

Moving On and Starting Over

Jim Kenyon

What do you do when it's time to leave your current job but you don't have another one lined up? You've taken a lot of pride in this job, forged many professional relationships and friendships, and now it's time to move on. Maybe your services are no longer needed and you're being downsized. Perhaps the work environment has become uncomfortable that for your well-being and peace of mind, you know it's time to go. Whatever the reason, you need a plan to deal with all the vagaries that come up as this sea of change occurs.

Take Stock in a Support System

Family and friends are great sounding boards to help assess your situation. They can provide the support you need as you figure out the next step. You should also look to professional colleagues for advice.

People who have gone through the need for change expressed similar feelings, such as fear and doubt. Most say they feared the worst but were surprised to find that life (and work) improved dramatically after changing jobs. During the early phase of change, they were able to keep their anxiety at a manageable level by talking about their concerns, fears, and hopes. Sharing your concerns with others helps lighten the burden of striking out into the unknown. Simply knowing you are not alone can be a huge boost to your sense of security.

Talking to colleagues can point the way to new opportunities—the classical networking strategy. The more people in your profession that know you are looking for a job, the more likely that you will find one suited for you.

Jim Kenyon, CBET, is the biomedical department supervisor at Good Samaritan Hospital in Puyallup, WA.



Talking to someone who has gone through this with a successful outcome can be a real moral booster. As one example, a service technician for a major patient monitoring manufacturer was laid off when he chose not to move from Florida to the upper Midwest, where the service center was relocated after a merger. Initially, he felt a huge amount of anxiety and didn't know what he would do next. He stayed in contact with his colleagues and was approached a few months later by the new owner to work as a traveling service school instructor. That was three years ago. Since then, he now works about nine to 10 months a year teaching one to two week classes all across the U.S. In addition, he has spent a month vacationing in New Zealand twice and feels a whole new world has opened up for him.

So what do you do if you don't have a lot of contacts or a mentor to guide your efforts? For those working in the biomed field, I would recommend contacting your local biomedical association.

As past president of the Washington State Biomedical Association (WSBA) I was privileged to help a number of technicians find positions in our area over the years. I knew supervisors at health care organizations that were hiring. As WSBA president from xx to xx, I also would recommend whom to contact or invite the newcomer to our monthly meetings to meet members and announce their availability and interest in employment. More than a few found jobs this way. Similar to the old real estate adage with a twist: "Networking, networking, networking!" This approach can connect an applicant to a job in a very efficient way.

Focus on Your Goals

My recent professional journey parallels this transition process very closely. I left a position as a biomedical supervisor of six years and a total of 17 years at my previous employer. The times had changed and I felt it was in my best interest to move on. Best decision I ever made, but it wasn't easy to land that next position. But several factors were in my favor: 1) I had quite a few

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contacts, 2) I had a good reputation, 3) I had enough savings to tide me over for many months, and 4) I had several good friends and family to provide support as I worked my way to new job.

I inquired about job openings around the state and one stood out from the others. It was a position with a major hospital on the other side of the state as a field service engineer. I had grown up and gone to school in this area years before and the person in charge of the program was someone I knew well. I focused on this opportunity and felt it was the right direction to go from the start. (Gut feelings count in this process!) As always, it took some time to fill out applications, schedule interviews, and let the hiring process work. I started two months later after moving and saying good-bye to many good friends and colleagues. It hasn't been easy to start over, but the challenges have definitely broadened my horizons and made me a stronger person.

If your situation doesn't prove to be as lucky and straightforward as mine, what should you do? First, don't give up hope. Your path may just take longer. Stay focused on your goals; take a job in another area to pay the bills if necessary. I had an opportunity to teach a quarter of biomedical equipment technology at a community college in Seattle last year. Most of the students were laid off aerospace workers in the second year of their two-year program. The stories they told me about being laid off, looking for a new career, and going from the depths of despair to new hope for the future was quite inspiring for me. Many would face the difficulty of finding a job in the Seattle area with so many graduates in the market. Some have found jobs by adhering to the advice in this article—be persistent and don't give up hope. Some will have to relocate but once they have some experience under their belts, they may be able to come back to the Seattle area someday.

Learn from Experience

What did I learn from my old job that helps me with my current one? I used to do field service for about a dozen physical therapy and doctor offices affiliated with my old job. I had experience with a broad range of patient care equipment including defibrillators, anesthesia machines, patient monitoring systems, and many other devices. I prepared work schedules as the department supervisor in the old job and kept track of the workloads and completion records.

Having a global viewpoint of the operations of a

biomedical department was helpful for me to perform my current job, which is a microcosm of my previous environment. Having a great deal of interaction with staff helped to develop confidence and an openness to promote good communication skills, a key component in field service work. This all took time to develop.

One other factor I believe weighed heavily in my professional growth is serving as an officer and volunteer in our statewide biomedical organization over the last eight years. When I began my career, I felt like a fish out of water but slowly found the skills and confidence to talk and work with people from many backgrounds, positions of power, and knowledge. I'm not the same person I was when I got involved with the WSBA back in mid-1990s. And it's given back much more than I ever gave it.

So in summary, if you find yourself changing jobs not by your choice, 1) rally your support system, 2) make a plan, 3) network, 4) stay positive and 5) make finding your next job your current job. This can be a tough time but it also could turn out to be the time of your new life. ■

