

Career Change Begins by Taking These Steps Against Fear

You're ready to make a big career change. You really want to get going. But you're held back by fear. So you wait...and wait.

Fear leads to paralysis. Then you start what psychologists call "catastrophizing:" imagining the worst that can happen, then magnifying the consequences till you're predicting a major, irreversible disaster.

Then you feel even more fear...you do nothing...so you feel even more fear. You're tempted to go hide in the closet, maybe forever.

Career change begins by breaking the fear cycle. Here are 3 steps to start.

(1) Recognize the consequences of doing nothing.

You really hate your job and you're long overdue for a change. But you like the security of a pay check. Maybe you have family (and dogs) depending on you.

Hang on long enough and you'll probably start sabotaging your own security. You'll find yourself making dumb mistakes, missing deadlines, losing important documents and more.

Some people handle this sort of thing better than others. Some live for 20 years with jobs they despise with no outward appearance of problems. My theory is

- (a) you just don't see what's going on: doctor visits, anti-depressants, stomach trouble, family grief, or more;
- (b) they don't hate their job as much as they say; or
- (c) they were born with a certain temperament with high tolerance for frustration.

(2) Do some reality testing.

'What's the worst that can happen?' is a good first question. Once you have the answer you can often create plans to cover your worst case scenario.

Here's where a career coach can help: not someone who administers a handful of tests, but someone who knows the ins and outs of careers.

(3) Take a small 10-minute step.

What should you do? It doesn't matter. Take just 10 minutes to deal with your frustration.

Action means getting off the couch. It doesn't include introspection ("what do I really want"), reciting mantras and affirmations (although you can do that too) or talking to friends on the phone. It doesn't mean reading books and surfing the Internet for more ideas.

Examples of action include phone calls to people who can help (such as experienced professionals in your field), attending meaningful networking events (not mechanically attending lunches), and meeting contacts for coffee.

If you can't think of a single action step, or you're taking steps but aren't seeing results, find a professional who can help. The sooner you get moving, the faster your fear will dissipate and the faster you'll find yourself in a good space.

Just one note. Sometimes you've just been through a traumatic experience: a death of someone close to, the loss of a career you loved, break-up of a relationship, sale of a business or loss of your biggest customer. Any of these experiences require time for recovery.

Each person will handle loss differently: formulas do not apply to everyone.

In my experience, it's best to wait 30 days before making any big moves or taking any significant risks. But at some point, you really do have to get off the couch and spring into action.