

# Where next to work?

## The importance of ambition, aptitude and application

**So - you're looking for a new job, or thinking of doing so. Hopefully it's something you actively want to do, perhaps you'd like to get back into the workplace after a period of non-working or retirement, or feel that it's time to spread your wings and go for a more challenging and fulfilling post. But maybe it's a situation that you're being forced into through redundancy or lack of prospects with your current employer.**

Whatever the reason, three basic questions will no doubt be occupying your mind:

- What do I *want* to do?
- What do I believe I *can* do?
- What do I *have* to do in order to achieve my desired outcome?

They sound deceptively simple, but for many of us in mature years, they provide a tremendous challenge in terms of clarifying our thoughts, achieving focus and maintaining self-belief. These are things which we all know really should get easier as we get older. But... somehow they just don't.

Let's look at each of them in turn.

### What do I want to do?

The big immediate question here is whether you want to continue doing what you've always done (or what you've been doing most recently), or whether you want a change. For example, if you're a nurse, or an accountant or a shop assistant and that's what you want to continue doing, the issues facing you will be different than if you now want to do something completely different. So if you want 'more of the same', you can, if you wish, skip this section and move on to section 2 - **What do I believe I can do?**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, deciding what to do is the most often quoted sticking point when we're talking to people about their dissatisfaction with their current work (or lack thereof) and their need to make a change. *'I know I need to do something, but I just don't know what I want to do!'* they say. Or, *'I've always been a (whatever*

*has been their career to date). I'd love to change but how do I decide what to do?'*

In a word, we're talking about *ambition* here and that's worth bearing in mind because what we often see in mature people re-assessing their working lives is a remarkable lack of it. There tends to be an unfortunate attitude of *'I'm too old now / no-one would let me/want me / It's too late to do those things that I wished I had done when I was younger.'*

Actually most of these aren't *reasons*, they're *excuses*. Yes, we may now be too old for some things like becoming a brain surgeon, an astronaut or a teenage model, but most opportunities are still open to us if:

- We know what we want
- We know why we want it
- We believe we can do it
- We're prepared to persevere to get it

The first question to ask yourself then in terms of what you want to do, is 'What do you most want to achieve from work?' Is it money, status, creative self-fulfilment, a social network, new skills...? No doubt, you will want a combination of things but it's worth spending some time really thinking this through, writing down what's important to you and then re-writing that list in order of priority. Then allocate a percentage to each factor.

By now, the reason for doing this should be clear. If you want a job where 60% of its importance lies with making money, 30% is linked to status and 5% is creative self-fulfilment then probably a backroom job as a data in-putter really isn't going to make you happy.

Next, make a similar list of the things you're not prepared to sacrifice, or the things you don't want. In this list you might put things like – *I don't want to sacrifice more than eight hours a day to work; I don't want to commute more than half an hour each way; I don't want to work for a large multi-national company where I will be just another employee.*

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## What do I believe I can do?

Draw up a list of things you know you're good at and things you like to do. Don't limit them just to things that you can immediately relate to in terms of your work, look much more widely. Consider all the skills and aptitudes which you possess, all those things that you know you're good at (even if you're too modest to admit it generally).

At this stage in life, particularly if you're looking to change the type of work you do, it's really essential to identify transferable skill sets. These will be what future employers will be interested in and judge you on when they review your application. For example, where do your skills and experiences lie in these areas?

- Leadership and Decision-making
- Coaching, Mentoring and Nurturing
- Creativity and Innovation
- Organisational skills and Time management
- Project Management
- Influencing and Negotiating
- Presentation skills (verbal and written)
- Numeracy and Budgeting
- Researching and Planning
- Monitoring and reporting

This list is by no means exhaustive, but should give you a basis to work from.

If you're unsure where your strengths lie, ask other people what they think you're good at or would be good at. Even family members, old friends and colleagues don't always see us the way we expect, and you're bound to be surprised by some of the comments you get.

## What do I have to do in order to achieve my desired outcome?

Having reviewed what you want to do and what you believe you can do, the biggest, most important thing you have to do now - and continue doing if you're going to get the outcome you want - is quite simply to believe in yourself. And you know the reason why. *If you don't believe in yourself, how can anyone else be expected to?*

If you're struggling with self-belief, take on board these few truisms:

- You are unique, with a unique set of skills and talents. Therefore, by definition, no one is better at being you, than you.
- Most other people always sound and seem far more impressive and talented than they actually are.
- Most new jobs appear to be high-powered, fascinating and hugely challenging – until you've done them for

six months. Then they're just as ordinary as every other job.

- You have undoubtedly been successful in many areas in your life to date, in many different roles. Therefore you can expect to continue to be successful in any new role you wish to take on.
- You don't lose impetus automatically because you get older. You get old because you stop trying and stop learning. And that's when you lose impetus.

## Practical steps for success

So, having got yourself in the right frame of mind, the next big step is practical application. You need to draw up an action plan of *who* you're going to contact – recruitment consultancies, old colleagues, companies themselves; *how* you're going to go about it and *when* you're going to act.

Do your background research. Particularly if you're looking for a change of job, or even returning to your old occupation after some time away, you need to check what types and levels of qualification are currently required, and which skills are important. They may have changed - and you may not.

Arm yourself with references and evidence of achievement. Just saying you're good isn't enough, you need substantiation.

Ask for help and advice from wherever you think you can get it. The trouble with doing things alone is that we only have our own perspective on the world and sometimes that's not a hugely reliable indicator of reality.

By all means prepare yourself well, but once you've decided what to do – DO IT! Don't go about it half-heartedly. And, always plan for the next step if you don't get the outcome you want. For example, if you've sent off your CV to three companies, make sure you know who's next on the list if the first answer is 'no thanks'.

Constantly ask for feedback. Ask prospective employers and recruitment agencies why you weren't selected and what you can do to improve your future chances. Ask your friends and family for honest feedback on your appearance, mannerisms and attitude. Do you need to change?

Decide the point at which you'll review progress and decide whether or not you need to adopt a new strategy – then work towards it. Don't navel gaze, change tack or panic in the meantime. Most important, *never give up*. It's often not easy landing your next job, but it can be done and *you* can do it – you're **in your prime**.