

TRANSITIONING: WHEN NOUNS BECOME VERBS

Career transitioning is now more the rule than the exception, says **Terry Williams**. Maybe the job you're destined for hasn't been invented yet?



VALENTINE'S DAY HAS BEEN and gone and the word "love" was tossed around frivolously, commercially, curiously and genuinely. Many business writers cite the benefits of having workers who "love" to work at your workplace. They do stretch the meaning of the term 'love' to a broad definition. By the time they've qualified it, we've reached the levels of emotion I express when I declare that "I love pizza!"

Pizza is awesome, I do spend a lot of time with it and I genuinely intend to commit to it for the rest of my life (albeit a life possibly shortened by pizza consumption). Would that level of commitment and emotional connection make me a more productive worker?

VIRTUOUS CIRCLE

There's certainly lots of research and common sense indicating that people with high levels of emotional connection to their work do make more effort and get more out of what they do. This creates a virtuous circle as that feedback stimulates more effort and so forth.

This is where I would make a distinction between people loving their work versus those who love their workplaces. There's a difference. People who love their work for its own sake get into that virtuous circle and score that productivity boost for themselves and their employers. People who love their workplaces may or may not.

Their connection is with showing up to a place or a group of people. It's better than hating your workplace, but I haven't seen any substance backing up that loving your workplace makes for significantly greater productivity.

I do love pizza, but I've been seeing falafels. It's not pizza, it's me.

So, in much the same way that I was committed to pizza and am now transitioning to falafels, it is more the norm now than the exception for people once committed to a career to transition to another, sometimes multiple times in a working life.

I remember seeing a documentary once about prostitution and one of the workers knowledgeably declaring, "It's better than working in a bank."

If Beethoven's mum hadn't bought a piano at some stage then maybe Beethoven would've ended up as a plumber (albeit a deaf plumber, which would at least provide a plausible excuse for never returning customers' calls). That and phones not being invented yet.

FRESH PERSPECTIVE

A transition is scary but it has its upsides, including a fresh perspective. For example, it must be tough for someone who has only ever been a police officer to organise a party. The only parties they ever get to see are crazy, out-of-control and end up with bottle throwing, baton charges and near rioting.

Imagine when they try and organise a surprise birthday party for the Sarge. It's hard enough to keep it a surprise, but it's quite a hassle to steal, overturn and set fire to a Mazda 3. That's probably why so many police transition out of their careers.

A *Harvard Business Review* article boasted it could teach you how to 'explain' your career transitioning, as if a prospective employer would see on your CV that you'd been a pianist, plumber and cop and that meant you were an unstable gadfly who wouldn't have the stick-to-it-iveness to be successful as an investment banker.

Maybe, before the mid-80s, I'd give that prejudice some credence, but not today. If anything the reverse is true. Can you really trust someone who's been in the same job for decades? What's wrong with them?

That said, it was pretty good advice to come up with a "compelling narrative" not so much to justify the transitions but to leverage them as a selling point, celebrating your versatility, ability to learn and need for challenge.

I've known people who transitioned from the rat race to the non-profit sector. I don't know if it worked out for them or not. I've tried to ask but they're too busy being happy and fulfilled.

The pre-retirement transition is a classic move. I had a manager at one outfit I worked at in Nelson who clearly had a transition into orcharding planned for when he retired from his management role. He insisted on an office car big enough for "three bushels of apples". A forward-thinker if not a subtle man.

I have a sideline as a stand-up comedian and the universal first bit of advice they get when starting out is: "Don't quit your day job." This is equally applicable to mid-career, non-comedy transitions.

It's a lot easier to find a new career when you have a job. Or maybe it'll hold you back if you have a safety net? Cortés, the conquistador who conquered the Aztecs, famously burned the boats after landing as a motivator to move his soldiers forwards.

If I'd been one of his soldiers, I'd have seriously considered transitioning into a career as a boat-builder. **E**

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