



# Changing career paths: A step-by-step guide



## Changing career paths

There are many reasons why you may want to switch careers. Sometimes, situations – such as relocation or health issues – call for a job change. Other times, you may find another career with:

- A positive culture
- A better work-life balance
- Better pay
- Enhanced benefits
- Less commute time
- More fulfilling work

The prospect of changing careers may be daunting at any point in your employee life cycle. However, it can be successful at any stage if the right steps are in place. The following guide can help make sure your career change goes as smoothly as possible, starting with how to know when it's time to make the move.



## How to know when it's time for a career change

If the thought of changing careers crosses your mind, it may be worth investigating exactly why you feel this way. As a loyal employee, you may sometimes shoot down any thought of leaving your current company due to uncertainty. You may be uncertain about a variety of things, such as:

- Backlash from your current company
- Logistics of making the change
- Opportunity for growth
- Risk of failure
- Your own needs

You need a certain level of self-awareness to realize when you need a change in your career environment. You have to be knowledgeable about what your workplace needs to give to you so you can thrive. This will vary from person to person, but there are telltale signs you can look for so you know it's undeniably time to make the big move.





## You're not fulfilled

Typically, work is a large component of your life. If you aren't feeling fulfilled at work, it may affect not only your work performance but your overall well-being. Work that doesn't bring you a sense of purpose or make you happy in some way can become tiresome and lead to burnout. You may want to search for an alternate career that allows you to find that sense of fulfillment.

Fulfillment looks different to everyone, but you should ideally be able to take pride in the work that you do. This may mean working toward a cause that you care about or helping the community in some way. It may also mean simply enjoying the work that you do, whatever that may look like. If you're feeling unhappy at work consistently, you may have a lack of purpose and need to look elsewhere.



## You're overworked

Whether you're fulfilled or not, you may be in a situation where you simply work too much. This can happen due to a demanding workload, unfair management expectations or even a lack of boundaries if you make your own work schedule. Employees that work from home, for example, may find it hard to clock out at the end of the day due to the overlap in their office and home environments.

Overworking can lead to fatigue, stress, and burnout – but working too much can also negatively impact your physical health. You may unintentionally form bad habits if you don't have much free time after working past the 40 typical hours a week. Prolonged periods of eating unhealthily (or not enough), not exercising, taking drugs, drinking alcohol or not getting enough sleep will take a toll on your physical health. Further, the relationships in your life may begin to suffer, impacting your happiness and the happiness of those around you.

The burnout that comes from being overworked affects both you and the company for which you work. Your work performance will likely decline, affecting productivity for the business and performance ratings for you. If you notice that your work-life balance is out of whack, it's time to reassess things. Either evaluate where you could cut back hours or search for a job that allows you time to adequately take care of yourself and perform your best.

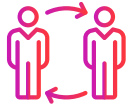




## You're underpaid

Financial stress is another clear indicator that a job change may be necessary. Of course, you can speak with your manager about a pay raise. If you're being underpaid for the amount and type of work you are doing, it can take a real toll on your well-being. Much like overworking, being underpaid can lead to negative effects, such as anxiety, stress and depression. You may also be tempted to turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as over-eating, drug and alcohol abuse or gambling.

Increased stress may also lead to physical ailments, such as gastrointestinal issues and headaches. Your relationships may suffer if you are arguing over money and you may start withdrawing socially to save money or avoid shame. If you notice any of these negative impacts on your life from being underpaid, it may be time to ask for a raise or look for work elsewhere.



## You've been stuck in the same role

If you ask for that raise or promotion and consistently get denied, you may feel stuck. If there isn't any room for advancement and you find yourself wanting a more challenging career, this is a clear indicator you could be happier in another position.

Be aware that, sometimes, switching companies can come with a pay cut. Calculate how much you can decrease in salary depending on your financial situation and negotiate to be paid fairly. If you want to stay within the same company, look for internal job postings. If there is simply no room for upward mobility, it may be time to explore other options.





# How to switch to a new career





The discomfort you may feel around changing careers may be mitigated if you plan correctly. A manageable amount of anxiety over a job switch is often worth it to transition to a better work environment. Acknowledge the need for this change and start planning to make the process as smooth as possible and find a career that fits your unique needs. Assess your values, interests, and professional strengths. Adequate self-reflection will allow you to hone in on what you need to be satisfied in a career. You may stumble upon different fields by searching online to help you think of options you haven't thought of before. Even if you are quite sure of your personal values, it can help to make a tangible list and update it. People change and grow, and their careers should reflect that.

A whopping 66% of employees expect their employers to follow through on purported company-wide values – and consider it a dealbreaker in taking the job if these values aren't acted upon. This can be anything from eco-activism to an inclusive culture.

When deciding your personal values, organize them in order of importance. For example, if you highly value having a position that directly impacts society, put that at the top of your list. Targeting potential new companies that hold similar values and allow you to enact your purpose in life will allow you to choose a career that feels fulfilling. Your level of job satisfaction will likely skyrocket if you can find a match to some of your top personal values.

Your interests will likely fall in line with your values. However, if they are vastly different, make sure to find a position that provides enough time to pursue hobbies in your free time. Although work life and home life are separate, they both impact your overall satisfaction levels and performance in all areas. This may also help you use your most prevalent skills, or take time to sharpen some newly desired skills through professional development courses.



# Develop a timeline

## Getting started

Getting started on the career search process is arguably the hardest part. Instead of jumping right in, it's best to set up a timeline for the search. This way, you can use your time wisely. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that people are unemployed, on average, for 25 weeks. If you plan correctly, you may not have to spend around six months without a job. It's possible to find a good career fit in a shorter amount of time, but give yourself some leeway if it ends up taking longer.

When putting together your timeline, schedule out enough time to thoroughly explore your options. This may include taking time to:

- **Conduct informational interviews** to identify and explore careers that you want to learn more about by asking career research questions of someone in your desired career.
- **Shadow employees in different roles** to experience the day-to-day responsibilities of a new career within your current company or another company and figure out if you would feel more fulfilled in this role.
- **Seek specialized education** to refine your skills and continue professional development, so you're in a better position to obtain the career you desire.
- **Build a network in your target industry** to make relevant connections, meet other people and learn even more about what working in that field is like.

## **Changing careers is a multi-step process**

Planning out your timeline carefully allows you to perform the necessary steps to determine the right career fit for your unique situation. This can help ensure the success of your new job hunt by allowing time to get a feel for a different type of career or even obtaining certifications in time to apply. Of course, you want to leave your current job on good terms. Depending on your relationship with management, you may want to reveal that you are looking for another position. This may even prompt your company to offer you a raise in pay or other adjustments to help retain your employment. If this is the case, make sure to request a clear timeline for them to make these changes and follow up if they fall by the wayside.

You may also opt to search for a new career silently, which is absolutely acceptable. Remember that it also benefits the company to have someone that is truly satisfied in their role. When giving your notice, it may be beneficial to give constructive feedback on what led you to make this decision. If you have determined that a different role would suit your needs better than your current position, you are taking the right steps for yourself and your career. A move to a new career path is typically the right decision – especially if you plan accordingly.



**Get started today!**

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