

They're still making changes. They're retiring later, or not at all. If not downsized or laid off, boomers often continue to work. When they don't choose to continue in the same career, it doesn't mean they're ready to stop contributing, and sometimes they're making transitions to new careers.

"On average there are three to five career changes in a person's lifetime and that's pretty common," says Kevin Gaw, Director of Career Development, University of Nevada, Reno. "It's pretty common that a layoff ends up being a great opportunity for someone to find something that's more suited to them, too."

But it can be challenging to a baby boomer to be suddenly confronted with a career change. They were raised in a world where you got your education, then got your job, and while you may not have stayed with the job until you retired, you would probably stay in the same profession. "It can be jarring to realize you have to transfer your skill set to another area," says Gaw.

In 2004, Gaw's office worked with 208 alumni. Nearly 7.5 percent were going through a career change, three percent because of a forced situation such as layoff or company closure or relocation. The rest of them just wanted to do something different. When you're faced with an important career shift, there are things you can do to make it easier on yourself and achieve a more enjoyable, productive career change.

- Look at your skills. Determine which are transferable to other jobs.
- Find your passion. What do you love to do? "It's not about the money," Gaw says. "The money isn't what makes us happy. What makes us happy is doing something that's meaningful to us."
- Look at reality. If you want to be an astronaut but can't do math, Gaw says, the reality is it's unlikely. People need to work through that disappointment and maybe change that passion to a hobby rather than a vocation.
- Determine whether you want to make a radical career change? say from legal secretary to Web designer? or stay within the same profession.
- If you like the company you're with but feel the need for change, see if they can retain and retrain you. If it comes down to a complete career change, there are also some things you can do to help create a whole new career for yourself.
- Promote yourself rather than your age. Once you get into a position and can show off your skills, you'll be known for those skills rather than your years.
- Start slow. Before investing heavily in education, determine if it's the right career path for you.
- Network. Many non-entry level positions are found by references. Join professional organizations in the field you want to enter.

- Consider working for yourself. A job market survey conducted in 2005 by global outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc., quoted on thematuremarket.com, indicated that of 3000 job seekers, 13 percent chose to work for themselves, and 86.6 percent of them were over 40.

Another option is to leverage your experience and teach or train. Moving into training and coaching people just entering the profession you're leaving is a fairly informal move. Teaching requires state licensing, and there are programs helping place retiring workers into teaching positions. The University of Nevada Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning takes executives through a first-time licensing program and puts them in the schools in just a couple semesters, often teaching in high-needs areas like math, science and languages. Likewise, IBM unveiled their Transition to Teaching program in September, reimbursing them for tuition and providing stipends while they student teach. Many of their executives are highly trained in math and computer sciences.

Whether making a career change to a new profession or a new position, Gaw says such changes are a normal life pattern. "It's a good thing to be open to change. The challenge is recognizing skill sets and knowing how to capitalize on them and present them to the new opportunities."

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