

Do You Have What it Takes to Change Industries?

By Rachel Zuppek, PrimeCB.com writer

As everyone knows, finding a job is no easy feat, especially in today's business climate. Consequently, many job seekers are finding themselves looking for work outside of their comfort zones in different cities, levels and industries.

While making a change across industries can be difficult and sometimes daunting, job seekers are forced to look for work elsewhere as more and more sectors lose jobs each month.

"Industries are going away; jobs are going away. I think people are looking at changing industries out of necessity, not choice," says Deborah Brown-Volkman, president of Surpass Your Dreams, a career-coaching company.

The trick to changing industries successfully is finding what the marketplace is looking for. Once you know what employers want, then you can look at your own skills to see if they're a match, Brown-Volkman says.

"It's your job to tell people why you are a match for a position," she says. "Show them that you not only understand the responsibilities of the position, but how your skills are transferable. In addition, your background has given you insight that will help you perform that role exceptionally well. They may or may not accept your background, but at least you tried."

Want to know how you can identify your transferable skills and change industries successfully? Here are four easy steps to follow:

Step One: Do Some Research

Start with an online search for your current or most recent job title and see what comes up. It doesn't matter where they are located (yet), you just want to see what the job market is looking for, Brown-Volkman says.

Step Two: Make A List

Take out a sheet of paper and make a list:

- On the left side, list the requirements for the jobs you want
- On the right side, Brown-Volkman suggests you do the following:
 - If you have done the same tasks in a different industry, write down what you did.

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- If a new job requires project management or sales, for example, and you've managed a project or sold something in the past, write it down. The terminology might be different, but how you went about doing these assignments is the same, regardless of the industry, Brown-Volkman says.
- If you've done something similar, write down how it was similar or close to what the employer is looking for.

Let's say a prospective employer wants you to run reports, which you've done before, but they want you to use a software program you're unfamiliar with. Research the type of reports the software produces, Brown-Volkman suggests. The software might be different, but the output of the report is probably similar. Write down how.

If you've never done a task, write down in detail how you've overcome not knowing how to do something in the past. This will be how you'll show you can acquire new skills.

Maybe a potential job includes selling a product you've never sold before. Write down how you've sold something in the past that you didn't know how to initially, Brown-Volkman suggests.

Detail how you got up to speed. It will show your initiative, drive and ability to learn new skills.

Step Three: Work Isn't The Only Thing That Counts

Many job seekers are under the impression that because they haven't worked in a specific area, they don't have experience. Brown-Volkman notes that experience comes from different places like work, hobbies and volunteer efforts.

Make another list of your skills, talents and abilities and compare them to the job descriptions you've been looking at. Can something from your life outside of work help you get a job you want?

"Everything you have done up to this point in your life is relevant," Brown-Volkman says. "I helped a woman who was in corporate communications get a job in the nonprofit art world because her hobby and passion was art."

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Step Four: Rewrite Your Resume

If you want a job outside of your industry and your resume is filled with words and initials that only the people in your sector understand, take them off, Brown-Volkman says.

Create a new version of your resume that details what you did, rather than the industry you worked in.

Brown-Volkman gives these examples:

- “16 years experience in marketing financial services” becomes “16 years marketing experience”
- “Worked closely in team approach with department heads in programming, research, marketing, business development and finance,” becomes “worked closely in team approach with department heads”
- “Conducted market/competitive analysis for the financial analysts and prepared business plans for venture capitalists” becomes “conducted market/competitive analysis and prepared business plans”

Get the picture?

Finally, Brown-Volkman says it's true that people look to what you've done as an indicator of what you can do. People can write you off quickly if they see that you have not worked in their industry or held the same title before.

But, she says, “I would rather have someone wonder what industry you worked for and have to ask you, rather than write you off because they believe that for the three seconds they spent reading your résumé that you are not right for the job.”

Rachel Zuppek is a writer and blogger for CareerBuilder.com and its job blog, The Work Buzz. She researches and writes about job search strategy, career management, hiring trends and workplace issues.

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