



Reducing the Stress of a Career Transition

A career transition can be hard—especially when it isn’t planned. [Charlene Bergman](#) explores the mental health consequences of transition, and provides some insight on how to cope and maintain through a career gap.

Executives move from one job to the next more frequently than a generation ago. However, as you know, not all transitions are made equal—with some executives finding themselves in an unexpected career gap.

Many transitions are often unforeseen and come with the uncertainty of where and when the next opportunity will emerge. Aside from the practical challenges around finding the next position, many encounter stresses related to perceived loss of career status, personal identity, social image, and even daily routine.

Sometimes, staying upbeat can be as difficult as managing the search itself. So, it shouldn’t be a surprise that there are higher rates of depression among executives in the throes of transition. Emotions can add to the challenges of the job search, especially if they hamper motivation or the way we project ourselves to others.

As human beings, we fear what we don’t know. More specifically—and for executives in search mode— we fear what we can’t control. The objective, therefore, is to control as much of the process as possible by building milestones on the journey and to measure progress accordingly. Here are a few guidelines to steer the process and help reduce the stress.

Determine what help you need and secure it

Finding a new role requires different skills and expertise than being good at your job. Identify where you need assistance in defining your next role; in preparing your resume, credentials and references; and in making contacts. Access experts, colleagues with their own personal experience, and family and friends who can provide support. And yes, this may mean extra help—even professional help—with your attitude and motivation. This will arm you with the tools required to begin a search, but it also gives you the confidence of knowing that you’re doing what you need to do.

Use the opportunity for self-reflection and re-creation

Are you in the right industry? Are you tired of doing the same thing and looking for something more? Is it time to learn a new skill? If there was ever a time for career and self-reflection—a transition is the perfect time.

There are few points in your life when you have the time and perspective to examine your own career goals, desires, and skillsets in detail—away from the daily grind. For many, the buffer between jobs is an opportunity for a reset. It's a chance to look at career avenues that may be a better fit than the one you left and to define a new path that suits you best.

Develop a plan

Finding your next position will be different for everyone, so your plan to get there may be somewhat unique. Once you've defined your career goals in sufficient detail, you'll need an action plan that lays out the steps you need to take to get there. This requires specifics around the tasks to perform, the information you need, the contacts to make, and a timeline in which to do it. The plan is your guide and your companion through the whole process and it will give you confidence that you are making progress.

Measure your progress against the things you can control

At the end of each day, you need to ask yourself not whether you landed a job today, but whether you made progress on the items called for in your plan. If your plan is sound and you're doing what's needed, success will come. And yes, it's hard to predict exactly when.

Concentrate on networking

Networking accomplishes at least two things. First, we are all social beings and staying engaged with others in the workforce helps reinforce our sense of connection and belonging. But more practically, your next job offer will come from a person who gets to know you and your value—not from an organizational chart or a resume-screening robot. When projecting yourself to others, foster a sense of confidence in describing the results you could potentially deliver in a new role, since you'll be doing it regularly.

Enjoy the time to do other things

There's a saying that looking for a job is a full-time job, but whoever came up with that adage never experienced the downtime of waiting for employers to respond. Don't blame yourself or your plan for those idle periods, and don't feel guilty about enjoying your interests, hobbies, or relationships that you didn't have enough time for before. This is a chance to have some fun, however tough it may be to convince yourself! It can also provide a connection point with others that you meet who have similar interests.

Finally, maintain perspective and stay motivated

Many executives look back very positively on the time they spent between roles. For some, it's remembered as a chance to recalibrate and set new goals—even a time for self-discovery. Would they have said the same thing at the time? Maybe not, but our narratives change with the benefit of perspective.

Let's be honest, making the best of a career gap can sometimes feel like making lemonade from lemons. But if you can remind yourself of your own worth, and measure your progress against a plan that's within your control—motivation will spur success and combat the stress. Indeed, there's always an element of luck involved in finding that next role, but in the long run, we make our own luck.

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