

CONTEMPLATING A CAREER CHANGE?

First, Chart Your Own Needs and Values

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	Unimportant			Very Important	
	1	2	3	4	5
MONEY
EGO
GRATIFICATION
TRAINING
TIMING

We all, at some time or another, think about changing the way we earn our livelihood. Sometimes it is a pipe dream, and other times it is forced upon us by downsizing or becoming "behind the times". I'm not speaking of just changing from Company A to Competitor B, but leaving an established position for another in an unfamiliar field or discipline.

The process is often difficult because we tend to think of many things and confuse ourselves. Over the last 15 years in management consulting, I have had occasion to interview and advise many individuals who contemplated a career change.

Aside from locating a potential Employer prepared to take the leap of faith in hiring you for your potential vs. proven contribution, I see five basic questions one must think through in order to reach a decision which will have some basis in your chances of successfully transitioning one field to another:

Is the economic, business and competitive climate positive enough to consider change? If one gets involved in a new position or business venture that fails, it may inevitably result in having fewer career choices available.

How much money do you need in order to meet your obligations, provide the lifestyle you are accustomed to, and prepare you for retirement? This is not about how much money you would like to make, but what your current obligations require you to earn. If this amount is close to your present earnings, you may find that you do not have the luxury of being able to change fields. For example, I met a technology professional who grew tired of the rat race in their field, and asked me how to transition to a role they saw as enjoyable and while maintaining their income. Their ideal job, as they saw it, was as a Home Depot Associate. The answer was they couldn't - at least, not in the short run. One is unlikely to earn as much in the first step in a new career as an industry expert. If you

can afford the step back in earnings, you may be able to take the step down onto another career ladder that will take you where you would rather find yourself.

What do you enjoy doing? What activities, contacts, situations have you gained the most gratification from? Perhaps you are in a technical role, but most enjoy the people interaction elements of your position, or coaching and training others. When you identify these areas of personal gratification, it is possible to plan how to maximize them and select a role that will involve more of what you like and less of what you don't.

What will your ego let or require you to do? This is a tough one to answer honestly. Most people would initially say ego is not an issue, but inevitably find out it is. It's possible you could live on less money, and enjoy work activities that do not come with any particular status in an organization. Conversely, you may find a rewarding position that compensates you well where the job enjoys less status than the job you currently hold. Concern about what others will think about your career selection and how they will react often restricts us in our range of choices.

For what are you qualified to do by way of training, experience, knowledge or aptitude? (I always dreamed of being a golf pro, but after years of mediocre play, decided this was not a viable career alternative). It is sad but true that we may be able to afford to do something, enjoy doing it, but not do it well enough to convince anyone else to pay us to do it!

These are the basic questions one must consider in contemplating a change in career direction. In my experience, people find, going through this type of a personal evaluation, that they are not as free to make a change as they may have thought. Often the simple case of financial consideration makes it very difficult. If you are able to realistically adjust your standard of living and accept a change in your status and security, you may be able to make the quantum leap to job fulfillment. Looking back, you may even be able to say it was the smartest move you ever made.