

A new career will change who you are

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**A new career will change who you are**

**By Cathy Goodwin, PhD**

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I hear from many people who feel trapped in a career after fifteen or twenty happy, productive years. It's been a good ride, they say, but now it's time to jump off the train. They want to fulfill a creative dream, recover from burnout or just try something new. The old challenge is now a "been there, done that."

If you can relate to that description, you probably recognize that midlife career change is both easier and harder than starting out in the world of work. Change is easier because you have resources to grease the rails. You have savings, equity in your house, and a retirement fund. More important, you have acquired skills, contacts and networks. You may be able to use the resources of your current employer to develop new skills.

On the other hand, change is hard because you have invested in your career identity. In my relocation book, *Making the Big Move* (New Harbinger 1999), I emphasize that moving is stressful because identity is interrupted. The change is equally stressful when you relocate your career.

Often people focus on the skills and activities they want to incorporate into their new careers, but ignore the impact on identity. Yet I have seen people falter and give up on new careers because they were uncomfortable with the new way they had to define themselves. Just saying, "I am..." creates a new reality.

At the same time, once you begin to acquire a new identity, you increase your risk. It will be more difficult to return to a former career or job once you have begun to enjoy a new identity. And your former colleagues will see you differently.

There are three components to identity: self-concept, social identity and paper identity.

Self concept is expressed when you fill out a series of "I am" statements. You think of yourself as a father, country club member, and banker.

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Social identity is the way others view you. People treat you differently if you're a bank manager or if you're starting a new e-business in a field they've never heard of. Think about how you feel when you're introduced at parties as, "This is Mary. She is a..."

Paper identity is the way you're regarded by the businesses and professionals you deal with. When you have a job, it is easy to get credit and a premium checking out. When you change careers, especially if you start your own business, you may be on shakier ground.

Your response to a new identity will be unique: "After being on my own, I went back to a corporate job. When we got the United Way forms, it hit me. I was now an employee. It didn't feel good." Others will find the same world liberating: "No more chasing after clients — and I love the pension contributions!"

I encourage career changers to include a plan for identity change, as a way to help smooth the journey.

Cathy Goodwin is a career consultant who focuses on intuition and career freedom. She likes to work with mid-career professionals who are evaluating their futures. Email for her free ezine: [subscribe@movinglady.com](mailto:subscribe@movinglady.com) and visit her website: <http://www.movinglady.com>

## **When Your Career Becomes Very Stressful**

**By Stan Popovich**

What do you do when the career you have chosen stresses you out? When this happens, it is easy to get depressed since your career is very important. As a result, here are some suggestions on how to deal with your career anxieties.

Determine why your career makes you stressed out. Maybe its some aspect of your career that makes you anxious or maybe you need a new job. Do some soul searching and determine the main causes of your career anxieties. Once you know why you are stressed, then develop a plan of action.

Maybe it is not your career that is stressful, but instead your job that is the problem. If it is your job that makes you anxious then try to find ways to improve the situation. If this doesn't work then change jobs.

Sometimes it may be the career itself that is the problem. Do not be afraid to change careers if you have to. People nowadays change careers for various reasons. Many adults go back to school to get the necessary training for their new career. The important thing is to determine which career best suits you.

Remember you have options. There are all kinds of jobs and careers out there so do not feel that your back is in the corner. If you do not know what to do, then take a career skills assessment test which will determine what kind of job or career best suits your particular interests and skill sets.

There are many career coaches that can give you additional advice. Your local college has career

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counselors that can give you much assistance and provide you with information on a variety of careers.

It is important to find a job or career that makes you feel good about yourself. Do not just take a job because the money is good or because it will impress your friends. You're the one who has to go to work everyday, so find something that you like to do and also will pay the bills. It will take some work, but eventually you will find something.

Stan Popovich is the author of "A Layman's Guide to Managing Fear" an easy to read book that presents a overview of techniques that are effective in managing persistent fears and anxieties. For additional information go to:



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