

JOB SEEKER TIPS: THINKING CAREER CHANGE? FIGURE OUT WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

Takeaway Points

- How much of a career change you want to make depends on several factors, including your current job satisfaction, your employer's business outlook, and the health of your industry as a whole.
- There are three key questions you must ask yourself, starting with: What are my strongest skills and interests?
- Then, ask: What industries or roles would my skills transfer into?
- Finally, ask: What new skills must I acquire to complete my career change?
- If you start down a new career path, don't set yourself up for another career change in the near future.

By: Team Pongo

Most of us at one time or another have considered switching careers. For some, it's a matter of necessity, because job opportunities are scarce in their current fields. Others hope a change will improve their career prospects, be a better fit for their talents and interests, or just get them out of a rut.

If you think you're ready to change careers (assuming you've weighed and analyzed the financial implications, such as a possible salary cut), one of the first things you'll need to decide is how much of a change you want to make. That decision will depend on several factors, including your current job satisfaction, your employer's business outlook, and the health of your industry as a whole.

A career change usually takes one of three forms:

Same Employer, Different Job	If you like your employer and the business is doing well, but your job has no room for growth, changing to a different department within the same company can give you a new start without sacrificing seniority or benefits.
Same Job, Different Industry	If you still like what you do, but the long-term outlook in your industry is poor, a similar job in a different kind of business might be the right change for you.
Different Job, Different Industry	A drastic change is in order if the economy has destroyed your industry, you're burnt out, or you're finally ready to pursue a long-held passion.

Regardless of *why* you're considering a career change, or which kind of change you're seeking, there are three main questions you need to answer to get started:

1. **What are my strongest skills and interests?**
2. **What industries or roles would they transfer into?**
3. **What new skills must I acquire to complete my career change?**

Answering these questions will help you figure out what your best job options might be, and outline the steps you must take to achieve your goal. Let's take a closer look at each question.

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“The key (to changing careers) is to honestly assess what you can do well, determine how those skills can be effective in a new role, and understand how the change will impact your career in the short and long term.”

QUESTION 1: What are my strongest skills and interests?

Think honestly about what you're good at, and what you really like doing. When you're sizing up your talents, separate them into hard and soft skills. The Skills Inventory Worksheet at the end of this document makes it easy to record this information.

Hard skills are the abilities, credentials, or knowledge required to perform a given job. **Soft skills** are the personal traits that determine your work style, the type of tasks you're good at, and how you interact with others.

In a career change, soft skills often outweigh hard skills, because employers look at your innate soft skills to help determine how well you'll fit in with their company or department culture.

Examples of Hard Skills:

- **Degrees, certifications, licenses**
- **Software proficiency**
- **Specific abilities such as bookkeeping, teaching, nursing, designing, carpentry, auto repair, or machine operation**
- **Physical strength (e.g., lifting capacity)**
- **Fluency in another language**

Examples of Soft Skills:

- **Communication**—Do you communicate better through verbal conversation or written e-mails and memos? Spoken communication skills are key in almost any job, and written communication is important in jobs that require business correspondence, logs, and recordkeeping. A skilled tradesperson might not need the high level of writing skills an administrative assistant or marketing specialist would.
- **Leadership**—Are you comfortable with building consensus, tracking tasks, delegating, coaching, managing conflict, or promoting change? This skill area is important for executives, managers, and supervisors, but also for individuals who might be called upon to lead project-based tasks.
- **Organization and Multi-Tasking**—How well can you juggle and prioritize multiple tasks and organize the tools and resources to do your job effectively? An emergency medical technician must be highly organized and able to shift gears quickly, whereas an assembly-line worker would need the skills to focus on one repetitive task.

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Did you know?

Pongo's Job Search Tool allows you to search for job openings in your area right from your Pongo account, while you work on your resume or cover letter.

- **Teamwork and Collaboration**—Can you effectively share decision-making, workload, and credit with others on team-based projects? Or are you more effective working independently in a role such as field service technician or bus driver?
- **Interpersonal Skills, Empathy, Diplomacy**—When you interact with co-workers, are you good at listening, picking up on non-verbal social cues, or avoiding or defusing awkward situations? A sales or customer-service role requires strong interpersonal skills, whereas an independent engineer or auto mechanic might have minimal people contact.
- **Problem-Solving**—Can you effectively analyze a problem and find a way to fix it? Can you identify potential problems and head them off? Manager-level jobs and security-related roles, for instance, require good problem-solving abilities.
- **Attention to Detail**—Are you more of a “big picture” thinker, or someone who sees every last detail? For instance, a construction contractor might need to keep track of the major projects, while a proofreader or event manager would have to be exceptionally detail-oriented.
- **Ability to Perform under Pressure**—Do you thrive in an intensely stressful environment such as stock trading or police work? Or, do you need to have peace and quiet to do your best work, such as video editing or research?

QUESTION 2. What industries or roles will my skills transfer into?

Transferable skills will be the ticket to your career change. Now that you've figured out your own set of strengths, you need to figure out how well they'll transfer into your desired role.

Go online and review job postings for the areas that interest you and that you're well suited for. Examine the skills and level of experience they're asking for, and highlight any skill—hard or soft—that's a close match with one of your skills.

If you aren't yet sure about your next career move, type the name of one of your top skills into the search function on a job board, and see what kinds of jobs require those skills.

[TIP: If you're still having a hard time finding out which industries might represent a good career move for you, check out this resource—[mySkills myFuture](#)—from the U.S. Department of Labor.]

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Don't worry if you don't match every skill exactly. From an employer's point of view, an enthusiastic, trainable candidate who really wants to learn the job can be more appealing than someone who has several years of related experience but no passion for the job.

QUESTION 3. What new skills or credentials must I acquire to complete my career change?

If you fall short in some of the hard skills the employers are requesting, you might need to address them before you can make the change.

Here are three routes:

- **Education**—Find out if you can take a course or two to gain the needed skills. If you need a degree, that will take a larger commitment of time and money. If you need a technical certification or other form of professional development, look for providers through business and professional associations, or through a web search. You have many options online or on campus in a classroom.
- **Part-Time or Volunteer Work**—When you list your work experience on your resume, be sure to list any part-time or volunteer work that taught you skills that align with the job's requirements. If you don't have any, consider postponing the career change until you can get the experience to help prepare you.
- **Internship**—We usually think of college students when we think of internships, but companies are increasingly open to hiring older workers as interns. An internship, which may be unpaid or low paying, can help you gain related experience to transition into a new career, or help you decide whether a certain career option would be a good move.

In the end ...

Changing careers can open up a new world of opportunity, but it's not a decision you should take lightly. You want to launch a successful new career path, not set yourself up for another career change in the near future. The key is to honestly assess what you can do well, determine how those skills can be effective in a new role, and understand how the change will impact your career in the short and long term.

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Pongo Resume is a premier, full-service online resource for job seekers. The Pongo Resume web site provides all the tools and support needed to write professional resumes and cover letters, ace tough interviews, and secure a great job. Pongo users generate over 100,000 resumes per month. Privately held and headquartered in Northborough, Massachusetts, Pongo Resume currently has more than 4 million registered users and averages over a half-million unique visitors per month. In 2009 and 2010, Pongo was named to the Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing private companies.

SKILLS INVENTORY WORKSHEET

Instructions: Write down the hard and soft skills you've acquired during your current and previous jobs. Next, find job postings for positions that interest you. Write down the skills the employers request in those postings, then compare those with the skills you have.

Hard Skills: abilities, credentials, knowledge that qualify you to perform a given job.

Examples: specific skills such as bookkeeping, nursing, designing, carpentry, or machine operation; software proficiency, degrees, certifications, licenses, fluency in another language, physical strength

Soft Skills: traits that define your unique personality, work style, preferences, and strengths.

Examples: communication, creativity, leadership, organization, multi-tasking, teamwork, independence, interpersonal skills, empathy, diplomacy, problem-solving, attention to detail, performance under pressure

JOB TITLE:	JOB TITLE:	JOB TITLE:
Skills Sought	Skills Sought	Skills Sought
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Do you meet the job's education requirements? (e.g., bachelor's degree and major, high school diploma) (Circle "Yes" or "No")

YES NO	YES NO	YES NO
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