

# Changing economy requires flexible approach

Stephanie Veale • January 30, 2011

Changing careers is common practice in tough economic times, as some industries fade and others boom.

But starting over in a new field isn't always a straightforward proposition. You may have to go back to school for additional training or even an advanced degree; at the very least, you'll have to be creative in the way you market yourself to potential employers. The sky may not be the limit as far as the options you'll have.

Still, finding a new career — whether out of necessity or passion — should never be viewed as impossible, said Deb Koen, president and CEO of Career Development Services.

"It's not a matter of time or age. I wouldn't put any limits or boundaries on it at all," Koen said. "But it takes an incredible amount of commitment in a difficult economy."

Peter Pecor, CEO of RochesterWorks, said he thinks that many employers these days are open to career-changers who are reframing their skill sets to fit a new field. With the current economy, employers have to expect that they'll be interviewing people who were laid off from their previous job and are seeking employment in another area.

One strategy for job seekers is to develop a resume that emphasizes their talents, Pecor said. Rather than using the traditional format that lists employment chronologically, strengths and skills are listed at the top of the page.

"I think the chronological resume is something of the past," Pecor said.

The words on your resume can be an avenue to job opportunities you may not have considered. SMART 2010 is a resume-scanning technology endorsed by the state Department of Labor. It generates job listings based on keywords found in resumes, Pecor said.

Your network is essential, too.

"It's important to have people around you who support you, who can help you generate options, and who can work with you to keep your confidence up as you go through the process," Koen said.

Katie Sauer, 27, sought to change fields in 2008 after finishing a teaching fellowship in New York City. Her stint in a Harlem classroom made her quite certain that life as a teacher was not for her.

Sauer, a Rochester native, decided she wanted to move into public relations. Although she had been an English major in college and was a good writer, she had no experience writing press releases or working in communications. So she moved home and began hitting the proverbial pavement.

"I knew that I needed to jump into things," Sauer said. "Rochester is a pretty small and well-connected community. I started by asking people I knew if they knew anyone in the field who might be interested in talking with me, and I scheduled half-hour informational interviews here and there."

Her networking paid off. Within weeks, she was helping the local chapter of the American Diabetes Association and landed an unpaid internship in public relations at the American Red Cross. Through a contact she made at the Warner School at the University of Rochester, she helped a business owner with publicity for her store.

After a couple of months, Sauer got an interview at the Golisano Children's Hospital at the University of

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Rochester Medical Center. The hospital hired her as a public relations assistant.

Sauer used the interview to play up her strengths and experiences: writing, challenges she overcame while teaching, and the motivation she displayed in the months since she'd moved home.

"I really cared about giving back to the community and working in the PR field," Sauer said. "That lined up with what they were looking for in a job applicant."

Having a clear focus in your job search is key, Koen said. While it's OK to have a spectrum of jobs in mind, don't cast too wide a net or feel tempted to take any opportunity that comes along. Get a handle on the strengths and experiences you have, figure out what you really want to do and what kind of setting you'd like to work in, and research which fields have the most job growth.

Also pay attention to where you have gaps or weaknesses. Be realistic about this, Koen said. You're automatically at a disadvantage entering a new field when you're competing against people with years of experience.

Koen recommends joining a professional organization to make contacts and keep abreast of developments in the field. Another strategy is to seek opportunities — even if they're unpaid — that highlight your skills or help you develop new skills necessary for the field you're entering, Koen said.

No matter what industry you target, Koen recommends exploring as many avenues as possible for getting where you want to go.

"There generally is more than one way to move into a new field," she said. "Select the route that is best for you."

*Stephanie Veale is a freelance writer in Rochester.*

**SMART 2010**

SMART 2010 is a specialized web-based skills-matching program that analyzes resumes for skills and work experience. It then electronically generates job recommendations for unemployed New Yorkers. The system can be accessed locally through RochesterWorks.

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