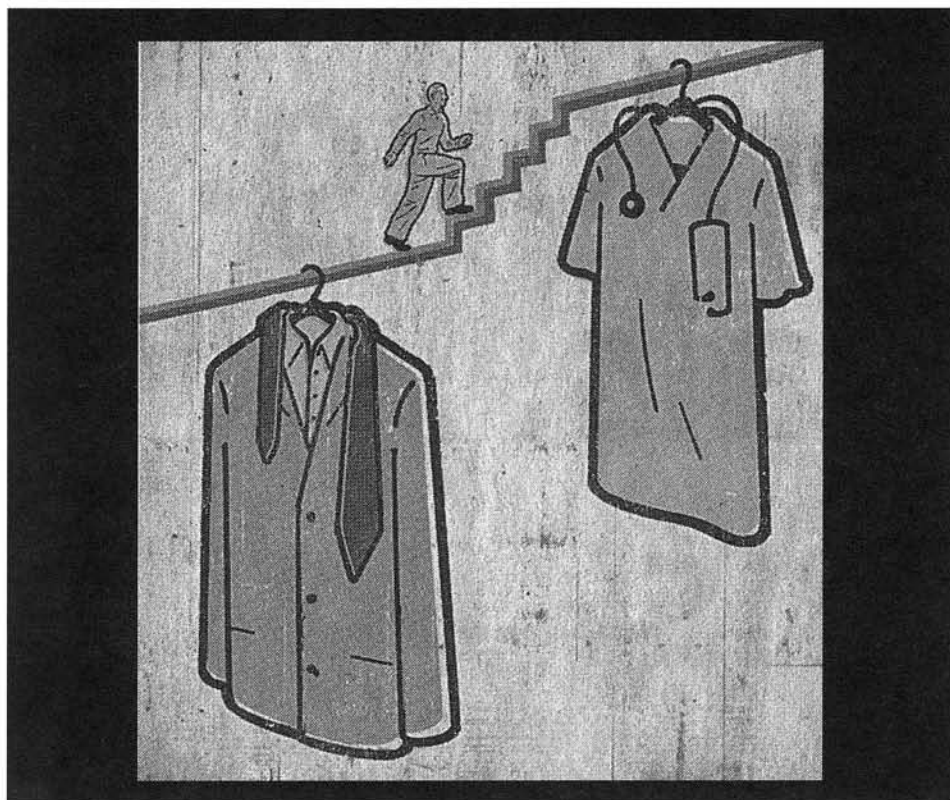


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The Jungle | Recruitment, Pay and Getting Ahead | By Erin White



Profession Changes Take Time but May Be Worth Wait

FRANK HARRINGTON spent 13 years climbing the ranks at a semiconductor maker in California. But he gradually realized he hated his job, so he changed careers. It took years, but today he's a nurse — and much happier.

People often dream of changing careers. But substantial change takes

a lot of work, and it may require additional schooling or intensive networking. Many people lack the stamina. Career counselors and career switchers say that laying the step-by-step groundwork for a change isn't easy but is often necessary.

Nella Barkley, president of the coaching firm **Crystal-Barkley Corp.**, helps clients make career transitions. "They invariably think it will take much less time than it really does," she says. A profound career change, she notes, usually takes years.

But even small first steps often make people happier, Ms. Barkley says. Simply having a plan for long-term change brightens people's attitudes, she has noticed. She tells clients to first "stabilize" their current job situations with relatively short-term, straightforward changes. If they dislike their co-workers or boss, they can try switching departments. If the travel is too much, they should talk with the boss about curtailing it or switching to another role.

Then employees can focus on achieving a longer-term change. They need to plan not only the work required to make the change but also how to accommodate family and financial obligations. Still, Ms. Barkley says, clients overwhelmingly find the changes rewarding despite the obstacles. What's more, they become better equipped to fine-tune their careers and lifestyles in the future.

Mr. Harrington's transition, for instance, took several years. He started at the semiconductor firm as a production-control planner. As he worked his way up the management ladder during the 1990s, he became increasingly unhappy. He disliked the

internal political sparring required of management roles. In 1999 he was promoted into a job that required him to be particularly confrontational, and he hated it.

That situation led him to think back to a conversation he had had about six years earlier with a family acquaintance. He had mentioned his then-early-stage malaise. Out of the blue, she had suggested he might like nursing. "It resonated immediately," he says. But he was making good money and winning promotions. So he kept the fantasy in the back of his mind. Then, with his job nearly unbearable, he decided to take the first steps toward a career in nursing.

He researched the entry requirements for the nursing program at a local college. He lacked some prerequisites for admission, so in September 2000 he enrolled in night classes. He felt an immediate affinity for both the course work and his classmates. "I felt really convinced that I was doing exactly the right thing," he says.

At the same time, the technology bubble was bursting, and in February 2002 he was laid off from his tech job. He had been planning to start nursing school full-time in September and have his family — he and his wife have three children — live off savings and stock sales. But the value of his former

The transition took a long time, but it was worth it, he says.

employer's stock was dropping precipitously, so he and his wife decided she would go back to work, as a manager in local government.

In 2004, he graduated. With nurses in hot demand around the country, he got four job offers in three days. He now works in the trauma intensive-care unit at a public hospital in Silicon Valley. His base salary is roughly the same as it was in his old job, but his total income is lower because he doesn't get stock options.

Nursing, of course, is no less stressful than his previous job. But now the stress seems worth it. Rather than pulling his hair out over widgets, he says, "at least now there are actual lives at stake." He used to hate talking about his job because he found it so boring. But he loves talking about nursing. "I'm fiercely proud of doing it," says Mr. Harrington, now 42 years old.

Other times, people take small steps without realizing they will lead to major change. Antreas Ghazarosian, 60, spent two decades running

a commercial-real-estate firm in New York. By the late 1990s, though, he was burned out.

He tried modifying the business. He shifted toward serving clients with many facilities so that he could do more work for fewer clients and not constantly churn through transactions.

But he realized he wanted a more profound change. In 1999 he sold the business, stayed on for a few months, and then consulted for another company for about a year. Ultimately, he founded a new firm. This one helps companies reduce their facilities-related expenses. Now, he deals mainly with corporate financial managers and tax professionals rather than brokers and landlords. His work is broader and more analytical.

The transition took a long time, but it was worth it, he says. "You just cannot get up one day — at least I can't — and say, 'This is not working, forget it,'" he says. "It's not an overnight kind of thing."

