

My commerce degree is wasted at work

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THE QUESTION

I read an article several months ago by Globe and Mail reporter Richard Blackwell explaining that seven of 10 executives are having trouble finding the right talent.

This got me pondering my own situation. I graduated three years ago with a commerce degree, majoring in finance. My minor was in business communication. I've been working in the corporate division of a financial institution but doing a research/news monitoring role – completely different than what I studied.

I need a change, but I'm finding it difficult to switch to a finance or accounting-related role because I don't have any related experience.

To add to that, I don't entirely know what I want to do in the future, so I need to explore my options. What makes sense at this point?

THE ANSWER

Making a job or career change can be exciting, but for many people, it can be quite daunting too, based on a fear of the unknown.

Ask yourself honestly how active have you been in pursuing a change? Is opportunity really evading you, or is fear or insecurity holding you back? It's not enough to want change – you have to work for it.

You may have noted in Mr. Blackwell's article that, according to the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC) poll, many employers said they'd consider hiring employees with the right soft skills, such as a positive attitude, communications skills and a strong work ethic, even if they didn't have the right job training. In fact, many are willing to promote from within and offer additional training to help employees transition into different roles within the company.

The takeaway: Don't let your lack of finance-related experience hold you back.

If you want to make a move, you have to tell people about it – your family, friends and social network, even your employer.

In an open communications environment, you need to share your career aspirations with your manager or human resources department, and ask them to help you create a career plan within the company. If they know where you want to go, they can keep you in mind when an opportunity arises. You can also ask them to help you assess your skills gap, outline the training you'll need, or set you up with a mentor within your area of interest. Smart employers will appreciate your desire to grow with the company and will support you.

Outside of the finance world, if you feel like you're stuck in a career rut, consider a little introspection. What do you like to do generally in your life? What do your friends say that you are good at?

Ask people around you – what do they love about their jobs? How did they discover their careers? Some people "fall" into their jobs, but they often stick with it because there's something in their work that they love.

Make a list of things you love to do, and then conduct research on careers related to those activities. Consider "test-driving" a new career too by job shadowing others.

Most importantly, remember that people tend to make this process more complicated than it needs to be. Look at what you enjoy doing the most in life, and find your career answer there. Turn your passion into work and you will find happiness.

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Have a question about careers, labour law or management? Send it to our panel of experts: careerquestion@globeandmail.com Your name and address will be kept confidential.