

When a career change means starting from scratch

If you're not happy in your current job, or you're looking for a role that's better suited to you, you might be thinking of changing careers. Sometimes this means starting over, which can be a big step.

You wouldn't be alone though. Research for SEEK shows that just over half (51%) of candidates have switched to work in a completely different industry in their lives, and a further 1 in 4 would consider doing so in the future.

Importantly, of those who have taken the plunge, 93% are happy with the decision to switch careers.

Reasons for switching careers

You might have many different reasons for thinking about changing jobs or industries. The research highlights these as the top three people have:

- For a better work-life balance (36%)
- To get a higher salary/better benefits (33%)
- To challenge myself (32%)

Leah Lambart, a Career Coach at Relaunch Me sees lots of candidates who are looking for a career change, and says some of the most common reasons are:

- Seeking more meaningful or purposeful work that ties to their interests and values
- Seeking work that provides a better work-life balance, especially if they're burnt out after working relentless hours for a long time
- Returning to work after a break and realising they're not happy in their career
- Realising they perhaps didn't do enough research before choosing a course/career pathway and then realising it doesn't suit their personality or interest them
- Wanting to do more creative work
- Wanting to help others and make a positive contribution to the world.

Lambart gives examples of people who've successfully made the move into whole new careers, including a marketer who switched to nursing after three years of full-time study, and an established photographer who changed to a career in User Experience after studying an intensive short course and taking on internships.

Steps to starting from scratch

Starting over can be a daunting prospect, so it helps to have a plan and tackle one element at a time. Lambart breaks down changing careers into six steps:

1. **Do a self-assessment:** Firstly, understand who you are as a person. "Where are your natural strengths? What motivates you? What sort of people do you want to work with? What sort of work culture suits you best? And what type of work most energises you?" Write these answers down if it helps you.
2. **Look at career options:** If there are a few career options that interest you and would suit you, do research to narrow down the shortlist to find a role that suits you best right now, Lambart says. Refer back to what you discovered in your self-assessment to help you identify how good a fit you are for the different options you're considering.
3. **Research roles:** Use online tools like those found on [SEEK Career Advice](#) to find out more about the key responsibilities in the job and the type of work environment. There is plenty of [useful advice on changing careers](#).

"Reviewing current jobs advertised on SEEK is a great way to get a feel for these jobs, whether they would interest you and what skills employers are seeking in candidates. This will help you match your current skills to the role and identify any gaps," says Lambart.

4. **Speak with others:** Get in touch with people working in the role or field you're interested in and ask if you can [have an informational interview](#), Lambart says. This isn't a job interview, but a way to find out more information about a role to work out if it's right for you. "Online research can't replace speaking with people who are doing that work on a day-to-day basis and who can give you an honest view of the role and industry."
5. **Choose a course:** Once you feel that you've done enough research – which may take weeks or months – turn your focus to choosing a course or area of study, Lambart says. "I don't recommend choosing a course and then just hoping for the best! It's important to understand how it relates to your chosen field."

You may want to speak to people in the industry you're interested in to get their advice on the most relevant study options or qualifications you'll need to work in the field.

6. **Save money:** You may need to have a financial buffer if you're going to take an initial pay cut or have time away from work as part of your career change. This is particularly true if you're returning to full-time study for several years.

When your ultimate goal is more meaningful work or work-life balance, you may need to make some sacrifices such as dropping to part-time hours, downsizing your home, selling a car, moving in with family or making major changes to your lifestyle.

Be prepared for challenges

There can be some significant challenges or hurdles to making a career change, Lambart says. Here's how you might navigate them.

- **Lack of experience:** This is a key challenge facing many people, Lambart says. "You may need to be very proactive to get that first job. Build a network in your new career area to improve your chances of gaining employment," she says. Depending on how competitive the industry is, you may need to do an internship or even do volunteer work to get your foot in the door.
- **Fear of failure:** We may fear making a mistake or making the wrong decision. "Recognise that this is totally normal, and be prepared for these feelings of self-doubt to arise often throughout the career change process," Lambart says. Overcome this fear by reminding yourself why you're looking for a change, and by doing plenty of research so there's little doubt in your mind that you are making the right decision.
- **Fear of what others think:** "This fear can be debilitating, especially if you're giving up a career that has required a lot of study and significant work," Lambart says. It may especially affect you if you come from a role with a high income or status, such as law, medicine, and finance.

But it's your life and you deserve a rewarding career. "Be sure about your career change and your reasons why. That way you'll feel more confident explaining it to colleagues or concerned family members," says Lambart

Take your skills with you

When you change careers, you're often not actually starting from scratch because you have [transferable skills that you're able to use in a new career](#).

"Most candidates have many more skills than they realise, which will help them transition into their next career path," Lambart says.

"The hard part is identifying these skills and articulating them correctly. It can help to discuss your skills with someone you've previously worked with or a career coach to help you really appreciate how many skills you have to offer."

Transferable skills that can be use in a new career include:

- client management skills
- communication skills
- relationship building skills
- problem solving skills
- time management skills
- teamwork skills.

“In many cases, these are the skills that are most important to future employers as the technical skills can be developed on the job.”

You will still need to be ready to learn new technical skills required for the role such as clinical skills if you’re moving into healthcare, or digital skills if you’re transitioning into web design or digital marketing, for example.

Changing careers can be daunting, but it takes some self-assessment and research – and that can become exciting once you start to explore your options. It’s normal to be worried about failing, but planning, speaking with others and breaking things down into steps can put you on track to working in a role that you love.

Source: Independent research conducted by Nature of behalf of SEEK, interviewing 4000 Kiwis annually. Published November 2021.