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Expert Advice

Career 360: And Now For Something Completely Different

**By Kirk Brown,
Special to Gannett**

Disenchanted and unfulfilled after 15 years with a pharmaceutical company, Kelly Hevel was ready for a career overhaul.

"I wanted to feel more connected to what I am doing," says Hevel, 35, who teamed with a career coach to chart a new course. Today she is working part-time at a church, dabbling in art and testing the waters herself as a career coach.

The Brooklyn, NY resident is part of an unending stream of employees seeking to change their careers, says Leslie Prager, founding partner of The Prager-Bernstein Group, a New York City career management firm. Prager sees dissatisfaction as the driving force motivating most career-changers.

There is plenty of fuel for the fire, according to a new poll that found that Americans are growing increasingly unhappy at work.

Only half of the respondents to a survey by The Conference Board reported being satisfied with their jobs, down from nearly 60 percent a decade ago. The survey also found 40 percent of workers feel disconnected from their employers and 25 percent are just "showing up to collect a paycheck."

Many mid-career professionals look for change when their current jobs are no longer challenging or rewarding, says Deirdre McEachern, Hevel's Boston-based career coach.

"After 10 or 15 years, these people discover something is missing," McEachern says. "They find themselves thinking about that college major that they left behind."

Ample time, careful thought, a positive attitude and realistic expectations are essential aspects of a successful career change.

At the starting point, prospective career-changers should answer two key questions:

What are my skills and talents?

McEachern's clients take the Highlands Ability Battery, a three-hour test that they can complete at home on a CD-ROM. Other leading assessments include the Campbell Interest and Skill Survey and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Strong Interest Inventory.

What do I want to do?

As the next step, McEachern's clients take the Life Experience Inventory, an assessment that she has developed to define their values and identify their passions.

For many career-changers, money is not the overriding objective.

"The phrase that I hear over and over is: I want to make a difference," says McEachern, who made her own career change five years ago when she left a job as director of sales and software at a computer company.

After deciding on a field that best matches a person's passions and skills, the final part of the process involves steps related to finding an actual job. It can take time to meet educational requirements, do networking, study hiring trends, revamp resumes and prepare for interviews.

"Realistically, you are probably looking at about a year to make a major change," Prager says.

However long it takes, it's important to stay upbeat.

"Believe in yourself," Prager says. "Don't get discouraged by those who are negative."

Hevel says the hands-on assistance from her career coach was "hugely important" after she quit her managerial job.

"It's scary to leave."

Despite the anxiety that can accompany career changes, Prager predicts people will keep taking the plunge.

"Career-changing is something that is here to stay."

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