

Transferable Skills Often Facilitate a Needed Career Shift

By Emily Sanderson

The oil crisis of 1987 eliminated many oil-related jobs in the United States. The advent of the Internet in the mid-1990s changed the business outlook for many job sectors including IT and the media. 9/11 affected the financial industry in 2001, and the real estate sector is feeling the pain now as lending institutions struggle to stay afloat.

In early January the economists predicted that the United States would see three interest-rate cuts in the next six months. January 22 saw the first rate cut of three-quarters of a percent, and the Federal Reserve has made additional rate cuts this year in an effort to prevent stagflation, which could lead to increased unemployment and recession. Professionals whose industries are being effected might consider changes of focus in their career paths by relying on additional skills they may have picked up along the way. Some may consider different job sectors; others may consider leaving their industry altogether.

In their efforts to select and then specialize in particular trades during their educational pursuits, many individuals are exposed to various trades, some with similar characteristics. What factors go into selection of a particular profession?

Availability of Resources. Financial resources certainly come into play here, but in addition to that, the programs available during an individual's schooling play a role in the direction his or her career will take — whether they include a fantastic high school shop program or access to a large software company located nearby.

Encouragement by Mentors. Family members, schoolteachers, neighbors, ecclesiastical leaders, and early job supervisors play a role in not only teaching an individual a particular trade but also identifying that an individual has talents in the trade and reinforcing to the individual that he or she has something to offer.

Opportunity to Develop Skills. Individuals who are able to secure summer internship positions and are then able to land permanent positions for businesses often learn more about their profession in a six-month period than they do in college.

Perhaps an individual would have chosen a different career path originally if other resources, mentors, or opportunities were available to him or her. If the factors above played a role in an individual's original selection, they will also play a role in changing that person's career path.

Availability of Resources. An individual's financial situation is often different mid-career than it was when he or she was just starting out. Whether they can rely on savings, investments, or, as a last resort, credit, individuals often have options mid-career that they didn't before. However, individuals may be more limited because of debt and/or because they may be providing for families. Individuals should consider their financial needs when making career shifts. They should also ask themselves what resources in the forms of businesses located in their present cities of residence or educational tracks they can take advantage of.

Encouragement by Mentors. Close friends or coworkers may be inspirational and may provide an individual with insight about a different career path for which he or she has applicable skills. Networking is the key to making new business contacts who can provide advice and support.

Opportunity to Develop Skills. Professionals may have received training in different branches of their industries through their present places of employment or through community service opportunities. An individual will continue to learn throughout his or her lifetime, and often, he or she can learn valuable skills through unexpected or even mundane experiences.

The decision to pursue an additional degree should be considered carefully because of the required investment, not only of money but also time. Often, individuals already have the marketable skills they need to pursue career shifts.

Rich Gee, an executive career coach, offers the following advice, as printed in the Wall Street Journal: "Start another round of networking. Review how you present your talents, and rehearse with a career coach, friend, or mentor some effective ways to align your experience with prospective employers' needs. Research their businesses in advance, and formulate good questions. Try to make a personal connection with interviewers, and develop a 'flexible elevator speech' that can be adapted to different employers' objectives. And don't be discouraged at setbacks; finding new direction may be a 'hit-or-miss endeavor' for a while."