

## Career Transition: A New Beginning



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The current economic downturn is forcing many people out of jobs and careers they have held for years. Others have seen employment in their industry dwindle and are looking for opportunities in new arenas. Navigating the transition to a new career can be made successfully with proper planning and preparation.

### Building your professional brand

Your *personal* brand tells the world who you are, what you want people to think when they think of you. Your *professional* brand is what matters to an employer, networking contact, or anyone who can help you find a job or grow your career. It includes your skills, interests, and expertise.

Developing your professional brand is essential to:

- Creating a professional presence
- Marketing yourself as a strong candidate for employment
- Connecting with contacts to help you in your job search
- Helping prospective employers find you

**Online Branding** It's important to make sure that the information available about you online is visible, accessible, and relevant to where you are in your career and where you want to go.

Go to *Google* and search your name. What comes up? Is it what you want employers to see? Remember, if you don't brand yourself, others will do it for you.

**Identify Your Skill Set** Begin by listing everything you have to offer. Then identify the skill you want to highlight to strengthen your appeal within an industry or for a specific job title. The goal is to target a specific employer and portray the skills you have that meet their objectives. Keep in mind that your resume, in whatever form it takes, is a snapshot of your value.

Once you've made your list of skills and have determined the industry or job title you're interested in, you're ready to develop your list of accomplishments. Accomplishment statements are short, measurable, and results oriented. Here is an example: Launched the first professional development and training program for all employees, measurably improving job satisfaction 38%.

### New Rules for Resumes

With online access and internet services, your resume isn't just a piece of paper anymore. If you are submitting an electronic resume, the rules have changed. It isn't 'action' verbs, its 'keywords' that employers are looking for. Employers use keywords to filter through piles of resumes whether they received them hardcopy, through online applications, internet job boards, or resume databases. The right keywords will help you land the interview. Keywords may include:

- Technical terms (specific to the perspective employer)
- Industry jargon
- Education
- Professional organizations

One way to find the right keywords is to review 5 to 10 employment ads with similar job titles in your field. See which words are mentioned repeatedly. Use them, in conjunction with action verbs, to get your resume noticed in a competitive job market.

## The Job Search

Searching for a job requires a clearly defined action plan. Here are the three phases to include.

**PHASE 1 PREPARATION** Thoroughly research to develop a list of your target companies and develop a plan for getting lots of interviews. Here are some common choices:

- Network (word of mouth campaign)
- Professional associations
- Search firms
- Social media/networks (LinkedIn or VisualCV)
- Online job sites
- Newspaper ads

**PHASE II INTERVIEWING** Typically, it takes more than one interview to land a job. Here are some overall objectives:

- Aim to have 3-5 interviews each month
- Express your value
- Learn about the companies
- Move forward in the process

Too many people looking for jobs stumble through interviews as if the questions are coming out of left field. The following are sample questions and answers that you will no doubt encounter during the interview process.

**Tell me about yourself.** Provide an overview of the information you provided in your resume. Do not include any personal information, such as marital status, dependents, age, race or religion.

**What are your weaknesses?** Handle this question by minimizing your weaknesses and emphasizing your strengths. "I am always working on improving my communication skills. I recently joined Toastmasters, which I find very helpful." Toastmasters is an organization that helps you improve communication skills.

**Why should I hire you?** Summarize your experiences: "With 5 years experience working in the financial industry and my proven record of saving the company money, I could make a big difference in your company."

**Why do you want to work here?** The interviewer is listening for an answer that indicates you've given this some thought and that you are not sending out resumes to every company. "I selected key companies whose mission statements are in line with my values, what the company does, and this company is very high on my list of choices."

**What salary are you seeking?** It is to your advantage if the employer tells you the range first. One possible answer: "In what range do you typically pay someone with my background?"

**Tell me about a time when you solved a problem.** This answer calls for a specific example of a specific incident. If you claimed on your resume that you are very organized, a natural question for the interviewer would be: "Tell me about a time when you organized a project." It is now your task to let the interview know that you have had success when organizing a project. In other words, proved what you said you did by providing an example.

**Why did you leave (or why are you leaving) your job?** If you're unemployed, state your reason for leaving in a positive context: "I managed to stay through the first two rounds of downsizing, but the third round was a 20% reduction in the workforce." If you're employed, focus on what you want in the next job: "After 2 years at (company), I'm looking for a company where I can add my experience."

**What Are Your Goals?** It's best to talk about short term and intermediate goals. For example: "My immediate goal is to work for a growth-oriented company. I hope to eventually grow into a position with additional responsibilities."

**Last Question!** You've submitted your resume and been asked all interview questions. Then the interviewer turns the table and asks, "Do you have any questions?" The type of questions you ask will give your prospective employer more of an idea regarding your motivations. Consider asking the following questions.

- How does the company promote individual growth?
- Is this a newly created position or are you replacing someone?
- What strengths should a person in this position have?
- What are some of the challenges in this position?
- Can you describe a typical day?

**PHASE III FOLLOW-UP** Develop a Thank You letter and send the letter after each interview. This step often overlooked by job seekers, but is important in demonstrating your interest in the job.

**NETWORKING** This is the most useful job search tool. Start by asking your existing network, past employers, recruitment agents, past colleagues, friend, etc. It is vital that you build up your network as you progress in your job search.

Once you've written an effective resume, practiced your interview techniques, and brushed up on the fundamentals, it's time to connect to your industry through networking, social media, and online job sites.

**Social Media** In today's digital age, you should consider creating virtual connections. Having a professional profile on the internet in social networking sites like Linked In, Facebook, and VisualCV could increase your chances for success.

**Online Resources** Here are some online resources to assist with your career transition. Specifically, in the areas of job search preparation, interviewing and follow up.

**CAREER LAB** Career Lab is a career strategy and leadership development firm that provides online tools and resources to assist individuals advance their career.  
[http://www.careerlab.com/art\\_11steps.htm](http://www.careerlab.com/art_11steps.htm)

**ABOUT.COM** About.com is an online neighborhood of hundreds of helpful experts, eager to share their wealth of knowledge with visitors. Their experts provide valuable guidance in job search and resume development.  
<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/resumes/resumes.htm>

**INDEED** Indeed.com is a search engine for jobs, allowing job seekers to find jobs posted on thousands of company career sites and job boards. <http://www.indeed.com>

**LINKED IN** LinkedIn is an interconnected network of experienced professionals from around the world, representing 170 industries and 200 countries <http://www.linkedin.com/>

**VISUAL CV** The VisualCV reinvents the resume and assists you with your online recruiting strategies.  
<http://www.visualcv.com/>

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