

The Career Pivot

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Change is constant, prevalent, inevitable. We experience it in the weather as temperatures vary, in the seasons as spring cycles to winter, and within ourselves as we accumulate experiences. For most of us, these changes or transitions are characteristically familiar. Similarly, we embrace characteristic changes in our careers, expecting a familiar, linear path of advancement within an organization, within the same industry. This typical paradigm describes the traditional career ladder.

However, a paradigm shift has occurred. Change is still constant, prevalent and inevitable, but it is now faster and more pervasive because change is broadening and deepening our ability to connect. The Internet, now a tool rather than a phenomenon, and technology, itself rapidly evolving, enable instant communication. We have global access, so our relationships are expanding and our perspectives of others are broadening.

On this new stage, today's professionals change careers multiple times. These "career pivots" allow people to make agile transitions and follow different, better paths for themselves. Even employers are noticing the advantage of people who can pivot. Reid Hoffman, a cofounder of LinkedIn® who has pivoted often in his career, asserts, "Markets are rapidly changing. Everyone will have to change and adapt. Because markets are changing, companies need help in adapting; this affects how you develop your skill set, which is not a typical 'career ladder.'"¹

What defines the career pivot and what is its value as a framing strategy in directing your career? How do you manage your achievements so as to translate them into the currency of transferable assets? What are the opportunities and benefits for both the career changer and the new employer? Let's take a look...

What is a pivot?

A pivot is a shift in direction. In sports, such as basketball or martial arts, a pivot takes place with one foot rooted in place as the other foot moves into a different space. The pivot cannot be executed unless the planted foot provides stability. Think of the anchor foot as your foundation of values, accumulated experiences and achievements, which provides balance and strength as your other foot moves into a new area. Both work in concert to achieve change, as well as stability. When you pivot in your career, you are not throwing away what you have accrued in skills and experiences; rather, these are the underpinnings that help you shift in a new direction.

Why pivot?

Because many motivators drive a shift in direction, this requires that you accept an element of uncertainty in your career. Some professionals are unhappy and need to try something new, some become unemployed, some want to build upon a strength or improve a weakness, and for some, life intervenes or dreams change. Others purposefully apply their own formulas to career changes so that they are constantly evolving. In this last instance, pivots serve as a framing strategy to direct their careers and to refresh how they market themselves. With this approach, you can evaluate your assets and highlight how they benefit the particular needs of a potential new employer.

In addition, career pivots offer:

P = possibilities

I = interactions

V = value

O = opportunity

T = transferable assets

S = satisfaction

Possibilities

The term “pivot” is commonly used in start-up tech companies when they implement revisions or adjust what they do in response to changing market conditions. Rather than stubbornly stick to one idea that might not be successful, a company will pivot to a new idea. As the career changer, a pivot puts you on a new path with a new way of thinking. It often means venturing into something unknown, unfamiliar and uncomfortable. In both cases, a pivot is not starting over; it is using what you have in new ways. A pivot opens you up to new possibilities.

In the music industry, we see many instances of artists shifting to embrace new possibilities. Madonna, Beyoncé, and Lady Gaga change styles and often portray new personalities as they market themselves in fresh, new ways.

Interactions

Other musicians pivot to broaden interactions, inviting novel perspectives and connections. Prominent R & B artist Lionel Richie recently moved outside his genre to collaborate with well-known country stars on his latest album. Innovative partnerships help artists stay current and engage with new fans.

Value

As the examples above illustrate, pivots continually create new value for you and others when you leverage your growing skill sets and accumulated experiences. As you become more comfortable with change, uncertainty, new connections, and your evolving surroundings, you become nimble at addressing shifting market conditions. Nimble athletes are quick and light in movement. Similarly, nimble career pivoters are quick to comprehend and adapt with ease in new situations.

Opportunity

The new circumstances, interactions and challenges encountered during a pivot provide opportunities to increase your awareness of others’ perspectives, as well as showcase your flexibility and openness to innovation. In addition, as you effectively face stressors and recover quickly, you demonstrate your resilience as you persist toward your vision. In this way, Reid Hoffman has built upon and transported his experiences to build new opportunities as he has pivoted from social networking to PayPal™ to LinkedIn.

Transferable Assets

Transferable assets are the qualities, experiences and skills that you have accumulated and nurtured in one situation that can easily transfer and apply to a new situation.² What you have achieved in one situation now becomes an asset of value in another.

As an example, John Grisham’s observations and experiences as a lawyer and a politician have translated into a successful career as a storyteller and novelist. Other examples include the

experience of performing multiple tasks simultaneously that develops into a transferable asset of effective prioritization, or working with many people on a project that cultivates the transferable asset of collaboration.

To determine and communicate your own transferable assets, try the following exercises:

How to Determine Your Transferable Assets²

- List five things that make you great at your job.
- Now, one by one, ask yourself, “What makes me good at that?” Try to come up with at least two reasons for each.
- Then, for each of the reasons you listed in the previous step, again, ask yourself, “What makes me good at that?” and you will develop your list of transferable assets.
- Next, do this for your top five to 15 accomplishments.

Re-write Yourself³

Once you have determined your transferable assets, look at how these can be applied to another job, career or industry. For potential new employers, translate what you have done into what they are looking for. Captivate them with your story.

- Ask yourself the following questions:
 - What motivated me to make this change?
 - How did I arrive on this particular path?
 - What is the logic behind my choices?
- Consider your audience: As with your resume, tailor and adapt your story to who they are and what they want; give them a reason to care.
- Mine your experiences: Determine your most significant professional and personal achievements and detail how they have shaped your unique path toward the goals that you and your audience share.
- Highlight your trends: Be sure to call attention to the specific decisions you made that allowed you to expand your learning, as well as any positive patterns that have emerged over the course of your career.
- Articulate: Combine these components to tell the story of your career changes in a way that conveys how your choices define your unique abilities and how this particularly benefits your audience.

How to Facilitate a Career Pivot

- Track mobility: How do people move around in an industry as they progress in their careers? What is the point of entry? What barriers are there with regard to education and certification?
- Note landmarks: Who are the big players and the small upstarts? Accumulate facts about the competitors, which can be achieved easily through an online search.

- Locate guides: Find people who know the ropes and workings of the industry and who are willing to share their wisdom and insight (i.e., contextual industry information). LinkedIn and informational interviewing are helpful tools.

Satisfaction

A final advantage of the career pivot strategy is the satisfaction you experience by enjoying a new adventure, thriving on a new challenge, pursuing your passions or resolving feelings of stagnation. Ultimately, the value of a pivot is that you manage your achievements, you direct your career track, and you determine what success and happiness looks like for you. Create your own unique path to attain your goals. What is *your* strategy?

Sources

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