

How to Make a Pivot in the Latter Half of Your Career

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Summary. Changing careers as an older worker can be daunting, especially amid today's relentless uncertainty. But you already have what you need to set yourself apart as a candidate — you just need to do a little extra preparation to ensure that hiring managers and... [more](#)

Changing careers can be challenging, especially when you've worked in a single profession or industry. Doing so when you're in the last decade or two of your career may be even harder because

you need to maintain a certain compensation, level, or title and your competition is younger and “experienced enough” to get the job done.

I remember at 33, when I wanted to change careers from TV news reporter to entertainment lawyer, I was scared hiring managers wouldn’t value my decade of work experience. That fear multiplied exponentially when I decided to pivot careers again at 48 from entertainment lawyer to HR business partner in a new industry, tech.

If you’re considering making a move to a different type of role or industry later on in your career, here are some ways to set yourself apart from your more junior competition during the interview process.

Highlight experience that requires more years of work to master.

Being more mature in the workplace means you understand how to excel in not only the “what” of work but also the “how.” Highlight the personal, interpersonal, and soft skills that have contributed to your career achievements and progress.

Personal skills like dependability, punctuality, and commitment show your overall work ethic and energy to perform the job. Soft skills are also important, such as independence in performing work, being able to work at all levels of an organization, and an ability to understand how your work contributes to a company’s larger goals. For example, if you’ve had the opportunity to present to or work with the CEO or other executives, highlight this experience to show you have executive presence, the ability to communicate effectively, and that you’re not intimidated by more senior leaders.

Finally, interpersonal skills are critical in the corporate workplace. Knowing how to partner with cross-functional team members, problem-solve with others, align and manage stakeholders through change, and influence without authority are skills valued in every job. But your goal is to demonstrate these skills along with a higher level of business acumen — perhaps by giving an example that shows your ability to understand the wide-ranging implications of decisions or by showing an orientation toward profitability when answering a question. Providing examples of complex work situations that show your mastery of interpersonal skills will distinguish you from the more junior employee who hasn't had as much exposure or time to gain that experience.

Show how you'll bring value.

Even if you've never worked in the specific career area you're pursuing, as a seasoned worker, you've likely picked up plenty of skills and experiences that are applicable to it. And during this time when many companies are cutting costs by combining roles and expecting employees to do more with less, demonstrating the versatility of your skillset will help hiring managers see you as a top candidate.

For example, say you've worked in finance your whole career and now want to move into business operations. Your deep understanding of the nuances of finance, balancing a P&L, amortization, etc., will likely make you a more attractive candidate than someone more junior without direct finance experience. When asked a behavioral question that starts with "Tell me about a time when..," don't just talk about what you did from an operational perspective — also explain how your background in finance was the main reason you were successful in solving the problem, influencing someone's perspective, or gaining stakeholder alignment. Connect the dots so the

interviewers understand how your broad set of skills makes you more valuable than someone who only has the required skills listed on the job description or has more limited work experience.

Demonstrate how you continually upskill.

Continually growing your skillset shows you have the energy to keep learning and you aren't just coasting to retirement. To distinguish yourself from more junior candidates, explain how you've grown your skills and knowledge in specific ways that are relevant to the new career. Familiarize yourself with the digital tools and applications commonly used in the industry by reviewing job descriptions from its lowest- and highest-level roles. There you'll find language such as, "Must be proficient in X" or "Must have experience leveraging multiple technologies such as Y.." Then research how those applications are used in the specific field.

Also, take the time to understand how AI and machine learning might affect the new career — even if you're planning on retiring relatively soon. Research how AI is being used or might be used in the future in your desired field through a simple search for "AI impact on marketing" or "AI impact in finance." Being able to discuss emerging technologies and how they'll change the way work is performed will elevate your candidacy above more junior candidates who don't have the analytical skills to apply this knowledge in future-focused, strategic conversations.

Prepare to answer: "But you haven't actually done this before?"

Never admit that! In all interviews, it's your job to connect the dots between your skills and the job you're interviewing for using keywords from the job description.

When I transitioned from entertainment lawyer to HR business partner and executive coach, I was asked this exact question in every interview. Here's what I said to persuade hiring managers that I had the skills and capabilities to succeed in the new career (keywords from the job description are in bold):

HR business partners **align employees' skills and capabilities to achieve company goals**. That's what I've been doing on reality shows: **strategically helping** creative executives and producers build strong casts of people with **the right skills** to ensure successful shows **that drive the business**. I'm also in charge of **coaching** producers **on people-related issues that don't have a playbook** and **require exceptional judgment**. This is exactly what **HR business partners** do in an office — I'm just on set.

I work with my clients to prepare for this question when they're transitioning careers as well. For example, English teacher Janet was asked, "So are you a teacher or a program manager?" Janet replied:

Both. I am an English teacher but to perform that job, I need to be an **exceptional program manager in preparing programs to achieve our business objectives**, which in my world is to improve both student and faculty **performance** across the district. Since I'm more of a program manager than educator, I became **program-management certified** so I could gain more tools and best practices in areas such as **long-term planning, reconciling interdependencies between multiple projects, and facilitating communication on programs** across multiple schools and leaders within the district. I believe I can bring the most **value** to a company as a **program manager**, and that is why I am parlaying these **skills and capabilities** into a more corporate setting.

Lean on and highlight your vast network.

If you've been in the workforce for 20 to 30 years, you've likely worked with people who are now executives, board members, or managers and are therefore in a position to vouch for you.

Leverage those relationships to learn about jobs (some of which may not be posted publicly yet), and see if those connections can introduce you to recruiters or hiring managers.

Also, for certain jobs, a vast network, which less-experienced candidates are less likely to have, could make you a particularly attractive candidate. For example, clients or contacts from your work in sales or business development could expand your reach, influence, or access to benefit the next company — and help you be perceived as more valuable than the less-established candidate who doesn't have a book of business or deep industry relationships.

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Changing careers as an older worker can be daunting, especially amid today's relentless uncertainty. But you already have what you need to set yourself apart as a candidate — you just need to do a little extra preparation to ensure that hiring managers and interviewers can see how your unique set of skills, experiences, and perspectives will move their team and organization forward.

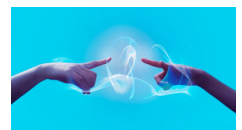
Marlo Lyons career, executive, and team coach and the award-winning author of *Wanted – A New Career: The Definitive Playbook for Transitioning to a New Career or Finding Your Dream Job*. You can reach her at www.marlolyonscoaching.com.

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