

What if, degree in hand, you suddenly realize you should have studied something else?

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David Tal, Special to Financial Post

After putting in the time, money and energy to complete a degree, it can be extremely discouraging to realize you no longer want to work in that industry. If you spent the better part of four years in a classroom only to learn you don't want to pursue the field you're now qualified for, what do you do? Most people don't have the time or money to go back to school and start over again — but don't fret. There are steps to take when trying to change career paths to something not directly associated with your degree. While making the switch may be difficult, it's not impossible. The following steps will help push you in the direction you want to go.

What makes you happy?

Your first step seems simple but is paramount: figure out what makes you happy. Where do you see yourself? What type of work setting would be perfect for you? Once you discover your ideal work atmosphere, schedule and tasks, use that as your springboard to zero in on the profession or industry you would like. Spend ample time on this step because it is, without a doubt, the most important. Nailing down the direction you want to head towards is critical and shouldn't be taken lightly. You don't want to end up in the same predicament again.

Prior skills

While you may not be fully qualified to work in the career you have now chosen, don't brush aside your prior education. Mould the skills you do have into something useful for your future. For example, the skills you learned in university, such as team collaboration, critical thinking and deductive reasoning can be repurposed toward the career you want. You can also research people in the profession or industry you're interested in on LinkedIn to see what skills they possess.

Volunteering

Since getting a new degree is most likely out of the question, gather additional skills towards your new career by volunteering. Most jobs have the classic Catch-22; you need the experience to get the job, but need the job to get the experience. Luckily, a way around this is volunteering to gain experience. Most companies will jump at the chance to have unpaid help around the workplace. Another alternative is to volunteer for industry-specific associations and events that can provide you with experience and insights that no individual company can offer.

Networking

If you want to get involved in a profession you're not qualified for, you need to begin connecting with the right people. To start, become familiar with the appropriate individuals in the industry or company you want to work for. Go back to LinkedIn. Then, research industry conferences you can attend and make a plan to introduce yourself to as many people as possible, especially those you recognize from LinkedIn. Alternatively, you can invite select professionals from LinkedIn out to coffee to learn more about their industry/profession. Ultimately, the right connections can help you wiggle your way into the career you want.

Market yourself

Last but not least, you need to market yourself accordingly. If you are in the habit of sending the same résumé and cover letter to all potential employers, recreate it with a bent to various industries by making careful word selections and highlighting appropriate skills. Tailor your cover letter to place an emphasis on the areas your potential employer is seeking to fill. To sell yourself to a company, make sure to play your cards right.

This article was written by David Tal of Jobpostings.ca, Canada's largest student job network helping post-secondary students find their internships, co-ops and entry-level jobs to launch their careers. Follow them

