

Is a career change the right move?

If job hunting or promotion is on your New Year agenda, it's time to get busy. Experts say a January holiday is the perfect chance to revise priorities and form a plan of attack for coming months.

Jacqueline Allen from human resources consultants DBM believes a short break of complete rest is vital for workers but that they shouldn't wait until their first day back on the job before addressing career options.

"The first thing that you've got to do is identify what it is you want to do, and a lot of people struggle with that," she says. "If you take some time to identify some life goals - and that would include your career - then you can start working out what you need to do in order to get to where you want to go."

Allen says a new job isn't necessarily the answer to career problems. Many people become burnt out and just need to take a few weeks off rather than resign.

It's also worth taking a close look at the way you work to see whether you can improve it.

"You might be taking on work that you don't need to take on or be feeling like you've got to put in a 16-hour day to be doing your job," Allen says.

"But if you can't resolve problems in your existing job, then what's going to be different if you change jobs?"

If you're simply looking for more money, it is worth talking to your manager about a pay rise before looking for another job. You are most likely to be successful if you can go into the meeting with a list of your accomplishments in your current role.

Allen says people may need to change jobs if they spend their entire day doing work they don't enjoy, their interest in their job is low, the culture of their organisation is moving in a direction they don't like, or they wake up feeling sick at the thought of going to work.

"If these things happen over a prolonged period, not just a day or a week, then, yes, it's probably time to move on," she says.

The first step to successful job hunting is working out what an ideal -- or acceptable -- job would be.

Professional help is available to manage career transitions but with a little enthusiasm and honesty, job hunters can usually go through the process themselves. Books, libraries and newspaper careers sections offer a wealth of information.

Allen says you need to work out three key points: "One of them is your skills, that's what you can do, then there's your interests, which is what you like to do, and then there is what you could call your motivation or your fit, which is what you will do."

"For example, if you say 'Look, I've got good skills in planning and strategy and working with numbers' and 'I enjoy working with financial products' and 'I'm really motivated to help people and interact with them', then you might be suited to a career in financial planning."

Another useful technique is to read job ads and pick out appealing phrases, whether they refer to an industry, skill or company. You can then write your ultimate job ad - which will give you a much clearer idea of which ads to apply for.

Once you have worked out your aims, it should be relatively easy to work out a plan for getting there.

Writing down short-term objectives can clarify what you need to do next -- whether it's applying for jobs, updating skills or working towards a new role in your existing company.

Allen says that whatever your aim, it's worth spending some of your holiday time updating your resume, practising interview techniques and perhaps drafting application letters.

These skills can make all the difference when applying for a job or trying to impress the boss. She says resumes in particular can be pivotal.

"The classic mistake most people make is they list all their responsibilities, when the focus should be on your accomplishments. In other words, it's not what you've done, it's how well you did it."

"For instance if you were looking at working in a call centre, you might say that you increased the number of calls you handled within an hour by 30 per cent, within six months. So you've answered calls -- that's just something you're meant to do - but employers want to know how well you do it too.

"Employers want to know how well you did your job so they'll know how well you'll perform for them."

Another vital skill is networking, even if it's just with neighbours and friends' colleagues. Research suggests that it's the way about 80 per cent of people find work.

"I say to people 'Go to parties, talk to people. Don't ask them for a job but let them know the kind of work you are looking for and if they know of anyone who has a contact that you can talk to, to let you know," Allen says.

"I once worked with a guy who had spent three months applying for jobs - 112 jobs -- and within two weeks of doing a program with us he found a job, and he found it networking with his next door neighbour."

Jo Rodgers, The Daily Telegraph, January 3, 2004.