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Embracing the Change

The start of your journey towards your next role involves firstly coming to terms with the prospect of change. You need the confidence and commitment to determine your future career direction and then make it happen.

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Introduction

You will see a lot of statistics about how difficult the job market is. You will read about how many people are losing their jobs and how many people, on average, are chasing each vacancy.

These statistics may be true but there are still jobs out there and people are filling them. More accurately, the best people for those particular jobs are filling them. As is the case in sport, it's important not to focus on the competition – you can't control that. You must, instead, focus on you and ensure that you are as good as you can possibly be *for the role you want*.

You will see from the contents pages that this book focuses on three key themes:

- 1 Knowing yourself and getting clarity over what you want from your life and your career
- 2 Giving yourself the best possible chance of getting the role and career you want
- 3 Ensuring you remain healthy, focused and stress-free whilst you are looking to make these changes – particularly if you are without a job during this period

If you believe you already know what you're looking for in terms of your next job role and your future career then you may prefer to skip straight to the chapters in this book which concentrate on how best to find your next role.

We would recommend, though, that you still give yourself the time to reflect on where you are in terms of your career and work life so far and re-evaluate whether there is a need to make any adjustments in terms of your long-term goals and expectations.

Hot tip



Even if you think you're committed to your ultimate career direction, it's still worth completing some of the exercises in order to confirm your chosen path.



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Exercises

You will see that, throughout the book, we have provided a number of exercises. Most of these are designed to help you better understand yourself so that you can make informed decisions about your life and your career. You will also find further exercises in Chapter 11.

It's up to you whether you complete any or all of these. They are arranged in an order that will help to build up your understanding of yourself in a logical way. You may prefer to just dip in and out of some of the exercises when you have a spare moment or they may help your thinking over particular issues.

Be honest with yourself

Remember, no one is going to be judging you on your responses to any of the exercises – unless you choose to share them, they are for your benefit only. For this reason you should be totally honest with your answers so that you start to build the most accurate picture of yourself. Some exercises may not be easy to complete and may require you to give considerable thought in order to answer them meaningfully.



Enjoy the journey

Depending on your personal circumstances, looking for and applying for a new job can be a stressful experience. However, whilst there are bound to be occasions when you feel a little anxious, we will show you how you can also make it an enjoyable, motivating and enlightening journey.

Don't forget



Remember, the output from any of the exercises you complete will only be as good as the responses you provide in the first place.

Your Career So Far

Ask any young child what they want to be when they grow up and you'll get fairly predictable responses: "I want to be a doctor or nurse"; "I want to be a police officer"; "I want to be a builder"; "I want to be an artist or musician". These are all easily recognizable and familiar roles which children can relate to and aspire to.

The roles we end up in

How many children of that age, would you guess, aspire to be '*Procurement Contracts Specialists*' or '*Bioinformatics Data Analysts*', for example. Of course, there's nothing wrong or unusual about these roles – as I am sure those reading this book who perform these types of roles will vouch! The point is, there are many, many roles out there, but we only find out about a very small number of those available.

Often the roles we do end up fulfilling are not ones from our childhood dreams but ones we find – sometimes after careful planning, often through luck and good opportunity and, sometimes, just because there appear to be no other choices.



Decision tree

Each time you change job, get promoted or take on new skills and responsibilities you are, effectively, making another decision over the direction of your career which, when mapped out, forms a very interesting and informative decision tree. In Chapter 3 we'll help you determine your preferred career path.

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Acquiring knowledge and skills

Throughout your working life you have been acquiring and developing knowledge and skills which, in some ways, provide the valuable experience that can look so good on a resumé and will hopefully persuade employers to take you on. But this same experience can also label or 'typecast' you – in the eyes of prospective employers and also in your own mind.

Keep an open mind

It's very easy to get into a fixed mindset where your career path to date, your skills and your experience, lead you to feel you have to continue on the path you are currently on and that you can only consider other roles that are the same or similar to your last one.

This is certainly not the case and we will show you, through some of the exercises in this book, how you can significantly open up the possibilities available to you.

People do make significant changes

Of course, we understand that there may be limitations created through factors such as:

- Financial commitments or expectations
- Geographic constraints
- Links and commitments to family and friends

But, until you have really considered the feasibility of all the available options, don't limit yourself through negative thinking such as: "I could never do that" or "I would love to do that but..."

People do make changes – for some, they are small adjustments to their existing career path, whilst for others they are life-changing opportunities. At this stage in your thinking, it's important to...

Don't forget



There are many opportunities out there which you are just as capable of pursuing as anyone else.

**KEEP YOUR
OPTIONS OPEN**

Coping With Being Laid Off

If you're reading this book having been laid off, you need to be clear about two things:

- 1 You are not alone!
- 2 It was, most likely, nothing personal

Depending on the circumstances, coming to terms with being laid off can be difficult. You will, no doubt, be asking yourself questions such as: "Why me?," "What did I do wrong?" and "How is this going to affect my resumé?"

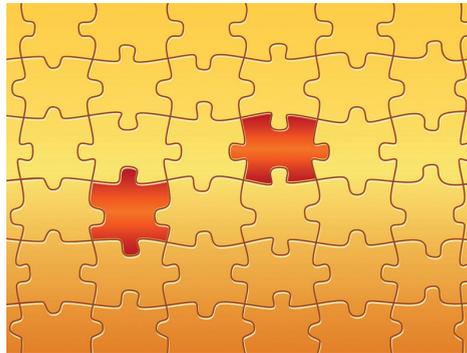
Don't forget



The decisions over who to lay off are not personal – they are difficult decisions about what skills and experience the organization needs for the future.

It's nothing personal

Organizations facing difficult times have to make difficult business decisions which may result in them having to lay people off. Provided they have followed proper legal processes*, they need to determine who stays and who goes based on a set of selection criteria. These criteria are likely to be based on the skills and experience the organization believes it needs, to take it through and beyond its current period of uncertainty.



Once an organization has determined the criteria for selection, managers should apply them consistently and fairly* in making their decisions. So, the answer to the first two of the above questions is: You were chosen because you didn't meet the criteria set for the selection process. It's as simple as that – it wasn't anything personal and you didn't do anything wrong. In terms of the question: "How is this going to affect my resumé?", the answer is, it shouldn't, provided you are honest and explain it properly.

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Coping with the news

You may have become aware of the possibility of being laid off some time ago and had time to come to terms with the prospect. Alternatively, the news may have been sudden and come as a great shock. It is important, though, once the decision has been made and all necessary consultation and negotiation has been finalized, that you quickly move your focus and energy towards dealing with your future plans.



Lessons learned

Continually looking back at what has happened and analyzing what was said and done won't help your current or future situation. OK, there may be some lessons you can learn from what happened and, in particular, how you handled yourself, but you should be able to deal with this relatively quickly. Note these and then focus on the present and, more importantly, your future.

Over the page we examine the emotional stages individuals go through when coming to terms with any change. You should find this helps you to understand your current mindset and how you can get yourself to a point where you are ready to move on.

**We have made the assumption that the organization followed proper, fair and legal processes. Where you believe this has not been the case you may be pursuing this in the form of legal action. The difficulty with this is that, while you are focusing your attention on your case and, therefore the past, you may have put on hold any activity towards determining your future plans.*

Clearly there may be financial implications to your actions so we are not advocating you drop any action you are pursuing but it will be helpful to separate the two issues and run them in parallel rather than wait until the one is resolved before even contemplating the other.

Hot tip



Hearing that you are being laid off is not easy news to take but try to move on as soon as possible and start making plans for your future.

Managing Change

The diagram below shows the emotional stages we all go through when faced with any change:



- 1 Numbness – Our initial experience after hearing news of changes is normally one of numbness or shock
- 2 Denial – Our next reaction is to deny the changes are going to happen – “It’s not going to affect me”
- 3 Resistance – When we realize it isn’t going to go away we may start to resist – “I really don’t want to deal with this”
- 4 Depression – In most cases resistance will have no effect and this is when we are likely to feel most down
- 5 Exploration – Having come to terms with the fact this is going to happen we normally then start to explore how it will affect us and how best to cope with the changes
- 6 Commitment – Having explored and tested the options we finally commit to the new reality and move forward

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Moving along the curve

Everyone needs to progress through all the stages we have described, whatever the degree of change being faced. What does vary is how quickly we go through each stage and whether, at any point, we slip back to a previous stage.

For minor changes we may not notice the transition through each of the stages, whilst for more significant changes, such as being laid off, we may become stuck at one particular stage for days or possibly even weeks.

You can't skip stages

Whatever the change you are facing you need to appreciate that you cannot skip stages. So, when you are thinking about your reactions to your current situation, you firstly need to identify where you are now before determining how best to move yourself forward to the next stage.



Don't forget



We all have to go through all the stages described – the important thing is to keep yourself moving forward.

Some questions to consider

You may have been, or about to be laid off. Alternatively, you may be facing a change to your current role or to your personal circumstances. Whatever the change you are facing, ask yourself the following questions:

- Where am I on the change curve right now?
- What am I feeling at the moment?
- What can I do to move myself through this stage and so, along the change curve?
- If I'm stuck at a particular stage, what needs to be resolved before I can move on again?
- Whose help can I seek to get different perspectives on my current situation?

Stuck in a Rut

Your reason for change may be through a realization that you have become stuck in the same or a similar role for some time. This may have resulted from a number of possible scenarios:

- It may have suited you because you had other priorities that needed more of your attention at the time
- Your role may have been sufficiently demanding but due to your experience, has now become relatively easy for you to do
- You have excelled in your role but there is no logical next step to take the role further
- The organization you are working for may have needed to keep you in the role because no-one else was available to perform your role
- You may have been overlooked or, worse still, forgotten!

Whatever the reason, the good news is, with all of the above, you can take the initiative to make change happen. Within this book you'll find plenty of ideas and exercises to help you get out of the rut you're in and fulfill your career aspirations.



Comfort zone

A more difficult situation to escape from is where you have become happy working within your 'comfort zone'. The reason this is a more difficult situation is because YOU have decided to remain there. It therefore requires you to choose to come out of your comfort zone and try doing different things.

You may have chosen to stay doing what you know best for an easy life or because you fear that trying something different could result in failure. But just the fact you are reading this book suggests you are, at least, thinking about how you could change.

So, before you settle back into your comfort zone, keep reading and find the courage to explore what else might be out there.

Beware



Watch that you don't miss out on great new opportunities because you are fearful of moving out of your 'comfort zone'.

The Need to Grow

With the constant advancement of technology and the pace of change occurring in all our lives, sticking with what you know best – working within your comfort zone – is likely to result in you going backwards in comparative terms. All around you, others will be moving forward with their careers and, in time, you could find yourself being left behind. At worst, you could find yourself without the necessary skills to perform effectively in today's working environment.

Personal responsibility

Rather than focusing on the negative aspects of not developing, let's look at the great benefits of taking personal responsibility for developing and growing yourself:

- You choose what, how and when you need to develop, based on what you know are your specific needs and career plans
- You can drive your development and your career at a pace that suits you
- You can make a conscious choice over whether to take on new responsibilities or roles based on your chosen career plan
- You can actively seek out opportunities to fill specific gaps in your resumé



Development in everything we do

When we talk about personal development, we are not just talking about formalized development by attending training courses, workshops and programmes. As we will explore in Chapter 6, you can develop yourself through your everyday experiences and the additional responsibilities you are prepared to take on.

Hot tip



Whatever experience you go through, use it as an opportunity to learn something about yourself.

Keeping Positive

It's very easy to say you need to keep positive during this time but, clearly, there are likely to be a number of factors that could all add to your potential stress levels and so lead to you thinking negatively. In Chapter 7 we will look at techniques to help you remain motivated, healthy and stress free. Let us, for now, just examine some of the reasons why it is so important for you to remain positive.

Remaining focused

Whether you are out of work or needing to move on from your current job role, you will need to have a very clear focus and real purpose over your decision-making. You are giving yourself a very rare gift – the time to think through what you really want for the future and, in particular, your career.

Beware



Avoid making rash decisions based on your negative thinking. Instead, wait and come back to the issue when you are feeling more positive.

Don't squander this opportunity by making rash or compromised decisions because you're feeling negative. Be conscious of your emotions and, if you are feeling down, put off making decisions until you are confident you're thinking rationally again.



Closed thinking

As we explained earlier, it is important, when you start exploring different options, to keep your mind open and not to discount possibilities prematurely through a lack of self-belief. Watch out if you catch yourself saying or thinking:

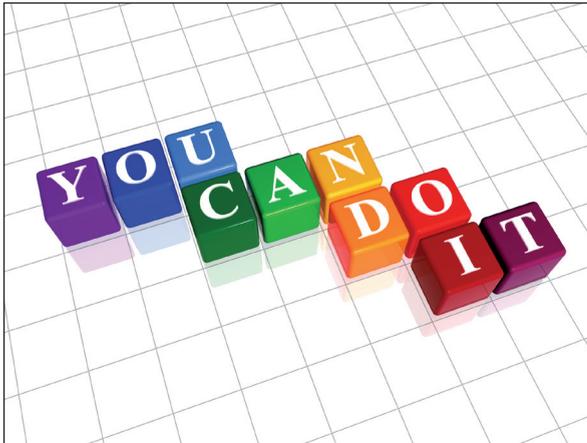
- “But I could never do that” or
- “It may not work” or even
- “What will others think?”

Most of these negative thoughts are likely to be irrational and inaccurate. Later on you can evaluate, rationally, whether you want to pursue some of the ideas you have come up with but, at the point of brainstorming options, don't discount anything.

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Pull yourself back

Be aware of your inner voice and whenever you hear yourself starting to think negatively, make a conscious effort to pull yourself back and remind yourself how unhelpful this is to what you are trying to achieve.



Allocate time

Set aside slots of time when you're going to think about your new career. If necessary, allocate times in your diary specifically for this purpose and ensure you stick to them. If you're still working, this may have to be in the evenings or at weekends.

Try to avoid interruptions from others or getting distracted into doing other things during your 'career thinking' time. When you are working on your career options, make a conscious point of telling yourself that this is time to set aside your negative thoughts.

Others can tell

It's very difficult to hide your true feelings and emotions. As a result of the subtlest of signals you transmit through your body language, others will often be able to tell when you are down – even when you think you are covering it up. This is something we will cover in Chapter 5.

Also take extra care, when attending interviews, to focus on the positive reasons why you want the job rather than focusing on the reasons why you want to escape from your current situation.

Hot tip



Set aside specific 'career thinking' time to focus specifically on your career and possible next roles.