

Preparation is key to a successful career change

Few years have witnessed more people attempting a career change than 2009. Thanks to the economic downturn, many people found themselves out of a job and wondering what to do next.

For many of the nation's younger unemployed workers, such wondering commonly led to furthering their education. However, middle-aged workers who found themselves the victim of layoffs widely chose to seek a career change. Those considering such a change should

know it won't be easy, but it could prove rewarding and doesn't have to be as difficult as it seems.

■ **Consult a professional.** Much like a recent college grad discusses his career plans with a guidance counselor or alumni representative, an adult considering a career change should consult a professional, be it an employment placement specialist or someone who works in the field you desire to enter, when beginning a job search. A professional can provide an accurate portrayal of the field and give advice or tips as to how best to get your foot in the door.

■ **Do a self-examination.** Arguably the biggest bright spot of getting laid off is the chance to do some self-examination as to what it is you liked, disliked or both about your old position. Too often workers get caught up in the commitments that come with being an adult and ignore whether or not they're happy with their job. But a layoff allows time for a careful self-examination, one that should allow you the chance to avoid finding yourself in an unfulfilling career that only pays the bills.

■ **Get organized.** Finding a job isn't easy. Finding one in an economic climate rife with layoffs is even less so.

Have an organized plan of action, including a daily commitment to learning about your new field. Treat the time off not as a chance to completely relax, but a chance to research your new field, find out what it takes to succeed and devote daily time each day to looking for work.

■ **Explore freelance opportunities.** A resume with large chunks of time where you didn't work is never attrac-

tive. Successfully transitioning to a new career might require you do some work for free. Oftentimes, even the most successful freelancers spend large chunks of time doing work they're not going to be paid for. That's a part of freelancing. However, staying active, even if you're not getting paid, is a good way to show you're serious and committed to your new field.

Receptionists matter in hiring process

When you go for a job interview, be careful how you greet the receptionist, because his or her impression of you could determine whether you get hired.

A recent survey of 150 senior executives found that 61 percent said they consider their assistant's opinion important when evaluating potential new hires.

"As soon as they enter the parking lot, job seekers should be on their best behavior," said Robert Hosking, executive director of staffing firm OfficeTeam, which commissioned the survey. "Just as treating the waiter rudely at a restaurant creates a bad impression, being discourteous or abrupt with a company's receptionist or office staff can reveal character

— or lack of it — in job applicants."

OfficeTeam offers these tips to win over the hiring manager's right-hand person:

■ **Mind your phone etiquette.** Learn the person's name, and be friendly and professional when contacting the "gatekeeper."

■ **Make a memorable introduction.** Start a light conversation if it appears he or she isn't too busy, and inquire about news or information about the organization you uncovered in your research.

■ **Be engaged.** After checking in, avoid snacking, chewing gum, talking on the phone or listening to your headphones.

■ **Be sure to say goodbye** to those you've met and thank anyone who assisted you.



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