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Twenty-two Random Ideas for Making Successful Career Transitions

Making successful career and job transitions involves our complete intellectual, physical, and spiritual selves. The market is replete with books, seminars, web resources, and people claiming to provide "the answer"–or at least a piece of it.
We know there isn't one–just the hard, heart work of continually refining the transition process, procedures and strategies which will lead to a new, satisfying job. Each day, one step at a time.

The following 22 ideas may provide some additional structure and insight to your process. They are placed in 4 major groups:

- Maintain Realistic, Positive Outlooks
- Determine Your Path
- Train Yourself With Job Seeking Essentials
- Engage Your Soul Perspective

Perhaps there are some ideas which apply to your transition, helping you enhance or distill what you're doing.

Use the Worksheet at the end to summarize new possibilities and focus on next steps.

MAINTAIN REALISTIC, POSITIVE OUTLOOKS

1. Know that the transition process is not predictable or rationale.
Howard Figler speaks of the Zen of the Workplace……

- Job seeking is not a predictable process
- There are unknown and hidden variables
- Many things are out of your control
- Scientific, rational methods go so far–and are only part of the solution. Think out of the box; take calculated chances. Sometimes do something because it just feels "right."

2. Accept what is.
It takes us away from the negativity that is often in our mind–and moves us toward the truth, which is in our soul. When unemployed or between jobs, this variation on an Eckhart Tolle principle is essential for us to embrace the loss of what was–and take productive steps toward what will be. There's little gained by wishing something didn't happen or should be otherwise.

3. Keep the "mental phantoms" at bay.
Tolle again; he defines "mental phantoms" as "what if" statements which are not real and interfere with positive thinking and action. The mind projects itself into imaginary situations and creates fear. Phantoms can also include non productive self talk like "I shouldn't have taken that opportunity", "I deserve better," "It might have been different if……", "He or she could have done……." I ought to have said that better." You get the idea.

4. Know in your heart that you have gifts which the world needs.
"Giftedness is the only means I know of for the ordinary person to make sense out of life. Each one is given a purpose and the drive and competitiveness to achieve that purpose. Meaning is thereby built into the adventure of living for everyone." (Arthur Miller) Focusing on how you can contribute to organizations, causes, other lives is a key practice.

5. In losing a job, recognize it is a death.
Get upset, angry; grieve; and know it's characterized by stages of denial, anxiety, confusion, uncertainty, action and new beginnings. Believe in your best, strongest self and that you will survive it–and even thrive in the new opportunities which you will discover. Parker Palmer encourages us to be more comfortable with death as one of his five "shadow casting monsters" as it relates not just to our own mortality but to ideas, projects, relationships. Everything new began because something ended.

6. Don't go it alone.
This transition work is hard and complicated. Seek out a trusted coach, counselor, and advisor or mentor to help you. When things get overwhelming and complex, it's usually essential to get help. Your coach or mentor can be invaluable in helping you determine what that is.

7. Don't let the media gloom and doom on the economy and job market discourage your job seeking.
Much of the data is not applicable to your personal situation or solution–it certainly may have a negative influence on your opportunities but there are many positive factors to consider as well.
Focusing on the positive may seem like simple advice but don't underestimate how critical it can to your attitude–and well being.
Article: Countering Job Market Gloom: Ten Positive Ideas

DETERMINE YOUR PATH

8. Discern (not decide) your mission in life as central to your decision-making as you look to new opportunities.
Decide is from the same root word as homicide–or kill off–or eliminate. Discern means to look beyond physical vision– and encourages the deeper identification of your passions–your most valued skills and interests. Studs Terkel's line from **Working**, "We work for daily meaning and our daily bread," brings home this need to go expand horizons when in transition.

9. Have a written vision or mission statement–a long-term plan for how your life will be better and meaningful through work. –and life work balance.
Balance realism and fantasy. Have heart in your goals–but know that plans must be clear and have measurable milestones; and a mentor and leader can be a great help in guiding and supporting you. Striking the balance between fulfilling your dreams and identifying employers who will pay you for the value you add and skills you have is difficult–but critical.
Article: The Five-Step Plan for Creating Personal Mission Statements

10. Self assessment is always necessary for successful planning i.e. clarifying and communicating your career interests, skills and values. But most often, the fog lifts and the sun rises on career indecision once you are out there in the marketplace–experiencing, exploring, examining and experimenting.
INSTEAD Professor Herminia Ibarra's wisdom here is spot on—

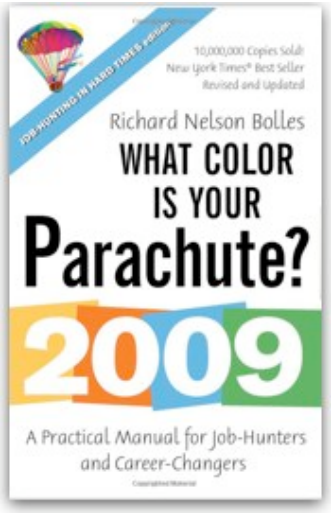
> *"We learn who we have been and who we might become —in practice, not in theory–by testing fantasy and reality, through exploration and examination, not just by looking inside. Knowing oneself is critical, but it is usually the outcome of–and not a first input to–the reinvention process. Intense introspection poses the danger that a potential career planner will get stuck in the realm of daydreams."*

11. There is no perfect job–life's always been about tradeoffs.
You'll make many as you evaluate job roles, responsibilities, organizational culture, colleagues, management styles, management hierarchy, benefits, etc. etc. And timing—a so-so job now can lead to a good one later. So…it's the evaluation process which matters–and being clear on your priorities. Career planning usually involves dealing with abstract possibilities–when specific jobs are identified and eventually offered, then concrete criteria–and tradeoffs–come into being. And choices can be more intelligently made.

12. Place job market projections in the proper context
– they are one variable of countless, in determining your strategies and plans. Job market statistics are aggregate data–they cross all industries and make up the 20,000 foot view. Each job hunter must define his or her own personal or ground level job market–the openings, opportunities, and organizations where your skills and background match.
Article: The Job Market for UMW's Class of 2009

TRAIN YOURSELF WITH JOB SEEKING ESSENTIALS

13. Place job loss and/or career change in appropriate context.
It's extremely tough on the ego and much of our identity is tied up with work, But you will both lose and gain good things as you move toward fresh opportunities. There will be tradeoffs and you'll gain many useful life lessons. The transition experience will be invaluable to your life–and is usually more prized in retrospect. William Bridges term "re-invent yourself" is accurate and exciting as you move into new environments.



Jack Falvey says you must be the head of both sales and research in your job seeking company. As head of research, you uncover through **micro-research techniques** (web, print, people) the key issues, ideas and questions around which to build your discussions. And it's through these information – seeking meetings that you will impress others and increase your credibility. In these situations, people want to help you– and referrals result and discussions turn to recruitment. That is the essence of Richard Bolle's best selling trade book, **What Color Is Your Parachute?** It's been telling the truth since 1974!

14. Job hunting should be called job slogging.
You will have ups and down, dark and light moments; days of consolation—days of desolation. There's little glamorous, efficient or streamlined about the process–and there are lots of detours. Every "no" brings you closer to the "yes." You will be successful in getting something better or a step toward better. It can be helpful to allow yourself to be ok with and even welcoming to "purposeless wandering." Taoists call it wu-wei) – allowing space within and around me so conflict and confusion can settle and a deeper wisdom emerge. Guidelines and a timetable can enhance this process. This is also compatible with Ibarra's emphasis on exploring and experimentation.

15. Master in the job search that which you can.
You can't do everything perfectly. We're human beings with many flaws. Parker Palmer encourages us to "honor our limitations." That translates to working around them–and getting help where we need it. The basic job seeking tasks need to be done as well as you can—identifying and articulating your strengths, conducting thorough job research, using multiple job seeking strategies, preparing for interviews, asking great questions, seeking support and assistance from valued mentors and coaches, planning for the unexpected, and having back-up options in place.

16. The web isn't the answer.
It's a tool or resource. Yes, you have to continually bang away on the best job boards and employer websites for you. But most importantly, use the web to research key intelligence about employers and how it relates to you. You have to apply for positions within the electronic systems set by employers. They make the rules–but know it's the human touch which will make the difference between success and failure. You will get a good job because you and an employer will have a mutually satisfying communication. Jack Falvey says you have to be out in the cold damp rain if you're going to get struck by lightening.
That means out there where employers are–virtually and in person.
Article: There are no hard and fast job-hunting rules

17. Prepare, prepare and prepare–for the tasks you are able to control and manage.

- Have clear concise communications to employers
- Write and speak about the specific connections between your strengths and employer needs–employers will not do it for you.
- Have a cover letters, emails and a resume which makes the "business case" for your candidacy–business case is about evidence and examples.
- Use crisp email and telephone contacts with industry specific language.
- Network for informational interviews as a key strategy for making contacts–it's not just about identifying job opportunities in the hidden job market but rather impressing people with your research about salient issues and ideas which translate to in-depth questions. Job information comes later.
- Interview with planning behind it–know what you need to answer and ask; balance preparation with spontaneity–this is not easy but your techniques improve with practice in non-interviewing situations. Even the best communicators don't perform well in interviews because they don't prepare enough.

18. The Job Market is Unfair.
Although we know this in or head, it rarely makes it to our heart. We keep hoping there's a recipe and if we mix all the ingredients in the right proportion, we will wind up with that award winning cake. Understanding this truth can cut down on the heartache when the offer doesn't come–and avoid some of the self blame that is only counter productive.

- The "best" candidate only gets the job sometimes.
- There are unpredictable elements and things you just can't control like business outcomes, personal agenda's, political schemes, etc.
- Sometimes you won't know the reasons for being turned down.
- You can do everything right–and not get the job.

19. It's helpful to be both an artist and a scientist
to be successful in career transition and job seeking. Artists are creative, spontaneous, imaginative, sensitive, entertaining, and innovative. Scientists are organized, experimental, procedural, systematic, and follow proven theory. All these qualities come into play with varying amounts, nuances and priorities as the situation dictates–but all can have a positive impact on job search success.

ENGAGE YOUR SOUL PERSPECTIVE

20. Embrace the hard, "heart work" of achieving meaning, breadth and depth in your life
–job and career is integral to happiness. In the latest of Thomas Merton's journal books, The Intimate Merton, Patrick Hart, his secretary and editor, says that at one point, Merton realized that he would not find God in the Central American monastery he was hoping to found but rather in the "hard heart work" of being in the room where he woke up every day and moving through his day–falling down, getting up, falling down and getting up again. Finding life/career meaning is no different.

21. You are encouraged to bring your God, faith or spirit into the transition journey.
"If you're in a career transition and you have an old faith hanging in the closet of your heart, now would be a good time to take it out and dust it off." (Richard Bolles)
Most of us think of faith in something beyond ourselves or the earth we stand on—but faith in self, community, organizations, family and friends and how God is connected to all can be valuable. Consider your spiritual self and be open to support, guidance and strength from new places. Telliard de Chardin (Jesuit theologian, philosopher and paleontologist) said we are first spiritual beings who have a human existence; not simply human beings with spiritual opportunities."

22. French philosopher, Descartes said "I think, therefore I am." Tolle counters with, "That's exactly the problem."
We think many things that aren't helpful–or truthful. Tolle says that if we step back and become the "watchful observer" of our thoughts–we are more likely to find "truths" in that "space" between us as the observer and the thought itself. Of course, you must use your imagination to do this.

As you recall thoughts like "I can't", "It won't work", That's not me", or "I'm not good enough"–they may not be coming from our best selves or our soul. Parker Palmer calls the soul "that life giving core of living self, with its hunger for truth and justice, love and forgiveness."

He continues, "philosophers haggle about what to call the core of our humanity but I am no stickler for precision. Thomas Merton called it true self. Buddhists call it original nature or big self. Quakers call it the inner teacher or inner light. Hasidic Jews call it a spark of the divine. Humanists call it identity and integrity. In popular parlance, people often call it soul." The mind is certainly necessary to plan strategies and ideas–but as ego and intellect often drive these tasks, it's the soul that connects us to power beyond ourselves–and sustains through difficult times.

The Soul by Mary Oliver

"Nobody knows what the soul is; it comes and goes like the wind over water.

But just as we can name the functions of the wind, so we can name some of the functions of the soul without presuming to penetrate its mystery.

The soul wants to keep us rooted in the ground of our own being, resisting the tendency of other faculties, like the intellect and ego, to uproot us from who we are.

The soul wants to keep us connected to the community in which we find life, for it understands that relationships are necessary if we are to thrive.

The soul wants to tell us the truth about ourselves, our world, and the relation between the two, whether that truth is easy or hard to hear.

The soul wants to give us life and wants us to pass that gift along, to become life-givers in a world that deals too much death."

The soul wants to be our ever present, mysterious, unpredictable, bridge to a personal God from which all life was born; where strength, peace and hope are found and toward whose unconditional love we journey.

By Tom Bachhuber
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SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

What are some different or deeper ways you may view your career/job transition?

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Name some new resources you may access or use to make a successful transition?

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What are the 2 or 3 key tasks you need to accomplish to be successful?

_____

_____

Name new people you will contact for support and ideas?

_____

_____

Oswald Chambers, author of My Utmost for His Highest and WWI chaplain, said that God gives us partial visions and encourages us to do ordinary things. When things are complex and murky, we need to stop, reflect, and pray. And do the next thing? We'll know what the next thing is.

Your next thing?_____