

## Mid-Life Career Changers – Moxie

Dr. Robert Vallerand, a professor of psychology at the University of Quebec, Montreal has studied passion which he defines as "...engaging on a regular basis in an activity that we dearly love, find important and that resonates with who we are." His research identifies two forms of passion: obsessive passion—where the passion controls the person — and harmonious passion — where the person controls the passion. Guess which one is useful and which one is harmful for a career changer?

When considering career plans or career transitions, one is often advised to “follow the passion” and a career path will emerge. However, there are two problems with this: 1) There is no direct correlation between “doing what you love” and the money you earn; and 2) Dr. Vallerand's research showed 15-25% of his respondents did not have identifiable passions. Rather than relying on passion to determine the next step, look ask yourself these questions:

### **Why are you interested in making a career change at this point in your life?**

Are you dissatisfied with the actual work, the working environment, or the people surrounding you? Or do you feel you have achieved all that you can in your current career, and are looking for new challenges? There are a variety of reasons people want to change careers, from boredom to necessity. However, it is important to be clear that internal, not external, factors are usually the strongest driving force for change. Understand the *why* behind your desire to change careers before jumping into something new, or you may find yourself experiencing all the same frustrations once again.

### **What are the financial risks of staying versus leaving your current career?**

Be realistic. Are you making enough now to meet your human needs of food, clothing, shelter, etc.? Where can you cut current living costs? Can you sustain a period without any income? How long will it take to establish a new career? A new income stream has to replace your current pay. You need a clear financial plan that forecasts your anticipated earnings both during the period of transition, and for the first few years following it. In the long run, you may earn more and be more satisfied with your career, but that doesn't mean it will be easy.

### **What are the transferable skills you have that can move from one career path to another?**

Transferable skills are those you use, not those formally required in a previous position. For instance, some transferable skills teachers can claim (in addition to knowledge of a particular subject) include persuasion, presentation, negotiation, communication, leadership, and human relations. Leverage your experience. Experience is an advantage because it cannot be bought or learned in textbook, and can be a useful selling point for older workers.

### **Are there new skills you can learn quickly to move into a new career path?**

Make sure you thoroughly research the career you want to enter. If you have been a hospitality worker and you now want to move into computer technology, perhaps it

is time to consider enrolling in a programming course. Take the course after regular hours to get a taste of the work you are considering and determine if it really is as interesting as you initially thought. Learning the key words and the particular industry jargon shows you are up to date and understand the area.

**What strengths do you bring to changing careers?** Dr. Martin Seligman's highly influential book, *Authentic Happiness* (2002) described twenty-four personal skills, and abilities, or character traits, he termed signature strengths such as leadership, integrity, curiosity. Seligman linked the use of these strengths to greater happiness. The myth that career growth is best achieved by improving weak skill sets has been largely disproved by psychological studies. It is better to operate from strength, understanding when your job performance was excellent, and building on the your strongest talents to create optimal performance for successful outcomes.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in 2003 that 67% of Americans dislike their jobs, and 41% are not employed in the fields they studied in school. The number is likely higher now, as people hang onto jobs they do not particularly like in times of economic uncertainty. However, if you were given the option of going to your current work versus getting a root canal, and you find it difficult to decide which is the least painful, it may be time to seriously consider a mid-life career change.

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