

Thinking About a Career Change? Here Are 6 Tips From Folks Who've Made a Switch

by [Rebeca Piccardo](#)



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If you've been thinking about a career change, first know this: It's perfectly normal to get an itch to try something new. As your goals, priorities, and ambitions shift, so can what you're looking for in a job.

Maybe you've been thinking about a change for a while now or perhaps you've only recently reconsidered your career path in light of [pandemic-related challenges](#). No matter the reason, it's [never too late](#) to make a move.

Here are tips from six career changers on how they successfully navigated their pivot—so you can, too!

1. Find the Common Threads in Your Career

If you're ready for a change, but not quite sure which direction to take your career, start by thinking about what similarities your previous roles share. That worked wonders for Devon Westerholm.

Before joining cybersecurity company [Palo Alto Networks](#), where she is now the VP of IT Customer Experience, Westerholm worked as a staff member at a homeless shelter, a video editor, and a customer service agent.

"When I look back across this very unusual journey I've taken, there are definitely consistent themes that weave all of it together. I consider myself a champion for those who don't have a voice, whether it's homeless people or customers who are not at the table as we're making decisions on their behalf," she says.

From there, she was able to determine what other industries or types of roles would be a good fit for her skills and allow her to do meaningful work. "Living my personal values and ethics is super important to me, so I'm drawn to mission-led companies," Westerholm says.

[Read more about Westerholm's career story](#)

2. Fill Any Gaps in Your Skill Set

Alexandra Hjert first joined [Squarespace](#) in a customer operations role, but when she discovered her passion for engineering, she was able to make the pivot into software engineering at the same company. How did she do it? First, Hjert dedicated a lot of time to learning the necessary skills—including taking the same coding classes multiple times.

"The classes inspired me to take my learning a step further professionally," she says. "I teamed up with a few colleagues internally to pilot a mini coding bootcamp, where those interested in learning how to code could be mentored by other software engineers at the company."

[Read more about Hjert's career story](#)

3. Explore Opportunities Within Your Company

A career change doesn't always mean switching industries—it could mean a new path within the company you already work for. In Joe Farrar's case, his part-time job at CVS Pharmacy in high school turned into a lifelong career at the company, where he's worked in various

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positions from pharmacy clerk to a director of talent acquisition at [CVS Health](#).

The secret to his success? He wasn't afraid to try new things—even when he didn't have the formal training.

"By raising my hand and being brave it showed people in decision-making positions that I was serious about my dedication and my desire to do more," he says. "Therefore, they knew they could count on me when it was time to fill the new role, assign the project, or direct the new assignment."

[Read more about Farrar's career story.](#)

4. Seek Out Companies With Strong Development Programs

Certain companies are ideal for career changers because they're committed to investing in their employees' professional training and development. That's how Sherronda Hurd, who had previously worked as a pharmaceutical representative, was able to switch jobs—and industries.

Hurd accepted an entry-level analyst position at [Northrop Grumman](#), which allowed her to take advantage of the company's numerous development opportunities, including mentorships, tuition reimbursement, and job rotation programs. She was also given guidance and support to help determine where she could thrive long term—and that led to her current role as a contract administrator.

"I learned that it wasn't uncommon to be unsure of your career path, and by seizing those opportunities, I was able to gain an abundance of knowledge and understanding, which aided me in setting and achieving my career goals," she says.

[Read more about Hurd's career story.](#)

5. Don't Be Afraid to Start Over—at the Bottom

Perhaps the scariest thing about changing careers, especially when you're further along on your current path, is starting from scratch. This type of uncertainty is something Stephanie Santiago faced when she moved into the private sector after serving 22 years in the U.S. Air Force. "In the military, I knew my job, how to succeed, and where to find answers. Having to relearn these things was stressful."

If you're able to make it work financially—or are able to save up in advance of making a career change—an internship or an entry-level role can help you gain experience to grow in a new field or industry. For Santiago, taking part in a veteran career program allowed her to intern with a company and test-drive a civilian role. After her internship, Santiago landed a job as a customer support supervisor at [Biogen](#), where she leads her own team. The takeaway, she says, is that you *can* build yourself up again from any starting point.

[Read more about Santiago's career story.](#)

6. Learn to Overcome Imposter Syndrome

When Erika Russi was laid off from her accounting job at a bank in 2018, she decided to invest her time—and part of her severance package—into furthering her education. She took a data science program at [Flatiron School](#) and with the help of the program's career coaching, she landed a dream job as a data scientist at IBM.

One of the things that Russi struggled with most throughout her job search was [feeling like an imposter](#)—a common side effect when you're giving up one career identity for another. She learned to cope by owning the fact that she still had a lot to learn in her new field.

"It's important to be comfortable with being uncomfortable, which is hard—especially for women," she says. "Leaning into that discomfort and approaching it from a positive perspective and a place of curiosity made such a difference."

[Read more about Russi's career journey.](#)



Rebeca Piccardo is Assistant Editor at The Muse. She was previously a staff writer at the *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, where she wrote about breaking news and crime, and then worked in editorial and creative services for a travel company. Originally from Caracas, Venezuela, Rebeca studied journalism in Miami, Florida.

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