

June 2011 eNewsletter: Feature Article

How to Make a Successful Career Change

We repeatedly hear that the average person can expect to change careers several times in their lifetime. In our last issue, the [feature article](#) discussed how to narrow down an occupation that you will enjoy.

Choosing a career is important and you've done your research – talked to a career counsellor, took [career quizzes](#), read [occupational profiles](#), and even checked on industry [labour market information](#) – and you've decided that a specific occupation in the oil and gas industry is the way to go. (Congrats! We applaud your decision! The labour market boom the oil and gas industry will experience in the next 10 years means lots of career choices.) However, let's say you've been working in the health industry for the past 10 years. So just how are you going to make the transition into a new industry and a new role?

Keep these things in mind as you embark on your new career path:

1. Remember that you can easily transfer your soft skills to the new role.

Over the years, you have acquired a variety of skills and knowledge. The good news is that soft skills, such as communication skills, interpersonal skills and fluency in another language, can easily transfer to different roles. In fact, since soft skills are arguably harder to teach than hard skills (i.e. operating equipment), it's often easier for employers to hire people who have the necessary soft skills and train them in the hard skills. So make sure to emphasize the soft skills that you can offer a potential employer.

2. Transfer your hard skills to the new role.

It may seem like a stretch in some cases to transfer all your hard skills to a new role, but it is possible. For example, the Petroleum HR Council worked with forestry workers in BC who lost their jobs due to a plant closure and [transitioned them into the oil and gas industry](#). While some of the workers did need to take additional training to upgrade their skills, some workers, such as plant operators, were able to transfer their hard skills directly into a job in the oil and gas industry.

3. Check to see if you need certain credentials to work in your chosen field.

Don't assume that you need particular credentials for all jobs. The best thing to do is talk to people who are in the field – ask about their background and how they got to where they are. You just may find out that you have a similar background and experience – or you may learn that there is more than one way to ease into your desired position. People in the oil and gas industry are working hard these days to recognize skills and experience gained from another career, so it's definitely worth your time to do some investigating.

4. If necessary, upgrade your skills and take the required training – but see if you can get your employer to pay the bills!

In some cases, it may be necessary to upgrade your skills and take the required training to qualify for the job you want. For example, [Enform](#), the safety association for Canada's upstream petroleum industry, offers H₂S Alive® training, which is a required certificate for any worker in the industry who could be exposed to hydrogen sulphide. In the oilpatch, learning never ends – by taking the initiative to upgrade your skills, you show employers that you are interested in continuous learning and will be a confident, safe, innovative and productive worker. If you can get a job where the employer is willing to pay for your training, even better!

5. Improve your literacy and computer skills.

As you're looking for a new job, take the time to improve your literacy and computer skills – whether or not your dream role includes a great deal of literacy or computer work. The odds are



that your job will involve reading, writing and computer work in some way, whether it's reading instructions or writing a full report. Plus, improved literacy and computer skills will help you in your job search as you write your resume and cover letters, research companies and apply for jobs. It also shows your initiative to potential employers!

6. Start networking.

If you want to make a successful career change, it's time to get out there, talk to people and expand your network. Talk to friends, former colleagues and family and let them know what type of job and industry you're interested in. You'd be surprised how helpful they can be connecting you to people in the industry, or sending suitable job postings your way. In addition, join professional organizations in the industry and field that you'd like to break into, and sign up for industry newsletters and surf websites like [Careers in Oil and Gas](#) that provide information on industry events.

7. Gain experience in the field.

It's easy to get caught in the vicious "I need a job but have no experience; I have no experience so I can't get a job" cycle. Break away from this problem by gaining valuable experience – start off with volunteering, work a part-time job in the industry – basically, do whatever you can to get that tiny bit of related experience onto your resume.

Switching careers is no simple task, but if you keep these tips in mind, you may find the transition to a new career smoother than you would have guessed.

