

Three Myths of Career Change

Myth #1: Passion and Work Are Not Compatible

In fact, research shows the opposite to be true. Most successful people are those who have learned to follow their passion. The problem is that many of us were taught to be rational when we make career decisions. So we buried our passion.

In order to get this point across at my seminars, I often draw a picture of a cart in front of a horse (and not a very good picture because drawing is not one of my natural talents). I show how most of us load up our cart with a toolbox of hard skills (e.g. architectural drawing, computer programming, public speaking, whatever). Our careers to date are often characterized by the cart dragging the horse—it being the symbol of the very things that fill us with energy, drive, strength, vitality—passion. Career transition is about putting the horse in front of the cart where it belongs!

Think about your own career path. Maybe you were passionate about writing when you were younger, but made the rational choice to go into nursing. Maybe you were passionate about designing buildings, cars, planes...but decided accounting would be a “smarter” choice. (By the way, if nursing or accounting is your passion, and you followed it, congratulations.)

When we are passionate about our work, we are able to excel because we are tapping into our natural strengths and abilities. When we enjoy and are fully engaged in our work, our self-esteem is higher, and we are able to perform at a higher level.

On the other hand, when we are unable or unwilling to connect emotionally to our daily tasks, we are less likely to be successful. In fact, our performance will more often than not be characterized by mediocrity, just good enough to get by—nobody’s going to fire us but neither will we light any fires and win major promotions or awards.

Myth #2: The Way to Be Successful is to Pick a Career in Order to Make Enough Money to Someday Quit and Do What You Really Want to Do

Over the years, I have met many individuals who committed their time and energy to finding the holy grail, be it the next great network marketing scheme, or a hot stock, or “guaranteed” investment plan. And, occasionally, one of them gets lucky (or crooked enough) to win a lottery to keep the (unreal) hope alive for others.

Again, studies confirm that this isn’t what successful people do. They, instead, are so absorbed in their career they work long hours, think about their work constantly, talk about it to their partners and friends. Please don’t confuse this passion with workaholism. Passionate people have that “fire in the belly.” In other words, their commitment to their work is unwavering. Workaholics often have energy but they don’t appear authentic in

their work. They seem to be driven, going through the motions, trying hard to please with their performance.

But if you are working to just make money and you are postponing enjoying your work for some later date, you will be unable to maintain that type of commitment over a long period of time. Workaholics burn out. Passionate people make it look easy. They have made an important discovery – that the journey itself is even more important than the goal.

Myth #3: You Need to Be Sure What You Want to Do Before You Start Doing Something

This belief holds people back from making any moves at all. People who have successfully changed their career began by experimenting; trying out new opportunities part-time, on a small scale, beginning weekend projects, volunteering, taking night classes or going back to school. They found a way to “stick their toe in the water.”

I did this myself. While I had a full-time job in the government, I did some assessments to determine my right work. After reviewing several recommendations to become a career counselor, I checked out the industry and identified a niche that harmonized with my talents and preferences. Then I started seeing clients during lunch hours and after work to validate my plan. Then I created a financial cushion for myself in anticipation of a worse case scenario when I made the final jump to a new career.

When you begin exploring, you actually begin to experience your possible future and what it might feel and look like. You can then make adjustments in your course as you gain more experience and your direction becomes clearer.

The reason is simple. For years, you have been molded by what you do. Therefore, you need to actually start doing something else. If you are the kind of person (like me) that likes to do extensive research, make lists, take assessment tests, and research potential companies before making a move, do it.

Gathering information can be useful. Don't forget, however, that you need to begin taking steps to try out what you are learning.

This is the hardest part of any career transition. You need to be exploring options with an open mind. It is by doing this research and exploring that the “right job” will appear. People tend to want to skip this part of the process but in my view it is the most important. Forget about what family, friends, books say in terms of educational qualifications and salary levels. It's way too early in the process to be thinking about those things.

The whole point is to do the research, which includes talking to people, in order to find the thing that will get you excited. You don't start with an “aha!” experience then go out and try to find it. You go out looking for the “aha!” experience. Yes, career transition is a

systematic and proven process. But be open to surprise, to coincidence, to chance encounter.

Career transition is not rocket science but it is something you've never really done before, so you need to learn new skills and apply those skills. You must put your assumptions aside and proceed with an open mind. One phone call, one click on the web, one chance encounter can propel you into a new opportunity. It might sometimes feel dispiriting but if you start today, you will be much closer now than you were 2 weeks ago and, if you persist, in 2 weeks you'll be further ahead than you are now!

Just this week a client said to me, "Ten years ago, my friends told me to go into Psychology, I was a natural. I said to myself, 'No, that's another 7 years of school.' But if I'd done it, I wouldn't be here regretting that decision 10 years ago." The ten years go by, whether you follow your heart or not.

Career transition does not follow a straight line and no two transitions are the same. It can happen in a matter of months, or it can take 2-4 years. Sometimes, it is smooth sailing, and sometimes it is a case of three steps forward and two steps back.

By waiting until your plan is perfect, you increase the chance that no moves will be taken. So, begin the search for where your passions lie. Get a proper assessment done, such as the JobJoy Assessment Report.

Don't let career change myths keep you stuck. By changing some of your beliefs about your transition, you will actually change the direction of your journey. Happy trails!