



BEYOND B-SCHOOL

Online Career Training for MBAs

CAREER CHANGE

10 Ways to Move Forward & Find Your Path





Introduction

Don't settle... **SUCCEED** in the right career! Are you stuck in an unsatisfying job? In the wrong profession? An industry that just isn't a fit? With this Guide, you can get unstuck! Change directions — one you're genuinely passionate about.

The Director of Career Management in the Wharton MBA Program for Executives and author of *Switchers: How Smart Professionals Change Careers and Seize Success* (AMACOM 2018), Dawn Graham, Ph.D., provides strategies that will help you overcome the challenges to get you where you want to go. As a leading executive career coach and psychologist, Dawn gives you techniques that work.

The first step is to recognize that the usual rules and job search tools won't work for you. Resumes and job boards were designed with traditional applicants in mind. As a career switcher, you have to go beyond the basics, using tactics tailor-made to ensure your candidacy stands out.

The Guide reveals how to overcome common challenges, including:

- How can the skills that I gained from an MBA enhance my candidacy in this career change?
- How do I overcome the concern that I'll be "throwing away" years of my life by taking a step backwards?
- How can I convince the company to roll the dice on me as a Career Changer?
- How can I stay motivated if this career change takes longer than I expect?
- How can I think differently about networking to be more effective?
- How can I get the information I need from an informational interview, while also leaving a positive impression?
- How can I figure out my transferable skills?

Career changers face unique challenges that demand fresh approaches. Packed with psychological insights and practical exercises, the Guide will help you leap over obstacles and into a whole new field.





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Challenge #1

How do I overcome the concern that if I reinvent myself, I'll be "throwing away" years of my life by taking a step backwards and losing seniority?

You're not alone on this concern, but, research supports that career changers are common in today's market. In fact, if you delve more deeply into others' professional backgrounds through networking conversations or Linked In, you'll likely find that few people have a linear, vertical climb any longer.

But hey, it's not uncommon to strongly identify with the current role or industry that you're in, especially after working hard to achieve status. However, while your title may change, your past credentials and accomplishments do not disappear or become irrelevant when you make a career transition.

If you think about it, you've gained valuable skills from all of the roles that you've had throughout your career, and these have all built upon one another to make you the success you are today.

Try this — On a piece of paper, map out your career over 2 — 3 year increments. For each period on your timeline, list the critical skills you've gained or strengthened in each role. Include:

- ✓ Different projects you've worked on
- ✓ Recognition or awards
- ✓ Promotions
- ✓ Training
- ✓ Internships
- ✓ Study abroad
- ✓ Volunteer projects.

Chances are, as you complete this exercise, you'll find several times when you took on a relatively ambiguous project where you had little training or previous knowledge, but yet still knocked it out of the park. How did you accomplish this? Well, by building off of your prior skills and knowledge.

Now to apply this to your career change, once you've mapped out your skills, identify the most relevant for your new career target. Then, put these skills together to show how you solve the pain points in your desired role.

Think of it like this: if you start with milk, butter and eggs, you can add a few more ingredients to the mix and whip up some fantastic pancakes. However, you can also mix them with different ingredients to make biscuits or cookies. The basic foundation hasn't changed, but depending on how you package the ingredients, the outcome is different.

Transferable skills can be thought of in a similar way. For example, your ability to understand a client's needs, negotiate a fair contract, and influence the judge in the role of a Lawyer, can be repackaged to make you a great Consultant, who's able to use these same skills to solve problems for challenging customers and to build new business.

So, instead of looking at the process of reinventing yourself as losing something, look at it for what it really is: a step forward into gaining a whole new set of career possibilities.



Challenge #2

Why do you want to change careers? How strong is your motivation to make a change?

A: There are usually two primary reasons people want to make a career change:

- 1) They're trying to get away from their current situation, which is unsatisfying. Or,
- 2) They discover something more exciting they want to do instead.

Of course there are shades of gray, but job seekers in the latter category, who are focused and clear about their target, also tend to be more motivated and successful in their transitions.

When you start an MBA program, you'll learn about many new career paths, all of which sound interesting and lucrative. To be as successful as possible in your chosen career transition, it's important to know WHY you want to make a career change, and specifically THIS particular career change. Not only will the reason keep you motivated when times get tough, but it'll also be a factor for decision-makers who are considering hiring you as a non-traditional candidate.

As a former Recruiter, I can tell you this: If you aren't clear about your motivation, or give a generic answer about why you're pursuing this new career path, your chances of being hired decrease significantly.

Employers don't want to roll the dice on a non-traditional candidate who may be making a change on a whim, or because it seems sexy or popular. If you want to be taken seriously as a career changer, map out a logical and insightful response to the question, "Why do you want to

make this change?" (aka, "Why should we roll the dice on you?")

To do this:

- ✓ **First, include the concrete steps you've already taken to demonstrate you're committed to this new career path. Investing in your MBA is one step, but there should be others since that alone won't differentiate you.**
- ✓ **Next, show how the transferable skills you've built translate into adding real value in this new career. The goal - in part - is to demonstrate that you understand the key pain points in the new industry or role, so be specific.**
- ✓ **Lastly, have clarity around how this next role will play into your longer term career goals and be able to communicate this in an interview or networking meeting. While you don't want to talk about the role as a "stepping stone" in such a way that leads the interviewer to think you're just passing through to check a box, you do want to present a logical story about how your contributions in this role will align with your future.**

Doing these things will show that your career change is not just a whim, but rather part of a well-thought out plan, that's already in motion. And in turn, this will give the Interviewer more confidence in you as a candidate.



Challenge #3

Making a career change is a little intimidating. How do I move from fear to courage?

A: The late George Burns once said, “I honestly think it’s better to be a failure at something you love than to be a success at something you hate.” The truth is, humans are designed to resist change. From an evolutionary perspective, it’s been our ability to reduce risk that has kept us alive and our ability to create habits that has made us efficient. Change, whether forced on us or by choice, goes against our biology, which is why it can feel so hard.

If fear is holding you back from taking action on a career change, try this:

- ✓ **Practice conquering fear.** Eleanor Roosevelt was onto something when she said, “Do one thing every day that scares you.” If you continually stretch outside of your comfort zone a little each day, the bar for what makes you anxious will continue to raise and new things will naturally feel easier.
- ✓ **Take a moment to think about something that you were initially intimidated to do that’s now a regular part of your life. What resources did you engage to help you to be successful? Chances are, these same strategies can be useful to you again.**
- ✓ **Ask for help.** Few great things in life can be achieved alone. Whether an accountability coach, mentor or a classmate, there’s likely someone who can support you in this career change. It’s important to be strong enough to

stand alone, but the most successful people also are wise enough to know when to ask for help.

- ✓ **And, be careful of comparisons.** When starting something new, we tend to watch the experts. This is a great way to learn, but also extremely intimidating. Especially if you compare your performance as a “newbie” to those who’ve already achieved success on the path you’re just now embarking upon. Be careful about comparing your start to someone else’s middle or peak.

“I honestly think it’s better to be a failure at something you love than to be a success at something you hate.”

— George Burns

One last thought — Researchers have found that while over the short term, we tend to regret our actions, and over the long haul, we tend to regret our inactions — those things that we DIDN’T do. In fact, when people look at their lives as a whole, inaction regrets outnumber action regrets 84% to 16%. The key takeaway — while fear of the unknown may be holding you back in this moment, think about how you’ll feel 5 years from now if you DON’T make this change...



Challenge #4

Informational interviews seem hokey. Are these effective, and, if so, what's the best way to go about doing one?

A: Informational interviews are meetings designed to learn more about an industry or a particular role. Over the years, these have gotten a bad rap since some job seekers were using them as a cover for asking for a job, which isn't really the primary purpose. So they tend to get the proverbial eye roll when recommended as a strategy.

But if done right, these meetings can be vital to your career change, particularly for gathering the insider scoop about whether or not this change is really what you even want.

To do informational interviewing right:

- ✓ **First, have a strategy — Identify specific companies or roles you're interested in and look for 3 — 4 contacts on Linked In who can be good resources for information. While some candidates worry that being too focused will limit their options, it'll actually help you appear organized and prepared when networking. You can always expand your target later, but starting with a clear focus will allow you to identify themes and patterns that you can build upon.**
- ✓ **Next, start with people you know — When in the exploration phase, you don't want to begin with C-level Execs or your strongest connectors. Save these for when you feel more confident in your target and are able to articulate how your skills can add value to the field. Remember,**

even in the research stage, you're always leaving an impression. So perhaps your MBA classmates might be one natural place to begin informational interviews.

- ✓ **Then, do your homework — Why should someone invest time in you if you don't invest time in them first? Anything that can be found on Google should be researched well in advance, so that your questions in the Informational Interview have depth, and can demonstrate your knowledge. Saying, "I noticed on Linked In that you worked on the Healthcare expansion in China last year, so I'm wondering how the recent legislation changes have impacted the growth in the medical device division?", is much stronger than asking, "Have you been involved in any overseas projects at Acme?"**
- ✓ **Lastly, don't forget to maintain the relationship, which is always much easier than establishing a new one. If someone has taken the time to help you, look for opportunities to reciprocate — can you introduce them to a contact of yours for example? At the very least, thank them and keep them updated on how your exploration process turned out.**

In my experience, clarity only comes through action. While assessments, research and pro/con lists can take you far, there's no substitute for getting outside of your head and "trying things on for size".



Challenge #5

How can I stay motivated? This career change is taking longer than I expected.

A: Depending on your level and profession, a standard career change can take 6 months or more once you clearly define your target job. And, if your target isn't clearly defined or there are other variables, such as a cross-country move, a career shift may take even longer.

Here are some strategies for staying motivated:

- ✓ First, be strategic from the start. Know the job search will involve the inevitable roller coaster of emotions and build in support from classmates, a partner, or friends to keep you positive. There will be setbacks, and cheerleaders can keep you on track.
- ✓ Second, reframe rejection. Any time we reach for something new, getting turned down or making mistakes is par for the course. A favorite quote is from Hall of Fame basketball player and coach, John Wooden, "If You're Not Making Mistakes, then You're Not Doing Anything." When I get criticized or something new doesn't turn out as I had hoped, this simple reframe reminds me that I'm still moving in the right direction — forward!
- ✓ Take a lesson from the Navy SEALs, who are trained that success (and survival) is based on taking an optimistic, non-personal view of bad situations. Instead of thinking, "This will never

happen", SEALs look at defeat as temporary, and they keep going. Instead of taking things personally and thinking, "I'm not qualified", SEALs recognize that circumstances are situational, then they come up with a plan to overcome hurdles.

- ✓ Lastly, do some soul searching to understand how badly you really want to make this change. Are you willing to relocate? Travel 80% of the time? Take a pay cut or a step back in seniority? Endure a longer commute? If the answer to many of these questions is "no", it may be YOU who is putting the obstacles in your way, rather than the other way around.

**"If You're Not Making Mistakes,
then You're Not Doing Anything."**

**— John Wooden,
Hall of Fame basketball
player and coach**

Throughout this process, you can count on set-backs and challenges, but if this is what you really want, keep your eye fixed on the prize, and you'll no doubt find a way.



Challenge #6

What can I do if my networking isn't working?

A: The research on networking has been consistent for decades — it's the #1 way to new job opportunities, hands down. When my clients tell me that they're networking like crazy and it's still not working, it's usually for one of three reasons, all of which are fixable:

- 1) First, most candidates know that asking for a job in an initial networking meeting is the equivalent of asking for your new crush's hand in marriage on the first date. Yet, many still subconsciously engage in this "one and done mentality" when networking. While not every contact will end up being a great lead, usually most have something to offer, and you never know who their contacts — your 2nd level contacts — are, which is vital. When meeting a new business contact, the goal is building the relationship and getting to the second "date". That's when trust starts to build and more valuable information is shared.
- 2) The second challenge I see is neglecting to create ambassadors. If the person with whom you're meeting doesn't leave with a good impression of you and wanting to either: 1) introduce

you to others, or 2) at least stay in touch, you haven't created an ambassador, which means, it was likely a waste of time for both of you. The best way to create ambassadors? Focus on the relationship, not the outcome.

Try this — Think about what impresses YOU when meeting someone new — it's probably things like: they're prepared, ask intelligent questions, are curious and engaged, share common interests, have interesting perspectives, and are positive. A networking meeting isn't about spending 30 minutes vomiting your every accomplishment and skill onto your unsuspecting contact. Instead, select 1 — 2 accomplishments to share, then focus on learning more about them. In the words of Dale Carnegie, "You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you." Remember - it's all about getting to the second date.

- 3) The last thing that can be easy to forget is that networking is about planting seeds. Many times you don't see the benefits of networking for months, and sometimes even years. This doesn't mean that your networking isn't working. Continue to cultivate it and your network may come to your rescue in the most surprising times. If you think about it, I'll bet you can find an actual example of this in your own past.

"You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you."

— Dale Carnegie

Keep at it — decades of consistent research can't be wrong.



Challenge #7

How can I convince the company to roll the dice on me as a Career Changer?

A: Research indicates that up to 80% of company turnover is due to poor hiring decisions. And, the Labor Department estimates it costs, on average, 1/3 of a new hire's annual salary to replace them.

As a former Recruiter, I can tell you that hiring mistakes are very costly, and that those costs increase the higher up in the organization that turnover occurs. Because of this, companies will err on the side of hiring a traditional candidate, who seems "safer", rather than a career changer.

But, there are things you can do to reassure the organization that you're worth rolling the dice on:

- ✓ **The best strategy is to network into the company. Hiring Managers are looking for 1) that you have the skills to do the job, and 2) a good fit with the culture of the team. While both are important, skills can be learned whereas "fit", such as your attitude, how you approach your work, and your style of interacting with others — tends to be more personality-based and therefore, more difficult to mold. If you network into a company, chances are good the person referring you has already assessed fit to some extent, and the assumption will be that you're already "one of them." Key point - If you're able to make a positive connection through your network, a Hiring Manager may be more willing to overlook a non-traditional background.**

- ✓ **Something else you can do is speak their language. What I mean by that is, if you're coming from another industry - for example making a switch from the military to a corporate consulting role - use language that connects you to the interviewer, rather than distances you from them. So, instead of talking about your "platoon", use the word "team." The goal of the interview is to build a positive relationship with your new Boss, so this subtle change in language can make a big difference in being viewed as a "fit" for the company.**
- ✓ **Lastly, demonstrate an awareness for their concerns and aim to put their mind at ease. One way to do this is to share experiences from your past where you were new to situations and demonstrated success. Here's an example, "When my last Manager took an unexpected leave of absence about two months after starting my new job, we were in the middle of a big client project, so I had to step up and assume his responsibilities as well as my own. Even though I was new to the company and didn't have much guidance, I engaged my resources and completed the project on time. In fact, it was so seamless to the client, they went on to purchase more business from our firm." See what I mean? Past success is one indicator of future success, so examples like this can go far in demonstrating your ability to quickly adapt your transferable skills to achieve results.**



Challenge #8

How can the skills that I gained from my MBA enhance my candidacy in this career change?

Many students engage in an MBA program with the intention of making a career change. While your classes will enhance your understanding of derivatives and BitCoin, in my experience, concrete application will always trump coursework when being evaluated as a candidate for a job.

So, while earning the MBA credential may be a pre-requisite, what a company is most concerned with is how you APPLY what you've learned.

Here are the two best ways that I know to get the most out of your MBA while in a career transition:

- 1) **First, focus on the transferable skills that you're gaining while earning your degree. Don't simply list a bunch of classes on your resume or Linked In Profile. What is most valued by a potential employer are real-**
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Whether as a current student or an Alum, your shared experience with all of your classmates, or graduates of the program is enough to open many doors.

world projects and assignments, where you solve business problems for actual clients or companies. Many MBA programs offer these opportunities as part of your "for credit" curriculum, but if not, you may be able to engage in an Independent Study or consulting project with a Faculty member.

The key point is, when writing your resume or interviewing, be sure to speak about your classroom knowledge and skills in terms of the outcomes and results you achieved by applying them, just like you would with any other professional experience.

- 2) **Second, don't underestimate the value of your MBA network. Whether as a current student or an Alum, your shared experience with all of your classmates, or graduates of the program is enough to open many doors. And this can be a huge advantage when asking a potential employer to roll the dice on you as a non-traditional candidate.**

So, go beyond the classroom and make time to really get to know your colleagues while in school, and then make it a point to engage in Alumni events after you graduate. If you skip the networking opportunities, you're missing out on one of the biggest advantages an MBA can offer you, especially when it comes to considering a career change.



Challenge #9

What is the best way to handle my salary negotiation in a career change? Is taking a hit inevitable?

A: As a Career Coach, the primary reason I hear about why people avoid making a career change is fear of taking a salary hit. While I wish I could say, “Of course your salary will not decrease”, unfortunately, this is a consideration when deciding to switch career paths.

For example, if you’re taking a significant step back in level or changing from an industry like banking to a non-profit, a lower salary may be inevitable. However, before concluding that the hit isn’t worth it, consider the entire picture.

For example:

- ✓ Think about the long term pay off. Will taking a hit on salary in the short run enable you to leap ahead of your peak salary in your old career in the longer run? Taking one step back

If your new job is energizing, reduces your stress, or allows you to spend more time on things outside of work that give you pleasure, then perhaps the temporary trade-off in base pay is worth it.

to take two steps forward in a job that you love seems to me to be a worthwhile strategy.

- ✓ Also, many other factors besides base pay add up to the total amount that ends up in your bank account at the end of the month. Perhaps you can negotiate more vacation time or tuition reimbursement for your MBA? Or perhaps your commute is cut in half, which saves both time and money. The bottom line: look at total compensation and take time to negotiate. You may not be losing as much as you think.
- ✓ While you may not be the typical candidate for the role, perhaps some of the experiences in your background enable you to contribute more to the job than a traditional candidate. For example, if your desktop publishing skills enable your new company to save \$8000/year on an outside vendor, perhaps they’d be willing to add this amount to your base salary when they hire you? If you don’t ask, the answer is always “no”.
- ✓ Lastly, consider the big picture. Salary IS a key motivator, but there are other aspects of a job that contribute to overall satisfaction. If your new job is energizing, reduces your stress, or allows you to spend more time on things outside of work that give you pleasure, then perhaps the temporary trade-off in base pay is worth it.



Challenge #10

With school, work and family, it's challenging to find time to engage in a career search. How can I manage this?

A: When I was working as a Certified Personal Trainer, “time” was the most frequently cited reason why my clients didn’t exercise. In fact, “time” is probably the #1 rationalization as to why most things that fall to the wayside don’t get done.

The problem? “Time” is a finite resource. It’s also an excuse. The truth is, we make time for what we choose to. As humans, we are fond of framing tasks in our lives as “have to’s”, when in reality, there are very few “have to’s” in life and many more “want to’s”.

Each moment, we choose how to spend our time. We choose to check Facebook. We choose to hit the snooze button. In my case, sometimes three times. We choose to stay out late with friends. All of these things make life enjoyable, but at a time when a job search is a priority, it makes more sense to “choose to” update your resume or schedule a networking meeting rather than watch a rerun of Law & Order.

If you’re serious about a career transition, there’s no getting around making time for it, which in most cases, will mean giving something else up, at least temporarily.

Here’s something to try:

- 1) **Think of one thing that you can STOP doing today that’ll have a significant impact on your**

job search. For example, perhaps you can stop watching television on Monday nights and instead use that extra two hours to reach out to contacts?

- 2) **Then, think of one thing that you can START doing today that’ll have a significant impact on your career transition. Perhaps you can spend 15 minutes on your daily train ride building your brand on Linked In? Or you can commit — really commit — to set aside one lunch each week for networking.**
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As a Psychologist, I’ve learned that we often put up our own roadblocks, and then get cranky when we have to drive around them. The good news? Every day we have a choice. Tomorrow, why not choose to focus on your career goals?

If you’re serious about a career transition, there’s no getting around making time for it, which in most cases, will mean giving something else up, at least temporarily.



Bonus Question

How can I overcome age discrimination in the hiring process?

A: To be human is to be biased. As a Psychologist, I can tell you that social decisions are based on emotions, which unfortunately don't always serve Recruiters and Hiring Managers well when making hiring decisions.

Age discrimination can work both ways. In some cases, very qualified individuals can be overlooked simply because they lack the specified number of years' of experience in the workplace. But more often than not, it's more seasoned workers who find themselves getting passed over for jobs that they are more than qualified for.

While it's impossible to control every situation, if you are not getting call backs for jobs that seem to be a great fit, here are some things you can try:

On your resume or Linked In, avoid adding dates or information that highlight your age. For example, few if any job descriptions ask for "25+

A common fear among Recruiters is that an older candidate may not be as motivated, but this bias can easily be overcome if you convey a strong career story in the interview.

years of experience", so there is no need to include information from that far back in your work history on your resume. A good rule of thumb is to not go back more than 15 — 20 years.

Also, you can remove the graduation dates from your education and also get rid of skills like basic technology programs. At this point, everyone is proficient in Microsoft Office, so unless you are a programmer or a technology-based industry, there is no need to list your computer skills. As a former Recruiter, a seasoned candidate who listed basic computer skills was always a red flag.

Lastly, own your expertise. Energetically demonstrate the value your experience brings to the role and show your enthusiasm about the position by talking about your ideas. A common fear among Recruiters is that an older candidate may not be as motivated, but this bias can easily be overcome if you convey a strong career story in the interview.

And lastly, confidence breeds confidence. Stressing about your concerns can come across in the interview non-verbally, making the Interviewer wonder what you are hiding, even if you aren't hiding anything. If you're confident in your abilities to do the job, more often than not, they will be to.