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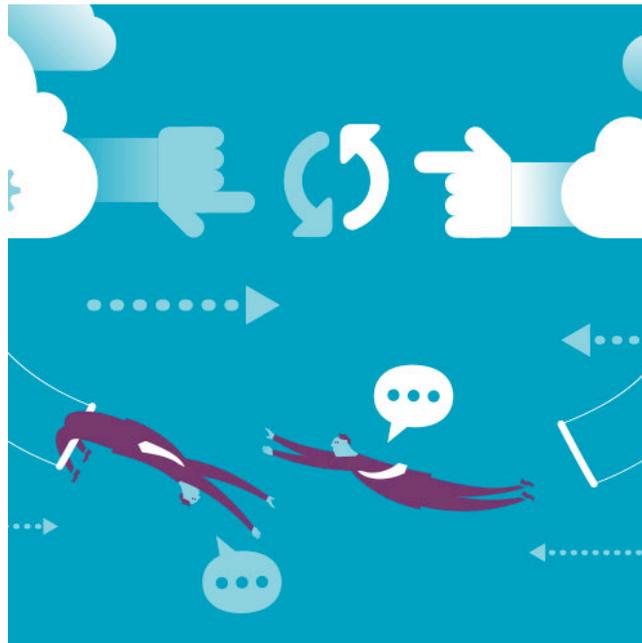
Home Article Job Hopping New Career

Job hopping is the new career | Career change, Switch careers

Job hopping is the new career

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By Rebecca Feigelson | Posted 6th February, 2013



For Gen X and Gen Y-ers, gone are the days of “jobs-for-life” and working at one company until you retire. According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, “Holding a ‘permanent’ job throughout one’s working life is no longer a reality for most workers. Today, most Canadians can expect to have about three careers and eight jobs over their lifetime.”

Mandy Cheetham is a biomed student turned literature major, turned cheerleading coach, turned fine art curator, turned PR guru, turned actress. She has also dabbled in condo development and worked for a charter boat company. Cheetham is a “job hopper” in every sense of the phrase; in the 13 years since she graduated from the University of Guelph, she has had three major career changes and tinkered with a couple more on the side.

First, Cheetham started a cheerleading company where she travelled the world. She taught students and coaches in China, North America, and South America, while also making cheerleading uniforms. After 10 years, Cheetham no longer felt fulfilled. “I was continuing because it made sense, and it was this sexy business to some people ... but by the time I got to 10 years, I didn’t want to get out of bed in the morning, I didn’t want to do it anymore,” she says.

Cheetham had been interested in pursuing the more creative side of her life for some time. She was drawn to singing, performing, and spoken word, but had put it off because of

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financial and family obligations. "I thought, 'I am going to pursue this cheerleading thing so I can make money and put the money that I make into starting a record label, or becoming a singer, or an actress, and do something that I really want to do,'" says Cheetham.

Falling into a common trap, it wasn't until her father's cancer diagnosis and passing that Cheetham decided to leave the career that no longer lit her up. After her cheerleading stint, Cheetham was lost. "I went to an ashram in the Bahamas and did yoga, then I went to Monte Carlo and then I went to London. I wandered around Europe," she says. "The hardest part is letting go when you don't know what's coming next."

She finally settled back in Toronto as a fine art curator and then transitioned to public relations and event planning, representing local artists. After a year, however, Cheetham knew this career wasn't where her heart lay. She flirted with condo development and selling chartered boats, but ultimately began taking improv classes at Second City and was cast in a local stage production. Cheetham studied at Lee Strasberg's Method Acting School and the Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre in New York. She has now been acting for two years.

Cheetham's story is not uncommon. Global workforce solutions leader, Kelly Services, reported that almost half of all Canadian respondents (of approximately 4,500 surveyed) said that they expect to switch careers within the next five years. The main reasons they desired to career hop were: the need for improved work-life balance (24 percent), changing personal interests (24 percent), and the need for higher income (23 percent). Mercer, a global consulting firm, conducted a survey in 2011 from over 2,000 workers in Canada and confirmed this; over 36 percent of workers reported that they were seriously considering leaving their current organization, which is up 10 percent from 2006.

The evolution of the modern workforce and lack of job security in the current economic climate has also resulted in more openness towards career-shifts and active preparation for the likelihood of being forced out of a career. "Job security has gone the way of horse-drawn carriages and gas-lit street lamps," says Brooke Ali, who has been laid off twice and has spent two of the last three years unemployed. "Everyone from small 50 employee businesses to big international companies can experience the kinds of changes that lead to people losing their jobs, so you'll be better off doing something that you'll enjoy and will make you feel fulfilled," rather than something you think will provide job security.

A decade ago, several career jumps on a résumé would be indicative of lack of focus, commitment and ability to follow through. Now, switching up careers is done more often than not, and employers' attitudes are following suit.

But how does one go about changing their career after only a couple of years down their original trajectory? And how do you know when it's time for a career-swap?

Doug Schmidt, director and founder of CareersPlus Inc., helps people determine their goals and passions and align them with a career path suited for them. His experience has taught him that lack of confidence in a new role is sometimes misinterpreted as the need to make a career change. Based on this experience, he believes that about 50 percent of the time, it isn't a career change that is needed, but a re-evaluation. "When you're feeling very stressed and anxious about things, sometimes it's a workplace issue and not a career change in those particular instances. It's not that the career is wrong, it's the work environment," he says.

Schmidt cautions against rash career switches, but doesn't warn against changing careers in general; he himself made a career change mid-life when he resigned as the vice president of finance and administration, and returned to school to complete an undergraduate degree and two graduate degrees. "You have to know what you're going back for and why you're going to focus your career in a new direction," he notes.

If you're finding that you no longer feel the sparks during your day-to-day tasks, consider taking on another role in the organization, before leaving the industry completely. If you're in an organization that encourages growth and development, you can test out different roles before deciding what the next step will be for you.

Cheetham advises a gradual career switch, by incorporating your new or existing passion into a small part of your life and slowly making more space for it. "Witness yourself, pay attention to how you're in this new situation. If you see a huge change in yourself and you feel happier because you have this thing in your life, then yes, that's the direction you need to be moving," she says.

In a society concerned with hyper-perfectionism, taking a leap-of-faith and going down a new career path is sometimes scary, but you'll be closer to finding happiness. "If you let go of your tightly wound ideas of where you think you should be, or where you think the world put you, then suddenly you see all these other opportunities you might not have seen," says Cheetham.

If you decide it's time for you to make a fresh start, self-exploration is an essential first step. Look into local career exploration programs, take a career quiz, and get to know your strengths and weaknesses better so you can relate your findings to possible career options. Ali participated in a career exploration program before embarking on her second career. "I not only learned about the careers that fit my interests, aptitudes, and values, but I learned a lot about myself. It's not often that you get to spend two weeks just exploring yourself."

When it comes to making a career change, following the money will most likely leave you wanting to make another switch down the line. Although it is important to look into the job opportunities of your new chosen career, making a switch solely based on compensation won't pan out in the long-run. "Most often, people come here because they are pursuing a passion for something," says Kathleen Abbott, associate dean of the Centre of Continuous

Learning at George Brown College.

To make the switch easier on yourself, do your homework. Don't just dive headfirst into a career you don't know much about because it advertises low barriers to entry and tempting perks. You'll have to work hard to enter into a new industry. "My advice would be to research what makes a successful individual in that field and what the requirements are for a job," says Abbott.

Another way to help with your transition is to apply previous skills and knowledge to your new endeavour, like Ali did. After Ali was laid off the first time from her job as a registrar at an ESL school, she enrolled in the Library and Information Technician program at Seneca to add to her existing honours BA in English literature. She got a job as a cataloguer but lost her job again when the company was purchased by a larger one. This time, she used the skills she learned at Seneca to make another career switch—this time to genealogy. "While I at Seneca, I noticed how many of the skills I was learning directly related to genealogy," she says. She plans on becoming her own boss by starting her own genealogy business. "You can't get laid off when you're your own boss, right?"

Whether you decide to work within your current organization by taking on a new role, go back to school and complete another degree or certificate, or change careers and draw on your past expertise to make a lateral shift, remember: you don't need to have all of the experience before you make the leap.

Instead of the traditional ready-aim-fire, "try ready-fire-aim, because it is never going to be rejected when you start," Cheetham says.

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