

Shifting careers: Are you ready?

Career Wise



By Michelle St. Onge

Most of us at one time or another have day-dreamed about leaving our current job to pursue something totally different.

These dreams can be as far fetched as heading south to work in a hut selling sunglasses on the beach, or more realistic, such as leaving your boss behind to go into business for yourself.

It should come as no surprise that these fantasies often coincide with job stress or a bad day at the office. If you find yourself considering new career possibilities all the time, you're probably unhappy or unsatisfied with your current career and ready for a change.

Once you have decided to seriously consider a change in career, it will pay in the long run to do your homework first. This is a process that can demand considerable financial resources, personal commitment and the support of family and friends.

You owe it to yourself and your loved ones to take the time to set yourself up for a successful career transition before you hand in your letter of resignation.

Knowing is half the battle

It is much easier to figure out what you don't want in a job than to pinpoint what specifically will make you happy. If you already know what you don't want, that is a good first step.

If that's all you know, you're probably not ready to make a decision that will satisfy you in the long term. Here are two easy exercises to help get you on the right track.

1) Identify your ideal work environment: Make a list of every job you've had from the time you started working. Next, divide a sheet of paper into three columns, labeled "Job," "What I liked" and "What I didn't like."

Starting with your first job, write out your likes and dislikes about each position. Try to focus on the work environment, considering factors that are

important to you. You might include type of work, degree of independence, use of creativity, salary, and physical location.

Once you've finished, go back and read each column, looking for common themes. You may want to ask a friend or family member to look at your lists with you.

2) Identify which work skills you enjoy using. For this exercise, think about the skills you used in each of your former jobs. Using the list of jobs from the

last exercise, write three or more brief statements that describe what you did at each job.

If you have a resume, you can pull some of these statements from that document. If you don't have a resume, you will need one soon! Save this exercise and use it to help you when you get to that point.

Once your list of skills statements is complete, rank each one on a scale of 1 - 10, according to how much you enjoy using that skill. If you don't want to use a particular skill again, rank it with an X.

If you don't have a lot of work experience or are contemplating an extreme career shift, you might find it helpful to repeat this exercise listing skills that you have gained from personal hobbies or volunteer work that you have done.

Once you complete these exercises you will start to gain a clearer picture of what you'd like to do and the kind of workplace that will fit you best.

Armed with this powerful knowledge you will be in a much better position to identify the specific industries and occupations that will bring you greater satisfaction in your work.

Michelle has served in various roles as a counselor, educator, and trainer in both higher education and corporate settings. An experienced group facilitator, educator, and career counselor, she is committed to helping people discover and achieve their potential.

Michelle and her young family recently relocated to the North Country, which is closer to her native Vermont.