

How Many Jobs Make a Career?

11 ways to create a fulfilling career.

by Heidi Smith Luedtke



If you're like many military spouses, you reinvent your life every time you move to a new duty station. Though it can be fun to try new things, frequent job changes can also make it difficult to progress on a meaningful career path. But don't let self-pity or self-doubt keep you from creating a work life you love.

"Your attitude sets the tone for what is going to happen in your life," career coach Wendy Billie said.

1. Create a vision. Make it a habit to sit down at least twice a year and think about what you want (and what you don't want) in your work life. Imagine it vividly.

2. Experiment with possibilities. If your dream job seems really far out, don't despair. Take classes to learn more, volunteer your time to develop needed skills and social contacts, or shadow someone who does the job you want.

3. Stay flexible. It may feel like you're at a disadvantage because you're forced to change jobs frequently, but the days when employees worked their way up from the mailroom to the corner office are long since past. "Most adults, especially those in the 20- to 35-year-old age bracket, will have four to six careers in their working life span," said career coach Kathy McFarland Scianella. The key to navigating tight

job markets and successful planning is flexibility, she said.

4. Be a lifelong learner. If you've held the same type of job for a long time, you may get comfortable (and even bored) with it. Even if a job change isn't on the horizon, find ways to challenge yourself and expand your capabilities. Ask the boss to support you in trying new roles or obtaining additional training.

5. Focus on skills. Specific job experience is important to employers, but it is even more important that you have the skills and abilities required to perform the job. Zero in on the skills you've developed in previous positions, such as public speaking, documenting important data, and handling disgruntled customers' complaints. These abilities transfer to many careers.

6. Build on strengths. Approach career advancement as self-development, Billie advises. Identify what you are really good at and what you enjoy doing (hint: they usually overlap). Focus on using your strengths in new ways or developing complementary talents.

7. Leverage all your experience. Identify skills and abilities you developed through any experience you have, Scianella said, including volunteer and church-related activities. Paid work isn't the only way to build job skills.

8. Target your résumé. Human resources will screen applicants based on essential functions of the job. That's hard to do with a one-size-fits-all approach, so tailor your message for each position.

9. Make a strong first impression. "You have 11 seconds to make an impression on a résumé," Scianella said. Start with a compelling summary of skills and use industry-specific keywords to demonstrate familiarity with the industry and position. Usually you can identify important keywords from the position description itself.

10. Use strong adjectives. Choose your words for maximum impact. Some strong adjectives include flawless, significant, best-ever, exemplary, and innovative. Be confident in your abilities but don't overstate them either.

11. Never lie. Employers do verify the information you provide, Scianella cautioned. Tell the truth, but put yourself in a positive light by describing your accomplishments, even if you were ultimately let go from a position.

Whether you need to work to help cover family expenses or choose to work to fulfill personal and professional goals you've set for yourself, smart career planning can really pay off. **MSM**