



The Six-Week Career Makeover

Before You Begin

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Whether you are purposefully seeking to change jobs, advance your career, or shift it in a new direction—or if a career transition has been thrust upon you by an unexpected job loss (hello former Federal employees!)—this workbook is designed to give you a structured and proven approach to getting to where you want to be in your career. It's about career transition—getting from your current position or most recent job to a new one. But it's also about managing your career, whether you are currently working in your “dream job” or not.

Yes, I will help you write a good resume. I promise. That's probably the main reason you have this book, after all. You may even be tempted to hire one of those resume writing services to do it for you. If you want to throw away a few hundred bucks, you could do that. But I will warn you that nobody else besides yourself will be able to write your resume in a way that sets you up for success. An excellent resume service may coach you to focus on and define your target, in which case, you'll be doing this work anyway. Getting ready to write your own resume will provide you with the stories and interview answers that highlight your unique value and will be aimed at the right opportunities.

An average reader could get through this book in about two-and-a-half hours—that's barely enough book to read on a regional flight before your transfer out of Atlanta. However, I don't want you to read this book in two or three hours; I want you to work through it over the course of six weeks. More importantly, I don't want you to work on this book alone. Find someone willing to meet with you weekly, even just by phone, to keep you focused and on track. A career transition is not a solo endeavor; you *will* need the support and coaching of someone you trust to get the full value of this workbook. Spoiler alert: That will be your first assignment!

Andrea is an attorney who wanted me to write her resume—I sent her the first version of this workbook. She hired a resume service instead, and they wrote her



resume like a used car salesman pitch, including language about “guaranteed results”—not appropriate for a lawyer. Fortunately, we reworked her resume, refined her interview strategy, and helped her convey her unique, authentic self, and she landed a great job. Just trust me. It will require thought and effort, but you will write a great resume for yourself and save a significant amount of money.

There are limited situations where hiring a resume service might be helpful. If you need a resume quickly to meet an application deadline, or are using a specialist to help you with nuanced phrasing in highly competitive industries, or a highly recommended service that can help highlight transferable skills for a completely new field. What you can never do is outsource self-reflection. Knowing your own career story ensures authenticity in interviews and networking.

Unlike other job search counselors and coaches you may have worked with, I won't even let you start writing your resume until you are ready for that step. Throughout the book, I use the “Ready, Aim, Fire” analogy. Your resume is the Aim step. First, let's focus on Ready. Then we'll Aim. Then, and only then, will we Fire that resume off to those who will (a) actually read it and (b) need, or know who needs, the value you can bring to their organization. Yeah, I know it's sort of a mixed metaphor with the “Career Makeover” title, but let's go with it for now. This book is more than just about job search; it's also about designing a career path and managing a successful career, whether you're changing jobs or not. So, “Ready, Aim, Fire” is the *how-to*, and the Career Makeover is *what* you are learning how to do.

In over 20 years working with professionals who are growing their careers, managing a career transition, or engaging in a job search, I have found that most people skip these crucial steps in the process. Usually, a job seeker (including someone looking to transition internally within their current company) starts with updating their resume, then starts applying for jobs. Instead, I want you to start by getting very clear about your options, the value you bring to an employer, and the problems your unique value helps alleviate for them based on the target



opportunities you identify. Over the years, my colleague Adrienne and I have narrowed down the career transition and job hunt into six steps:

Ready:

Gather your posse (I repeat: This is *not* a solo endeavor!)

Know your values, then know your value

Aim:

Identify options and opportunities

Write a master resume that can be customized for each opportunity

Fire:

Reach out to people who know your work

Land the job and manage your career

Throughout this workbook, I'll be reminding you of something else that Adrienne believes very strongly, that your career is an asset: If it isn't generating income, it's a hobby. It's also not simply a job where the primary reward is a paycheck. Your career may or may not be a traditional job. Think of your career as any activity that generates income, doing work where you bring a unique value (expertise, skills). That could be regular employment, freelance, consulting, or even teaching and mentoring.

The Career Lifecycle

As a talent management executive for multi-billion-dollar companies with tens of thousands of employees, I was responsible for managing the "talent lifecycle" from onboarding to learning and development to succession planning, including programs designed to develop identified "high potential" (HiPo) employees from early career professionals, into managers, and emerging executives. Careers have a lifecycle as well. One of the first "assignments" I would give my new HiPo program participants was to talk to at least two or three executives and ask them about their career journey. No two stories are ever alike. Few careers take a conventional



career-ladder path. Interests change; priorities change—the needs of your life change.

Careers go through phases. There are multiple key drivers in career decisions that occur at different times throughout a career for each individual. So, whether your current transition is voluntary or not, where you are in your career may influence the decisions you make as you move to your next chapter.

You may be early in your career—you don't know what you don't know yet! Despite Boomers lamenting about “entitled” and “unmotivated” Millennials and Gen Z youth, in my observation, young people are very loyal—only they are faithful to their own careers rather than to the companies they work for. They have more transactional relationships with their employers but want a relational work environment. This is a healthier relationship, I believe, than unquestioning loyalty to a corporation that will never be equally loyal to its employees.

Perhaps you've been wholly focused on building your early career, and now you want to start a family. Where you may have been eager to travel, relocate, and work long hours to establish yourself, now you are thinking about work-life balance (a misnomer we'll talk about later).

Often throughout your career lifecycle, you will experience what I call “the Shift.” Your aspirations change; so do your needs and wants. It could be driven by a shift in your personal relationships, family, or health needs requiring a different focus and emphasis on your career, or simply new interests pulling you in a new direction.

Younger generations tend to seek out companies that reflect their own values. They want their work to have meaning and impact. Daniel Pink identified three drivers for feeling engaged with work: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. He argues that traditional motivators, based on the fear of consequences, are ineffective and have no place in the modern work world.¹ Younger generations seek opportunities to learn and master new skills, applying them to contribute to a larger purpose



beyond a paycheck, and they desire autonomy to explore and innovate new ways of working.

Finally, you may have decided you're in a phase of your career where, instead of driving hard toward the next promotion or advancement, you want or need to have a period I call "the Coast." You want some time to coast along in your career because stability and routine are essential to you, so that you can give your prioritized energy to a life situation, including any of the other above shifts. Or, you may be seeking to "coast" because you are "well-seasoned" in your profession (we try not to say "old") and you want to get through the last years of your working life before retirement.

If you're unsure what "phase" you're in, you're not alone—and where we see ourselves often conflicts with your employer's view of where you "should" be. Career phases are not rigid and sometimes overlap, but if you want to consider this, here is a practical way to identify your current career phase:

1. **Early Career (Exploration & Growth)** – You're still learning the industry, building technical skills, and figuring out what type of work energizes you.
2. **Mid-Career (Advancement & Mastery)** – You've established competence, might be leading projects or teams, and now **strategically** decide whether to specialize further or pursue leadership roles.
3. **Career Shift (Reassessment & Realignment)** – External changes (like family priorities, burnout, or company restructuring) may push you toward reconsidering your current path.
4. **Coasting (Stability & Maintenance)** – Rather than aggressively advancing, you focus on sustaining a **steady** career, prioritizing **work-life integration**.



5. **Late Career (Legacy & Influence)** – You may shift toward mentorship, consulting, or roles that allow you to shape industry practices without striving for higher titles.

While all of these are legitimate career phases that most professionals experience at some point, these changes may conflict with what a traditional organization wants and expects from its workforce. Despite lip service to work-life balance and flexible work options, corporate culture, for the most part, remains deeply ingrained with traditional notions of upward advancement, expecting 24/7 availability from salaried workers and a dedication to the company and its mission.

Occasionally, people seek a career transition because of extreme dissatisfaction with their current work situation. It could be the company culture, a toxic boss, an unhealthy work environment, or even sheer boredom. If this is you, proceed only if you have done everything possible to transition to a new department, role, or focus within your current organization. A successful career transition needs to be about moving toward something you want and not about moving away from something you don't want. There are toxic bosses and questionable work values in almost every organization. Sooner or later, you will need to learn how to navigate and manage those challenges. We'll discuss this more in *Part 3: Fire!* and managing your career.

Reactionary moves are not the solution to your work frustrations. Ask yourself: Do you need a shift, or just want one? What are your options? Could you change roles in the same company, or should you look outside your current employer? And, of course, starting right here with this program will ground you before making major decisions. The assignments and activities will help you learn new skills, network effectively, and polish that resume.

Finally, here are a couple of tips to help you recognize when it might be time to make a shift in your career: First, if work feels repetitive with no intellectual or professional growth, it might be time to shift gears. Second, if stability turns into



stagnation (you stop learning new skills or stop networking), consider what small changes can help you reignite some level of engagement without a complete transition.

Successful Transitions

If you're feeling stuck or not sure whether to advance, pivot, or stay put, use this time to take stock of your motivations and frustrations. Self-reflection and conversations with mentors, peers, friends, and even family will start to bring clarity to your ultimate goals. You'll spend two assignments focusing on this part, and I'll share more of my perspectives and research to help you consider variables that are often overlooked in a career transition.

Navla Bahri, Ph.D., conducted research at Columbia University on career transitions. In her study, she found that those professionals who successfully transitioned after a career disruption did five things consistently:²

- Spent time learning about themselves through their network
- Invested in themselves outside of work
- Developed a reflective practice
- Owned their expertise
- Conducted “experiments” to move into their next career stage

These steps ensure emotional readiness, mainly when a job change is driven by frustration or urgency. It can't be emphasized enough how important it is to step back and process these emotions before making big decisions.

This book will help you do each of these and capture the process Adrienne and I use with our clients who come to us when they are looking for a career transition or starting a job search. You can copy, paste, add, and build on each assignment, using the downloadable workbook as an ongoing journal to help you maximize the return of your career asset. The workbook assignments are available for download as a PDF at my website: <https://sherryldimitry.com/resources/>.



Approximately 80 percent of our clients are mid-career to senior-level professional women working primarily in traditional corporate environments. Given Adrienne's and my research focus on professional women, that makes sense. This process, of course, works for both men and women. Yes, I am writing primarily to women, but just like women can wear pants and use power tools, guys can read this book, too, and I hope they do (they may even learn a thing or two). And, while I primarily discuss traditional employment in for-profit corporate settings, much of the advice and ideas presented here can also apply to other work sectors, such as non-profit, government, or entrepreneurial work.

When Bad Things Happen to Good Employees

I have had a successful career. For twenty years, I was a talent and HR executive and organizational change leader. Early in my career, a career coach gave me wise advice: never stop looking for your next job until you have enough money that you don't need to work anymore. For that reason, I always kept my options open and wasn't afraid to move (myself and my family) to a new location for a good new opportunity. Sometimes my growing children felt like military brats: As my career grew, we moved across the country every two to three years. I moved from the Midwest to Arizona, then back to the Midwest for my first "corporate" position. From there, I was recruited to Southern California, and then I moved three thousand miles to the East Coast, near Washington, DC. I was then recruited again to another company (and moved yet again to the southeastern Virginia Tidewater for a couple of years). Six months after joining the new company as a talent management director, the vice president who hired me left the firm, and I stepped in as acting VP for a year until a replacement was hired (I did not want to relocate to New Jersey for the permanent position. I survived Los Angeles, but I had my standards, after all—no more hard winters for me. Virginia is just far enough south to avoid that mostly).



A few months after the new VP was hired, I traveled to New York City, as I did regularly, to meet with him and some of my team, deliver leadership training, and connect with some of the executives I supported. On the third day, instead of walking into what was scheduled as a routine one-on-one meeting with the new boss, he was sitting in a conference room with another human resources VP. Unfortunately, the new boss did not like me.

I was being laid off. “Reorganized.” Not in two weeks. Today. I had to turn over my company laptop and work cell phone, and was then “invited” to exit the office on the upper floors of the Empire State Building instead of being escorted out. To say I was shocked, mortified, and angry would be an understatement. I knew this wasn’t unusual—I had seen it happen to a few other executive co-workers the previous year. It was just the company’s *modus operandi*. It was still devastating not only to be laid off, but also to be practically treated like a criminal in the process. I was traumatized. Anyone who has experienced a layoff or been fired knows what a terrifying experience it is.

If you are going through something similar right now, my heart hurts for you. It truly, truly does. How can you believe that you bring value to an employer after going through that? I get it. This is why I encourage you not to start updating your resume immediately after getting your layoff or termination notice. Take at LEAST a week—two if you can afford it—to process your loss and grieve and vent. To focus on a path forward, you need to feel confident and grounded. Very few people think of either of those in the first days after a job loss, whether it was expected or not.

My day continued to go downhill after the layoff meeting. I walked back to my hotel and asked the concierge to notify my booked transportation that I needed to leave earlier to return to Newark airport. As the car service was coming out of the tunnel from New York into New Jersey, my personal cell phone pinged; my flight had been cancelled due to summer storms. I got the airline notification too late: every hotel within 10 miles of Newark was already booked.



I called my former boss, who still lived in New Jersey, sobbing. She told me to book a hotel closer to her (about 40 minutes north) and come over to her house to visit. When I finally got to her home, she had vodka and chocolate waiting for me. Having Maja on my posse saved me that day (see Assignment 1).

I was “reorganized” and laid off in August. I had just signed a lease to relocate back to Northern Virginia, closer to a major airport. My daughter had just moved to Colorado for her first professional position after graduating from college.

First things first: I reviewed my budget and decided I could make it six months to a year if I were very frugal and rented out part of the townhouse I had just leased. I called my doctoral school classmate and close friend, Adrienne, and we began working on building a consulting practice that supports professional women. At the same time, I continued to search for full-time traditional employment.

Two months after the layoff, the unthinkable happened.

My seven-year-old grandson and his mother (my eldest son's son and his ex-girlfriend) were both hit by a car crossing a school crosswalk and were killed instantly. My son was so distraught when he called, I could barely understand him—it took a few minutes before I grasped what had happened.

Since I wasn't working, I was able to catch the first plane to Tucson. I was there for a week before the police released the bodies to the mortuary, and then tried to help my son cope with his ex's brother putting off funeral arrangements. I was able to spend a month with him. It was the most horrific month of my life, but I was so grateful I was there in Arizona for him. I am not religious—but I definitely believe there is a divine influence in the universe, and sometimes it just means there's no “reason” but usually there are hidden “gifts” or opportunities when bad shit happens.

I experienced two major life traumas in less than three months. Watching my son mourn over the body of his seven-year-old son changed me at my core. My children were now grown and self-sufficient—my experience of being an ambitious, driven career woman fell away and disintegrated like an outgrown skin



on a reptile. Nothing mattered anymore except the people I loved and cared most about.

It took me a year to return to full-time work. I accepted a lower-level position at a significantly lower salary than my executive-level corporate position, and I was thrilled about it. I spent the year between jobs doing a little consulting and a lot of career coaching with several of my former executives, high-potential managers, and emerging leaders. I was also job-hunting full time and kept a very rigorous schedule, often working 12-hour days. I stretched my three-month severance to 11 months. I was about to withdraw the last drops from my savings account and move back to Arizona with my mother or Colorado with my daughter when I was hired by one of the Big Four consulting firms to manage organizational change engagements for their federal clients. I had exactly enough in my checking account to pay my rent before my first paycheck arrived.

Whew.

Ch-ch-ch-changes

Change is constant. And necessary. Without change and adaptation, systems will eventually break down (the second law of thermodynamics describes this phenomenon). Human beings are biological systems living in multiple environments, which are also systems: natural environments, economic, geopolitical, societal, family, and cultural systems. The most complex adaptive open systems can also evolve. Human beings have the unique ability not only to react to change, but also to predict changes within their environments (or “containing systems”) and adapt. We can also initiate change and drive change to create a new state of being. Sometimes, minor, incremental adaptations aren’t enough to keep us going in rapidly or radically changing environments. In those cases, transformative change is required—or desired.



That may be where you are if you are seeking to change your career dramatically. If this is you, this short section is for you. I will warn you: Transformative change is hard and requires far more energy than simple adaptation. This is why earlier I suggested that if the driver of your desire for change is to escape your current situation—a toxic boss or unhealthy work culture—seriously consider instead whether an adaptive change to a new position makes more sense for you. You could seek a different position in the same organization or the same position in a different organization. Radical transformation—changing professions altogether—may mean starting back in an entry-level role, getting additional education or credentials, and competing in a job market against employees with years of experience in your desired field.

That said, careers are rarely linear. The traditional career path progression from entry level to supervisor to manager to director to executive is seldom neat and tidy. My career path, which transitioned from business ownership to non-profit management to corporate management, was more of a rollercoaster than a linear path. When I decided to pursue a corporate career with only entrepreneurial and non-profit experience on my resume, it took 11 months and 47 interviews with 23 companies across eight different states in the US. I knew if I wanted to build a corporate career after completing my Master's program, I would need to relocate away from the beautiful Sonoran desert of Tucson that I loved dearly. My first corporate role was an analyst-level position in organization development and change management in the Midwest—complete with prairie winds, endless cornfields, and snow: not exactly the physical environment I preferred. I told my then-husband and my two youngest children (who were still living at home) that I needed the Fortune 100 experience, and I hoped it would only last about five years. It turned out to be only two years before I was recruited to Los Angeles for my next position, where we stayed for 10 years (although we moved three times around Los Angeles during that decade).



My boss in Pasadena was a big fan of the author and speaker Brian Tracy. “What are you ready to sacrifice for what you want?” Dave would ask me. All choices we make have consequences and trade-offs. I chose to make my career mobile for the experience and opportunities I knew would be critical for a successful corporate career. Be very conscious and intentional about shifting your career focus and clearly defining what is important to you in terms of salary or income, geography, industry, and the impact of your choices on your family. If staying in your current geography near extended family is a priority, the trade-off might be fewer opportunities in your chosen field, settling for working in a different industry, or working for a company you aren’t especially passionate about. If you decide to change drastically from what you have been doing, the trade-off may be lower pay for an entry-level position. My trade-off was that my children were frequently relocated around the country. They missed out on having their cousins and grandparents close by, but they also traveled extensively throughout the country, gaining resilience when their own lives presented challenges and opportunities. My youngest is now mid-career and still gets antsy if she’s been living in the same city or state for more than two years.

One of the biggest considerations, of course, is whether it is even realistic to dramatically change the course of your career or change professions altogether. While many of your previously acquired experiences and skills may be transferable to a different field or position, you may still have gaps in requirements for other types of roles, new fields, or industries.

I recently spoke to a high school teacher who wants to leave the classroom and do something different. We quickly ruled out teaching at the college level because higher education typically relies on adjunct faculty who are grossly underpaid. I once taught a Master 's-level management course while working a full-time job and did the math: It paid less than minimum wage for the hours I put in teaching, grading, and consulting students, although I loved the work. One of the options she wanted to investigate was corporate training. She was not a “sit behind a desk all



day” person, as she described herself. I explained to her that corporate trainers may be in front of a classroom a few times a month, certainly not every day. There’s a lot of “sit behind a desk” work in that role. She would need to brush up on adult learning theory (which differs significantly from the pedagogy of K–12 education) and examine the additional job responsibilities and skills required. My role as Head of Talent Management included training, and I led numerous classroom leadership training sessions. I also had to learn to design online asynchronous learning materials (for e-learning or online courses), which involved a *lot* of “sit behind a desk” work. I was also responsible for succession planning, performance management, change management (including reorganizations and mergers and acquisitions), and employee relations work (which I referred to as 'drama management').

This is why the first few weeks of this program are so critical for you. You will carefully consider what your real talents are and how those reflect your deepest values and priorities in your career. Then, you need to learn what a typical position description looks like in the field you are considering and talk to people who are in those roles to understand what their day-to-day work consists of and looks like. You need to determine whether your transferable skills are sufficient or if you need to acquire additional skills, knowledge, and experience to make a meaningful transition to an entirely new profession. When we’re young, this is easy and almost organically happens within our first few job experiences. As we get older, it’s much harder to trade off the income level, status, and comfort of the job we know so well and where we are confident in our abilities.

Get Ready Before You Aim and Fire

If you’ve ever shot a bow and arrow or used a firearm, you know that the phrase “ready, aim, fire” contains three very distinct actions you take in that specific order if you want your ammunition to reach its target. Getting ready is all about finding



your stance, balance, and center so you can maintain your aim. Without a steady aim, your shot will likely go errant and miss your target.

Being Ready is the critical first step you must take as you carry out your career transition and job search. If you aren't Ready, if you are ungrounded, traumatized from a layoff, uncentered, you will be shooting at anything that moves, and you will feel like a Star Wars stormtrooper missing every shot with your blaster.

Job seekers commonly skip the "Ready" phase, and Resume services ignore it completely. The outcome is applying to jobs aimlessly, piling up rejections, and wasting energy. Without focusing on "Ready", you fail to refine your personal "brand" and make sure Who You Are is well articulated in your resume, your LinkedIn profile, and becomes part of your routine "pitch" reflecting your value and direction. And finally, skipping this step often results in overlooking transferable skills. Instead, jumping right into "Fire" focuses on past job titles instead of how their abilities translate into new opportunities.

Promise me you will NOT skip ahead to the resume chapter until you have completed these first few assignments. You can complete these in one to two weeks if you are not working full-time, or three to four weeks if you are working while transitioning. Especially if you are newly out of work, it will be tempting to skip ahead. Please don't.



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- ¹ Pink, Daniel H. (2009) Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us. NY: Riverhead
 - ² Read more on Navla's blog: [Insights Blog - Nayla Bahri](#).