

# Where to Go from Here: A Look at Options for Mid-Career Disenchantment

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**Tough day at the office. No longer challenged at work.  
Wish you had more time with family. No one notices the little things you do every day.**

The average employee changes jobs 12 times during his or her career, according to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS) in 2020, with 10 of these changes occurring before age 40. Some statistics go on to suggest the average person changes **careers** 5-7 times during his or her work life. These statistics come from longitudinal surveys where the BLS follows a group of survey participants over a long period of time (as opposed to surveying new groups intermittently over the same long time period). It might be surprising to learn this study followed Baby Boomers born 1957-1964 and jobs they held from ages 18-52.

Changing careers is a bit more dramatic than changing employers or advancing through a profession to more senior-level positions. According to CNBC (2019), 49% of people said they have made a dramatic career shift – teacher to baker, engineer to wedding planner, oil driller to security manager, and so on. The average age for a such a career shift is 39 years of age. This suggests workers are at mid-career, perhaps beginning to feel stagnant or disenchanting with their professions.

Unfortunately, mid-career shifts could also be related to pay statistics. Pay scale reveals pay growth for women peaks at age 40! This does not mean annual increases stop altogether at age 40, but pay growth slows dramatically as compared to men at the same age and slows in comparison to new workers entering the same industry's workforce.

Consider these signs it is time for a career change:

- 1) You feel underpaid and underappreciated;
- 2) You feel like you are not being challenged; and
- 3) You feel called to something different.

If you nodded your head as you read these three criteria, then you are probably at least a little bit interested in exploring alternative careers. Change is scary. The average worker takes 11 months to contemplate a career change before jumping. Sometimes additional education or training is necessary. Most workers daring to make a mid-career change take time to plan steps to ensure the change has the best chance for success. ►



If you are considering a career change, take a piece of paper and fold it to create four squares. In one square make a list of activities you enjoy doing in your free time. In another square list aspects of your current job you enjoy most. In the third square, list your very best characteristics, personal qualities, and abilities. In the final square make a list of jobs or work tasks you find most onerous and wish to avoid if possible. Let these answers guide you to an alternate job within your industry or to a career change to a new profession. Even if you do nothing with these lists this month, tuck them away and repeat the exercise as many times as you want. Most people find that when they finally make a career change, their answers were similar during the years preceding the change, but it was life's timing, rather than lack of direction, that delayed the change.

Next, make a list of your dream companies – if you could work anywhere, doing anything, which companies would you choose? Use your paralegal skills to research the job opportunities and contacts within these companies. Think **big** and then use more of those paralegal skills to expand the list. For example, if you dream of working with the PGA, start there. As you research, your scope will expand to include the LPGA, National Golf Course Owners Association (NGCOA), First Tee, *GolfWeek* or other well-known golf publications, course management companies like KemperSports, and other organizations related to golf on the bigger stage you envisioned. It is exciting to explore the possibilities. It may be surprising to see paralegal (or similar) roles in each

of these companies and discover novel and not previously imagined job descriptions. This process offers a glimpse into the type of work available in the new industry, and at the same time helps to identify how your skills might be transferrable. Keep notes as you research.

For those who want to play it a little safer, consider a new-to-you profession that is related to the paralegal field. This allows you to build on well-honed skills and existing contacts while shifting your professional path to address your personal needs. If you enjoy working with medical records, consider a second career as a nurse, medical illustrator, life care planner, patient advocate, or medical examiner. If you are a whiz with medical bills, consider accounting, financial planning, life care planning, medical costing, and lien resolution. If you exercise strong judgment and analytical skills during liability investigations, consider claims adjuster, mediator, law enforcement, or investigator job opportunities. If you have experience in family law, consider child advocate, counselor, GAL (*Guardian ad Litem*), mediator, travel planner, or education specialist. If you know the ins and outs of real estate law, consider alternative careers as a real estate agent, city planner, appraiser, assessor, relocation specialist, or in commercial development. Paralegals who exhibit competencies in organization, writing, and planning often succeed in the project management field. Paralegals with strong subject-matter knowledge, good public speaking skills, and the necessary credentials transition easily to teaching positions. If you are unsure, ask a trusted friend what he or she envisions you as, if not a paralegal. The answers may surprise you.

**Now, a bit of caution and brutal honesty before you submit a letter of resignation to your current employer.** Think back to those indicators for a career change.

**1 You feel underpaid and underappreciated.** Recognize that many people in all professions feel underpaid and underappreciated. Sometimes a worker feels this way during a particularly stressful week, when the company is temporarily short-staffed, or when an annual review did not go as well as hoped. If the feeling of discontent

is temporary, your love for your job bounces back quickly, and #2 and #3 do not apply, then it probably is not time to change careers. Consider whether changing to a fresh work environment or a different employer would bring more happiness to your work life.

## **2** *You feel like you are not being challenged.*

This is an important one and you need to be honest with yourself. Are you still learning new concepts and methods in your current field? Or conversely, are you relieved that you can perform your job on “cruise-control”? Many people enjoy the idea of mastering their craft because it lessens daily stress or allows them to operate on cruise-control every day – show up, do a good job, get a paycheck, and repeat. If you are too tired to seek out new challenges at work, you dread continuing education sessions, and learning the changes to the latest version of Adobe Pro puts you in a bad mood, then a mid-career change is probably not the right move. Some people are wired to thrive on challenges and their brains are constantly engaged, thinking of the next plan or better processes. Changing careers usually requires starting over near the bottom and serious re-training. People who desire to feel challenged at work are more likely to have the drive, determination, and tenacity to succeed in a mid-career change. If you have mastered your craft (#2), you feel underpaid and underappreciated (#1), and you are yearning for something more (#3), then you are a good candidate for exploring career alternatives. If only #1 and #2 apply to you, then think about advancement opportunities within your current profession, consider adjunct professorships within local paralegal programs or colleges, or opportunities to take on freelance work.

## **3** *You feel called to something different.*

The most important motivator for any major change is the **why**. It is critical to identify and articulate what is drawing you to a different profession. This calling often guides toward or even demands change. If your “why” is strong enough, it will sustain you during what can often be a bumpy or uncertain transition process. If all three criteria apply to you, then take out your piece of paper and start folding – you owe it to

yourself (and those who love you) to consider a positive change. If you feel called to something different (#3), but #1 and #2 do not apply, then stay in your day-job and consider volunteering in a field that seems fulfilling. Volunteering is a great way to get involved in another industry without exiting the paralegal profession. If you feel strongly about #1 and #3 but are not excited about a new challenge (#2), then consider whether another field of law might be more fulfilling to your soul. Take a serious look at your budget and family needs to determine if you need a rocketing career or whether you can shift gears a bit to pursue a career that feels more personally rewarding to you, even if you have to sacrifice income or seniority. According to BLS, the paralegal profession offers above-average compensation with the median paralegal annual salary at \$51,740 and good future job prospects growing at 10%, much faster than average.

In summary, it is normal to wonder about the allure and sustainability of other professions. Many people make successful mid-career changes. Paralegals are especially susceptible to burnout and, while overwhelmingly astute enough to recognize the symptoms, may be equally as reluctant to make a change without fully planning the course. It is always good to use your well-developed paralegal skills to identify your own value and explore career options. When considering a mid-career change, think objectively about your reasons and all available options, do as much research and exploration as you are comfortable, and then reassure yourself that you have many, many marketable skills to reach for your dreams!



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