



HOW TO MAKE A **SUCCESSFUL CAREER TRANSITION**

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“I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become.”

– CARL JUNG

Changing jobs, careers and companies is the new normal in the digital age. While organizations struggle to keep up with evolving employee demands and desires, a new generation of talent is making moves—and creating significant disruption.

With powerful motivators like personal growth aspirations, opportunities for career acceleration and clear financial upside, Generation Z (born after 1995) is projected to job hop 10-15 times during a typical 45+ year career span. Meanwhile, continual cycles of organizational turnover have led to lower overall company loyalty, a decline in employee tenure, and shorter institutional lifespans. For some companies, rapid growth during the last three years collided with a sudden market downturn, forcing even the most conscientious to propose layoffs. Today, many organizations also find themselves with a new layer of people responsibility: preparing them for jobs the world hasn't even yet imagined. As employees already know, if they're not getting upskilled or reskilled, they'll soon be obsolete—along with their employers.



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It's no surprise, then, that the top reason cited by a recent McKinsey report for changing jobs is a lack of development opportunity. If companies aren't proactively growing their talent, much less preparing their organizations for an imminent future, employee departures are all but guaranteed. But whether career transitions are voluntary, spurred by predictable attrition and hiring cycles, or necessitated by once-in-a-generation pandemics, the ramifications of continual employee turnover are real and costly for organizations and not without risk for individuals. If these transitions are so important and inevitable, why don't companies and individuals anticipate and manage them better?

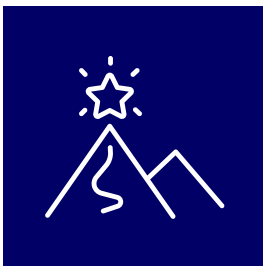
Simply put, because it's hard. Inside of organizations, a rapidly transformed, digital-forward world has created an alarming skills gap across sectors, making it difficult for organizations to fill even the most critical open roles at the speed of business. More pressure to fill open roles can lead to less conscious recruiting methods and taking shortcuts in hiring. Less mature internal mobility practices, insufficient talent management budgets and a lack of leadership commitment or time devoted to employee development prevents meaningful promotion from within, particularly for underrepresented communities. Onboarding is tough to get right even under the best circumstances and today, made more difficult by an increased need for "speed to impact," a lack of face-to-face time, and less retained institutional knowledge thanks to leadership turnover.

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WHY TRANSITIONS FAIL

Employees who depart their organizations voluntarily face their own set of challenges. What they might imagine as a successful and rewarding journey toward their potential could let them down or hinder their career longer-term. There are a number of key reasons for failed job or career transitions.



HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR NEW JOINERS

In today's high-performing organizations, newly-appointed professionals have a short runway to demonstrate impact. New joiners are expected to lead change versus manage the status quo, and this is where the rubber meets the road. Managing stakeholders and overcoming resistance to change takes a significant investment of time, which is all but easy for someone with limited experience in a new role or organization.



ABSENCE OF UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

All organizations have tacit rules and signifiers that take time to learn. "Making things happen" requires a solid understanding of an organization's policies, practices, unwritten dos and don'ts, behaviors, key stakeholder preferences and personalities, etc. In other words, having a good understanding of what Professor Sumantra Ghoshal of the London Business School called "the smell of this place" and knowing "how the rabbits are running here." This is knowledge that can't be acquired overnight, meaning increased performance pressure on new joiners.



LACK OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Unfortunately many workplaces are not perceived as psychologically safe, or places in which teams feel a sense of personal trust, mutual respect, and comfort in being oneself. As Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmundson defines it, psychological safety is “a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.” Psychological safety takes time to develop and feel, and it’s made even harder for outside hires, especially if leadership has unchecked expectations for success, those passed over for a role are disgruntled or actively working against them, or they are a member of an underrepresented community and lacking strong, visible institutional support.



MIND STATE

Transitions can inspire feelings of insecurity, confusion, anxiety, and self-doubt. Imposter syndrome, in which demonstrably successful people suddenly doubt their abilities and are afraid of being exposed as “frauds,” may also have a negative impact on job performance. New roles require the acquisition of unfamiliar skills, new capabilities, and in some cases, total reinvention. As Marshall Goldsmith wrote, “What got you here won’t get you there.” For people new to a role or career, it can feel like being under a microscope.



SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING CAREER TRANSITIONS

Despite the inherent challenges of making a career move, millions of workers will pursue greener pastures in 2023, or be forced to by organizational changes beyond their control. Research shows that taking time to gather data, self-reflect, and get outside input yields the best results for both searchers and their prospective employers.



1. INVEST IN SELF-REFLECTION

Considering a career transition can inspire a tapestry of emotions, including sadness mixed with a sense of loss; anxiety and hope for what is next; insecurity and confidence about what could be accomplished in the future. Before making any change, take time to reflect individually on any deeper fears. Identify the motivation for considering a change and uncover patterns of behavior that could stand in the way or could be beneficial to becoming successful in a new job or role. Reflect on methods and habits that have worked well in a current organization but may not in a new role or company.



2. DO YOUR HOMEWORK

If you've decided to make a change, commit to doing due diligence. Research organizations that align with your personal values and purpose. Understand a potential employer's recent events and headlines, their vision and values, and who their key players are. Most important, zero in on understanding the organization's people and priorities. During the recruitment and interviewing process, request to speak with as many stakeholders and potential peers as possible. Target team members that are likely future (senior) leaders or who may have an impact on success in the role. Look and listen for things like inclusive versus exclusive language, openness to employee needs around flexibility, and clarity in answering specific requests.

Ask unambiguous questions about things like:

- Role expectations
- What is unique about the company culture
- Year one priorities
- Challenges someone taking the role may face
- The support the organization provides if you decide to join



3. PARTNER WITH A CAREER TRANSITION COACH

Sorting through all aspects of a career transition alone can be daunting. Career transition coaching is a powerful tool in helping leaders identify personal patterns, link them to past experiences, and explore aspects of their “inner theatre” and how it can impact work performance. Career coaches are particularly skilled in recognizing and containing transition-related anxiety by offering structure, showing empathy, and providing affirmation.

Career transition coaches often use psychology-based models, such as Halina Brunning’s “six-domain model of executive coaching.” Based on Psychodynamic Psychology, this model explores an individual’s current working environment, illustrating the overlap between their personality, life story, and choices in professional role(s), as well as their skills, competencies, abilities, and talent. It also depicts their aspirations, potential career progression and future career options, showing all domains as cogs in continuous motion, each capable of impacting the others. Coaches may recommend supplemental work, such as psychotherapy or counselling, training and professional development, or taking a deeper dive into organizational dynamics as a way of better understanding what’s needed for a successful transition.

Six-domain model of executive coaching



IN CONCLUSION

Whether voluntary or involuntary, all professionals will experience multiple career transitions at different points in their lives. Successful transitions happen when individuals take a holistic view and identify the context for making a change, how they feel about it, and become self-aware of their conscious and unconscious behaviors. Digging deeper during the vetting, recruitment and interviewing process is also important in understanding where a potential employer stands on critical issues such as diversity and inclusion, culture, flexible working, and an alignment with one's personal values and purpose.

For many, partnering with a career transition coach can help set them up for long-term success. Coaches deliver impact by identifying important obstacles, addressing key mindsets, and recognizing behaviors that could slow forward progress and success. Career coaches use various models and methods to better understand their clients, including using an individual's impressions and intuitions as diagnostic data, or suggesting 360° feedback to gather insights on areas of strength and development. No matter the approach, career transition coaches bring new outlooks and mindsets for consideration and use the power of empathy to feel on behalf of their coachees.

All professionals will experience multiple career transitions. Partnering with a coach can help set them up for long-term success.



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Dr. van Dam is an internationally-recognized thought leader, advisor, researcher, facilitator, executive coach and best-selling (co-)author of more than 27 books and numerous articles on Corporate Learning, Talent Management and Leadership Development. Dr. van Dam has more than 25 years of business experience as a former Partner, Global Chief Learning Officer, HR Executive, and Client Advisor at McKinsey & Company and Deloitte.

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He has written numerous articles for various publications and has been quoted by Bloomberg Businessweek, The Financial Times, Fortune Magazine, Harvard Business Review, Times of India, Information Week, CLO Magazine, and The Wall Street Journal.

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EMILY RICCI

Emily is Chief Product Officer and cofounder of a stealth startup launching in 2023 and focused on teaching a system for personal fulfillment and happiness. As the Director of Learning, Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness at Robinhood, Emily set and drove Robinhood's learning and leadership strategy and built its foundational learning and leadership programs and systems. Prior to her tenure at Robinhood, Emily led the Americas Operations Learning and Development team at Apple, and the Experience Design and Design Services practices at The Regis Company.

Emily's 15 years in Talent Development spans sectors and industries across the Fortune 500. She has led the creation of multiple award-winning projects, winning CLO Magazine's Learning in Practice Awards (Gold, Excellence in Executive Education); Best Unique or Innovative Leadership Development Program (Brandon Hall Gold) and Best Learning Program Supporting a Change Transformation/Business Strategy (Brandon Hall Gold). She has been a facilitator, speaker and panelist for top executives and employees of some of the world's best-known companies.

Emily serves on the Austin PBS Community Advisory Board, the board of Alliance de Francaise Austin, and is the Austin community organizer for Ignite Talks, a global public speaking community.

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