

Dear Coach

What are your career aspirations? How are you going to reach those goals? This column could guide you to a new career stage. //

T+D WANTS YOUR STORY!

We are looking for people to contribute to this column. Are you anticipating a move into e-learning? Are you a recent graduate who wants to become a designer, presenter, or trainer? Are you a corporate trainer transitioning into a career as a consultant or entrepreneur?

We want to hear about your career aspirations and help you with the challenges you face in your pursuit of those goals. Send your career path story to mailbox@astd.org.

Dear Coach,
Radical change is nothing new to me. Armed with a bachelor's degree in humanities, which rendered me fascinating at cocktail parties but not all that employable, I spent my 20s living abroad, teaching English, playing the piano in restaurants and bars, waiting tables, and delivering sailboats across various oceans for the rich and not all that famous.

It was a great life, but adulthood and responsibility come to us all, and by the time I was 30, I was back in the United States, in San Diego where I received a master's in educational technology from San Diego State University in the late 1980s.

I spent nearly a decade at a Silicon Valley computer company, where I worked various jobs, from instructional designer to training manager. For about five years, I traveled internationally for the company, working across the Pacific Rim on pretty much any training topic you can imagine.

As I began to have kids, the travel became a problem, so eventually I took a job in Seattle as a training director for a telecom company. I spent four years there leading a talented team with a wide range of training responsibility; but as my family continued to grow, my interest in corporate life started to wane. Many of the things that had been important to me started to seem not all that important. I started to envision the time I spent in meetings while my kids grew up without me, so I left.

This radical change from director to dad was a great blessing, and I have been here ever since, raising three amazing creatures, though I have—for the sake of my sanity—kept my hat in the ring. Over the years I have done a variety of contract training jobs, some for the money (management and executive coaching), and others for the love of the content (working with a national foundation to create a variety of courseware of interest to conservators— from cool science stuff to courseware on digital photography).

To be honest, I am ready for new challenges. I have made myself over so many times by now that the thought of starting over again is not the least bit frightening, though I am in great need of advice and direction on just how to go about it.

While I'd like to make big piles of money doing something fascinating to the acclaim of millions, I am realistic

and I know that at age 50, coming back into the workforce after a seven-year hiatus from the corporate realm presents some challenges. While I believe that people with communications skills, common sense, passion, creativity, and empathy for other people can do a lot of jobs well, the challenge is to find the job, and convince the hiring manager that I am one of those people!

What do I have to offer? I have corporate communications and coaching experience, but most of my expertise lies in the realm of training and instruction, with an emphasis on international training. I've done a lot of contract writing, and I enjoy rolling up my sleeves and delving into Photoshop and other applications that provide a creative outlet.

I believe that part of my challenge is to determine just what it is that I want to do, and to learn more about what opportunities are out there. What are the up-and-coming jobs or places to work for people with training expertise? Where can I go to learn more about training opportunities these days, and what skills are most valued by today's employers? Seven years is a long time to be away.

For years I told myself that upon my return to reality I would provide training expertise to a not-for-profit or philanthropic organization. I will probably target universities and publishing companies, libraries, and museums, but I think I would thrive in any environment that values creative people with experience.

I'd appreciate any advice you can give me as I begin the year-long trek back to the workforce. Women have been making this trek for decades, but I haven't met a lot of men in my situation, and I'm curious to see how those interviews go ("So, you left a corporate job to do...what?").

Jeff Brechlin
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Dear Jeff

Not only are you absolutely fascinating at cocktail parties, you have critical characteristics for employability: *adaptability* and *flexibility*.

You have begun to catalog your skills; the next step is to put them in terms of accomplishments. For example: "Led international virtual team in the development of culturally sensitive five-day new hire product training, rolled out globally to 35 divisions over a six-month period." Have 20 to 25 of these accomplishment statements ready to use in your resume and for interviewing.

Which path should you follow? I'm a believer in letting your heart be your guide to keep you grounded and passionate. If you truly want to pursue not-for-profit (which does not necessarily mean not-for-pay), philanthropic, or the university route, why not do it? Community colleges and universities across the country have business outreach programs. Small to mid-sized businesses are great places to put your communications training know-how to practical use.

A year is more than ample time to ramp up and move back into the world of work. Get your tools in order while you begin your research. A good search tool kit includes

- accomplishment statements (to be used in resumes, correspondence, and interviews)
- a baseline resume that can be tailored with appropriate accomplishments
- a one-minute "talking business card" or elevator speech about what you offer and what you are seeking; use this as a summary statement for your resume
- a business card to exchange with others
- a list of organizations you want to target
- strategic thinking about your network that results in a list of contacts who are either inside or can lead you to individuals in the organizations you are targeting; if you're not on sites like LinkedIn or Plaxo, you may want to be
- a timeline: decide when do you want to go to work, and work your plan around that implementation date.

With easy access to information, organizations will ask you what you know about them. Knowing what their issues are, their business is, and what you bring to the party is where the rubber meets the road. Be prepared to talk about what you have learned from all of your experiences.

As an external consultant who is ready to go back inside, you have an honest, business answer to questions concerning the gap between corporate jobs. The challenge will be that most interviews focus on what you have done during the last 10 years. The variety of consulting projects you have done speaks well to your wide skill base.

Your zest for the profession and willingness to take risks, combined with your stellar communication skills and ability to conceptualize, create, implement, and lead, add up to an individual who can fit a variety of roles. Your challenge is to decide who is going to have the opportunity to mine your talents.



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