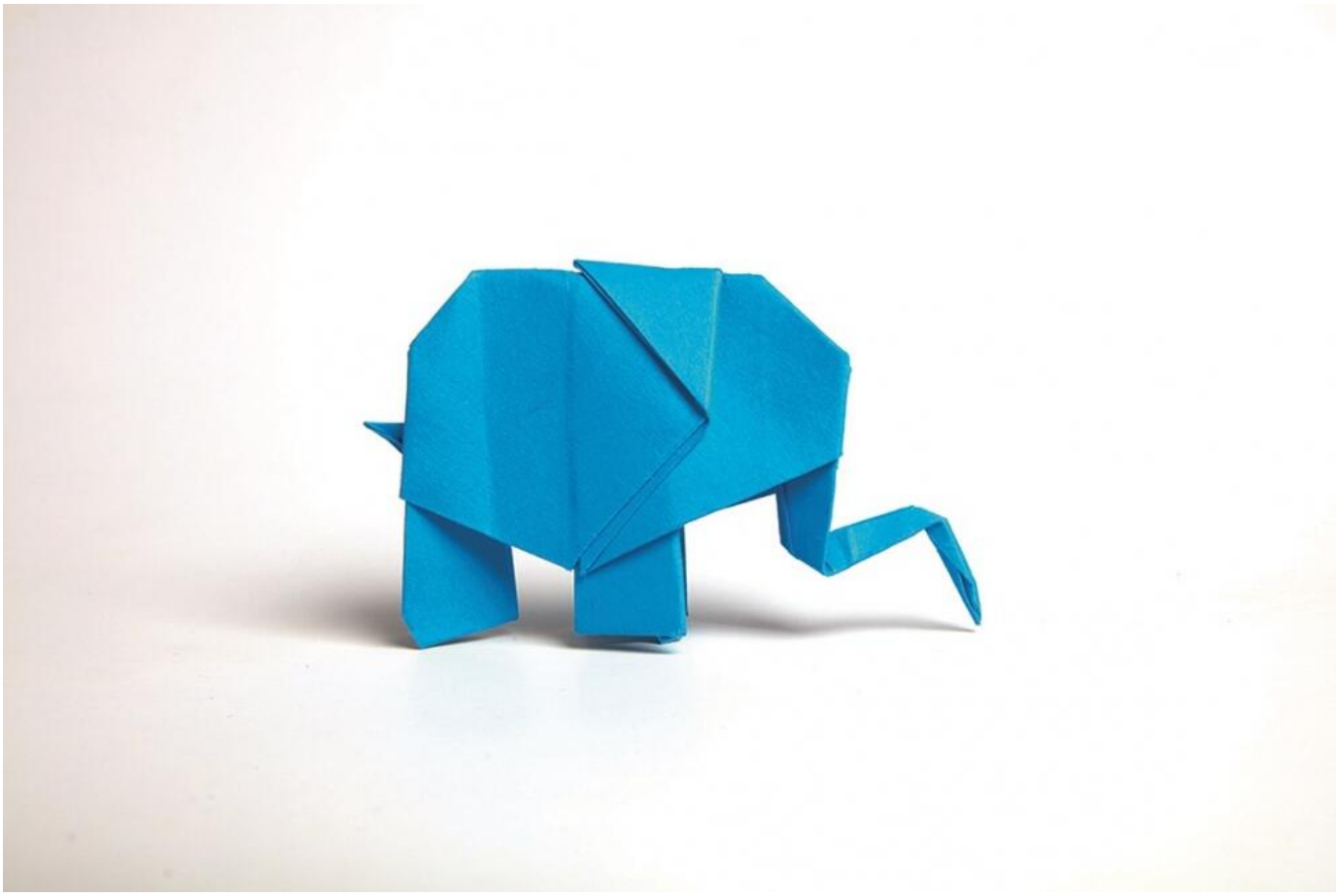
Changing Shape



01 January 2017

Jill Storey asks if multiple careers will be the norm, and considers how to prepare

Key Points

What is the issue?

The number of people who plan to shift to another, completely different, career has increased over the past couple of decades.

What does it mean to me?

There is a growing number of people that have expectations of continuously learning and developing new experiences and skillsets to grow their careers.

What can I take away?

Professionals can start with small steps, trying out the options they develop through extracurricular activities, for example, joining networking groups or attending events.

People used to say that changing jobs every few years would not help your CV and that potential new employers would be wary of you. This stigma is rapidly becoming outdated and the number of people shifting to a completely new career has continued to rise significantly over past 10-15 years.

What are the drivers behind this change?

For some the drivers will always have been there – they will have had a voice at the back of their heads saying:

‘Am I in the right role?’, ‘Is it time for a career change?’, ‘Is this it?’, ‘Is it now or never for me to follow my dreams?’, ‘Do I really want to retire at 55?’, ‘Will I be bored?’ or, aged 46, ‘What do I want to do when I grow up?’

For others the driver may be financial. As life expectancy (currently above 81 in the UK) continues to rise there will be those who cannot afford to retire at 60.

Others may love their jobs but as the robots arrive and automation becomes increasing prevalent, they may have no other option than to look for a new career. If widespread predictions are correct, automation in the workplace will increase at an unprecedented rate. The Mckinsey Global Institute predict that, by 2025, robots could jeopardise between 40–75 million jobs worldwide.

For the Millennials it may be that career concept is outdated as they look for a new reality. As this generation rise in the workplace they have expectations of continuously learning and developing new experiences.

How to prepare for your next career – the traditional or ‘textbook’ model

Conventional wisdom points to first knowing as precisely as possible what you would like to do or become and then spending time planning step by step how you will get there.
Individuals from a structured career background are often drawn to the idea of following a logical planning process and applying the same strategic planning principles they would to their business strategy. Such a strategy would typically revolve around three key pillars:

- Where I am now
- Where I want to be
- How will I get there

As part of the first phase, ‘Where I am now’, an individual will typically consider not only their journey to date but what drives them both personally and professionally.

Some individuals have a very strong sense of purpose and clear vision for their lives. They will have been pondering for years about the new online shop they will develop or re-training as a teacher.

However, typically many more do not know what they want to do with their lives and they may need to do their homework first. Some may use a SWOT model – Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats to help them gain greater clarity around their core strengths, values and passions.

A simple SWOT analysis can be created by simply analysing career milestones to date and reflecting on personal and professional achievements. Describing what capabilities were required for the achievement and then outlining sources of fulfilment and or bad stress will help provide a better understanding of oneself.

The ‘Where I want to be’ phase is about opening up the possibilities for the future and connecting with your life goals, passion and interests. It involves creating options to explore and considering aspirations. For example, what do you often say in the completion of the following sentences:

‘If I had the time, I would…’
‘One day I will…’

At this point in the journey it is also worth thinking about what you would like your legacy to be and how you would like your new career to fit with your lifestyle, balancing between family and friends, health, leisure interests and personal development.

Once new career options have been created, then transferable skills should be identified and linked those skills required in the newly selected field in order to consider the ‘How will I get there’ phase.

Part of the road of how to get there will involve practising articulating your new story with friends and colleagues you know well and asking for their feedback.

Having used this feedback to possibly adjust your message slightly and develop confidence that they believe your new plans are achievable, it is time to start looking at your existing network.

Who in your existing network may be connected to people in your new chosen area and be in a position to facilitate introductions for you.

It all sounds very simple …

This whole process does not sound like rocket science. Most people would probably follow something along these lines as a way of making a change.

Often people look at others and how they have changed roles. Although it often appears as if it happened by chance and they made it look very straightforward and seamless, these things are rarely by chance. There has often been a period of shifting going on before for quite a period of time until they found what they were looking for.

Accepting there is no five-point plan or easy answer

Today we have all become so used to finding a five-point plan on the internet about how we can do everything from writing a blog to climbing Mount Kilimanjaro.

No matter how common changing careers starts to become, for most there is not a clear blueprint that can be followed. Change and reinvention do not come out of the blue without soul searching and wondering whether you should stay or step out into something new. If you do decide it is time for a change then how you do go about deciding what that change will be for many turns out not to be a direct linear path.

In practice it is rarely a case of swapping one career for another overnight but rather a gradual and sometimes a bumpy transition process with a few trials along the way before we find our destiny.

Under this alternative approach, although there is no five-point plan or manual, there some suggestions that will help you get on your journey.

You just need to start

The most important piece of advice is the need to start and take action, however small. The majority of time and energy should be devoted to action as opposed to planning.

Are you going to be the person who spends years dreaming about and talking about change or the person who leaves it all behind for their new life?

> *‘Then indecision brings its own delays,*
> *And days are lost lamenting o’er lost days,*
> *Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute:*
> *What you can do, or dream you can, begin it;*
> *Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.’*
> (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

Expecting an uncertain transition

Being prepared for the uncertainty you will face as part of the transition to reconfiguring your new working identity, rather than surprised by it, will help keep you on your journey. Knowing that twists and turns lie ahead and not being deterred may help you recognise and avoid the temptation of falling back into your comfort zone.

The possible alternatives

For some, developing the list of possible alternative careers is the easy part. What can be more difficult is developing the criteria for selection. At first it is exciting to have so many possibilities to consider and follow but for most people after a period there comes a time when this becomes draining and it is necessary to reduce the uncertainty and number of options. Once the point of being able to discard possibilities is reached, real progress starts.

As part of developing the selection criteria one should not be deterred by what others think but try to understand where your energies lie and the times when you feel invigorated.

Picking up skills as part of the zigzag model

Career paths are becoming more fluid as organisational structures flatten. The route of direct promotion to the top of an organization via a ‘ladder’ is being replaced with many following a zigzag route rather than a straight path. This model provides more opportunity and more possibilities to be successful and find growth through different experiences. These opportunities can be used to acquire new skills and tap into new networks.

New networks

During the transition period there is a need to form new networks and step away from the old. It is not possible for people to reinvent themselves in isolation. It is necessary to have conversations to check out the reality of new potential careers. New peer groups enable people to test their new identities and gain a sense of belonging.

The dance between holding on and letting go

It is likely that there will be a period of oscillating between holding on to the old and letting go. At some point, by starting to engage with more people in your new world you will reach the tipping point.

There is no time to delay

Whichever model or combination of the two you adopt, do not delay making the first step until you have settled on the destination or found yourself. We learn by doing.

You can start with small steps trying out the options you develop through extracurricular activities, for example, joining meet-up groups or attending events. But the first step is just to start!

> *‘A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step’*
> (Lao Tzu)