand in your industry so hiring managers can find you in a search.
- **Stay professional**. Do not post personal information, casual pictures of yourself, or any messages that have a negative tone.

## 4 Notes on Networking

Social media sites can connect you to industry professionals, recruiters, and hiring managers through targeted searches. Here are four tips for developing relationships using social media sites:

### Start With Who You Know.

Focus on people you know who might have a connection to a company you are interested in. Looping in current or former colleagues is also a good start, as they can support positive claims about your work.

### Ask for Help.

Seek out advice for professional development in social and in-person networks. Consider contacts who may be effective mentors and ask if they might be willing to give you some advice. Be sure to act professionally, give them a way out, and respect their time.

### Be Helpful to Others.

Assist your networking contacts where you can. It may be suggesting a helpful article or submitting an internal reference for a job they've applied to. Make it clear you'll support them, and they will be more likely to support you.

### Create Genuine Relationships.

Avoid asking about job opportunities or references up front. Instead, try to cultivate a genuine relationship in which both parties feel respected. Once you have that, it's likely acceptable to ask for a referral.

# How to Write a Resume for Your New Career

Just because most of your prior experience doesn't reflect your new field, it doesn't mean your accomplishments aren't valuable. You just need to frame them in a different way. As a "career transitioner," there are steps you can take to prepare yourself to jump into a new field. Follow these guidelines to get your resume ready for the change:

**Functional vs. Chronological:** You want your resume to stand out even though you may not have as much relevant experience as other candidates. Do this by creating your resume in a functional format, which focuses more on your professional skills than on what jobs you've had and when. You can find examples of this type of resume online to get an idea of how to get started.

**Highlight Your Education:** What courses, certifications, or degrees have you completed that illustrate your knowledge in this new field? What subjects have you studied that incorporate industry terminology that an employer would find attractive? Remember, both experience and education count for most employers.

**Start Off Strong:** What is the first piece of information you want a prospective employer to see? That's how you should lead off your resume. Make sure to start with a strong summary or career goal, and then choose what to highlight in the next section wisely.

**Refer Back to the Job Posting:** Look at the qualifications and requirements listed in the job description and find similarities within your background. When you highlight them in your resume, use the same keywords or phrases used in the description.



## Understanding Today's Job Application Process

The advent of the Internet makes it easy for job seekers to search and apply for positions at any time from any place. The ease of applying online combined with the reality of a tough job market mean an employer might receive hundreds of applications for just one job opening.

Because it is impossible for one person or even a team to go through all of these resumes and applications by hand, some companies turn to applicant tracking systems to filter the resumes they receive. These tracking systems scan all of the resumes received for the keywords and qualifications the company is looking for in a candidate. This is why it is so important to tailor your resume to each position, using the same terminology and skills listed in the job posting when possible.



# Do's and Don'ts for a Better Resume

## DO

- Focus on your accomplishments instead of your responsibilities
- Tailor your resume to each job for which you apply
- Highlight qualifications that relate to the job posting
- Use keywords that relate to the job posting
- Have someone else proofread your resume

## DON'T

- Include information that's not relevant to the position
- Use language that you don't understand
- Misrepresent your background
- Explain the reason for gaps in employment
- Leave out dates of previous employment





# Preparing for the Interview

Hiring managers may view candidates transitioning into a new career as a risky hire due to the lack of hands-on experience. You will need to show the interviewer that you are flexible and confident, and that your background and skills make you the best candidate for the position.

## **SHARE YOUR RELEVANT EDUCATION**

Discuss what you learned in each class, the knowledge that you gained, and how it will assist you in the position. Go into detail: talk about specific projects, papers and research that you did so you can demonstrate your knowledge of the industry.

## **DETERMINE YOUR TRANSFERABLE SKILLS**

Discuss your transferable skills and show the interviewer how you plan to apply your background in the new position. For example, if your background is in retail and you are looking to obtain a career in an office

setting, discuss your customer service skills. Explain how you listened to customers and found solutions to ensure the customer left happy, resulting in repeat business. Make sure to give specific examples.

## **HIGHLIGHT VOLUNTEER WORK**

Emphasize your volunteer work in the field. One of the benefits of volunteer experience is that it shows the interviewer how serious you are about transitioning into a new career. In addition to providing experience to add to your resume and talking points for your interview, volunteering is an opportunity to network as well.





# What's Next?

Congratulations. You got the job, but your new career is just under way. How do you go about turning the new position into the career you want? Keep these fundamentals in mind.

## TRAINING AND EDUCATION

As you gain experience in your new job, you expect to gain ground on achieving your career goals. But time on the job is not always enough. Don't lose sight of the training and education that helped you get the job in the first place, and continue to do what you need to do to stay current and in-the-know in your new field.

Many employers prefer employees who are willing to learn a specific way of doing things. If your manager meets with you regularly to discuss your progress and goals, you should know which parts of your work still need improvement. Ask about training or professional development opportunities, and keep an eye out for workshops and seminars that relate to your on-the-job functions.

## ADAPTING TO THE COMPANY CULTURE

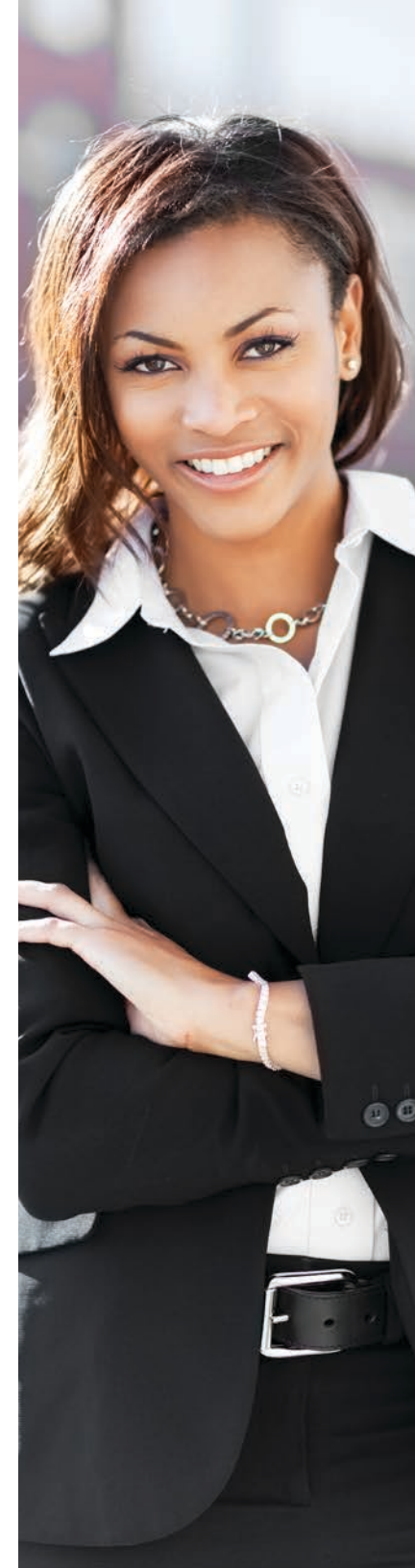
Every workplace has its own culture, and a critical part of your new job will be adjusting to that culture. The culture of an organization is composed of the informal rules and behavioral patterns that exist within that organization. It may involve the working environment, dress code, manner of addressing superiors, and even lunchtime practices.

As a newcomer to the company or department, do your best to learn and adapt to these established conventions. Usually the critical period for acculturation within your company is about six months.

## ADVANCING IN YOUR CAREER

Getting your first job in a new career field is a step on your way, but don't forget to look at the big picture. Now that you have the job, keep your long-term goals in mind. After you have worked at your job for at least a year, go back to your initial question: "Where do I want to be in five years?" Compare the direction in which your new role is taking you with what you envisioned to make sure you're on the track that's right for you.

Also, make sure to regularly re-evaluate your career goals with the knowledge that you gain from your job. You may discover new interests, or your job may help you realize you have skills you never knew you had. Track your accomplishments and keep an updated resume. Opportunities often come up unexpectedly, and you want to be ready to take advantage so you can take your next step forward.



# About AIU™ Career Services

This resource was created in partnership with the American InterContinental University (AIU) Career Services department, which is committed to offering knowledgeable advice, support and resources to help students and alumni with job-related planning and career-search assistance. Through its Career Advantage Program, AIU Career Services can provide students and alumni:

- Guidance on career development and job-search strategies
- Access to a comprehensive online job portal
- One-on-one resume and cover letter assistance
- Interview assistance, from tips and best practices to interview preparation sessions
- Opportunities to connect with employers via online information sessions
- Live online workshops
- And more

To learn more about AIU and our Career Services resources, visit [www.aiuniv.edu](http://www.aiuniv.edu). For the latest tips on interviewing, resumes, job searching and more, follow our Career Resources blog at [www.aiuniv.edu/blog](http://www.aiuniv.edu/blog).

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