

# Find the Right Career, Regardless of Your Age

By Curt Hagedorn

We all go through stages in life and, particularly now when young people are being asked to determine their future course at younger and younger ages because of the cost of education, often what you decided you wanted to be when you were 19 has very little to do with the person you've become when you're 35. That's why more and more people are discovering second or even third careers as they journey through their working life. Though deciding "what you really want to do" is often an occasion for celebration, it also presents any number of challenges, which, if you recognize them and prepare for them, can help you succeed in making your second career dream into a reality.

First, remember that no matter what you're doing now (and no matter how much you've come to dislike it) it's what's currently supporting you and perhaps your family. As satisfying as it may be to tell someone to "take this job and shove it" when you feel you've found your true calling in life, make sure that if that's the course you choose you're up for the struggle a few months from now when you find out that everyone else has decided to make decorative candles at home and sell them on the internet, or that veterinary school costs a great deal more than you thought. This is not to say that you shouldn't take risks – taking risks can often lead to great rewards – but for every person that transformed their home catering business until a multi-billion dollar empire, there are many more who ended up back behind the same desk in six months through lack of planning.

Like everything else, the first step is to do your research. If you're planning on going back to school, how much time will it take and how much will it cost, and when are your classes? Can you maintain your current job while training for another one? If your goal is even somewhat related to the field you're currently

in, you may even find that your employer may support your career change and help you with tuition. If not, find people who are pursuing the career you want, take them out to lunch and ask them some serious questions – how much did it cost, how difficult was it, what were the skills you needed and ones you needed to develop, what were the pitfalls along the way. If you can afford the time, you might even find that someone in the business you want to be in will take you on as an intern, or part-time, or at a lower rate of pay, in order for you to learn the business from the ground up – even if someone will let you hang around for a week during vacation time and observe, you will find out a great deal about how well you are suited for your chosen new profession, or even that sometimes dreams are just dreams – a lesson that it's better to learn before you turn your whole life upside down to pursue them.

Once you've convinced yourself that you are making the right decision, however, sit down and make an honest assessment of your resources. What skills do you have now that will apply to your chosen new career? Which skills do you need to develop? Can you get them through further education or can you learn them on the job if you can find an entry-level position – again, if you can convince an employer in your new field of your dedication to success, you might find that they'll help you pay for what you need to learn. Finally, even if you've never done it before, make a serious budget – if you have an accountant or financial advisor, speak to them as well. What expenses can you cut in order to finance your career change? Can you move into a smaller living space and finance your dream with the difference? Buy a smaller car and get rid of that monthly payment on the Lexus? Is it worth dipping into capital or retirement funds? Are there any programs or grants available for re-education or small business start-ups? If you're starting a business, check with your local chamber of commerce, there may be mentoring or other programs available for low cost or subsidized financial, management, or marketing assistance? The point is, remember when you were just starting out you had a lot of help, from parents to family friends, to

guidance counselors to mentors – don't make the mistake of thinking you can do it all on your own the second, or third time around.

And remember, if you do the research and planning necessary before you take the leap into your second life, you'll be prepared for the pitfalls along the way and have more energy to devote to moving forward. It may be an uncomfortable situation to be the low man on the totem pole at age 35 in a new field, or to be the oldest person in your biology (or English, or Marketing or Auto Repair) class, but if you've done your homework, you'll be a step ahead of everyone just starting out in terms of wisdom and experience which you've already earned in the first chapter of your working life.

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