



Switchers

How Smart Professionals Change Careers and Seize Success

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

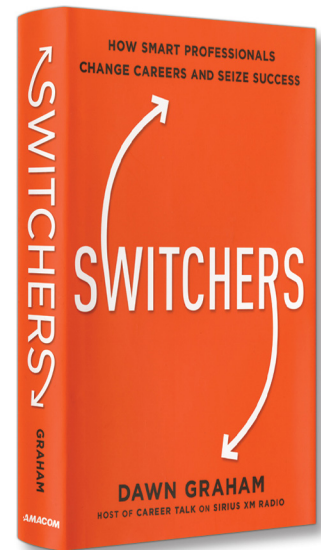
Are you stuck in an unsatisfying job? In the wrong profession? An industry that just isn't a fit? Get unstuck! Land a new career — one you're genuinely passionate about. *Switchers* helps you realize that dream.

Written by celebrated career coach and psychologist Dr. Dawn Graham, *Switchers* provides proven strategies that will get you where you want to go. The first step is to recognize that the usual rules and job search tools won't work for you. Résumés and job boards were designed with traditional applicants in mind. As a career switcher, you have to go beyond the basics, using tactics tailor-made to ensure that your candidacy stands out. You need to understand the concerns of hiring managers — and think like they do; identify transferable skills that companies covet; and convince skeptical employers to shelve their concerns and take a chance on you.

Packed with psychological insights, useful information and expert strategies, *Switchers* helps you leap over obstacles and into a whole new field. Want to pull off the most daring — and fulfilling — career move of your life? Let *Switchers* show you how.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The four foundational attitudes for being a successful Switcher.
- Why having a Plan B may not be a good idea.
- How to rebrand yourself and create “brand ambassadors” to support you.
- To proactively hunt for today's jobs and address interviewers' concerns about Switchers.



by Dawn Graham

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: SWITCHERS

by Dawn Graham

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Introduction

If you're like most Americans, you'll hold about 11 different positions in the course of your career, and each job search might take you six months or longer. The new normal is not only to switch *jobs* but to change *professions* — which isn't easy to accomplish.

When you want to make a 180-degree change, you need a savvy understanding of the art and science of the job search. Career Switchers tend to give up *not* because they lack the skills to excel in their desired profession but because they don't have the proper search strategies and knowledge.

To get optimal results in your career switch, it's important to approach the job search with an informed and empowered mindset. There are a few key elements to this way of thinking. By embracing four foundational attitudes (the four Rs), you won't be tempted to throw in the towel when your dream is still within reach:

Responsibility. You will best engage your job search by adopting an internal "locus of control." This is a psychology term that describes how people view their circumstances. People who are oriented toward an internal locus of control take responsibility for their actions, believe they have some control over outcomes, are proactive and are determined to find ways around obstacles.

Reality. People who attain success work with what *does* happen, not with what *should* happen. During your job search, things may seem unfair, silly or inconvenient, but if you want the job, you need to play the game and find creative ways around these realities. If you can't accept reality, your actions will be misdirected.

Risk. A job search is often ambiguous and anxiety-provoking, and you will be tempted to stay within your comfort zone. This is your brain's misguided effort to keep you safe from potential threats. You must overcome this to switch careers. Risks are inevitable when venturing into uncharted territory, and the best rewards usually come from the greatest risks. No risks, no *results*.

Resilience. At a basic level, the job switch is a series of human interactions that culminate in either an offer or a rejection. This process is rarely logical or linear, and is fraught with bias, assumptions, complexity and rejection. Because of this, it's not enough to apply tactical strategies. As long as your job search involves humans, it involves psychology, so resilience is a must. Without it, you'll run out of motivation to persevere when the road gets rocky.

Choose Your Switch

Are You a Switcher? The "Magic" Equation for Seizing Career Success

Many people who want to switch careers underestimate the nature of the challenge they're accepting. Before doing anything else, take time to think about what type of career Switcher you are.

Here's the basic principle to keep in mind: The further you stray from a "traditional" career trajectory, the harder it is to switch. Knowing the degree of difficulty will help you design your strategy.

An **industry switch** is moderately challenging. An example of this type of switch is to transition from the corporate world to academia.



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Making a **functional switch** within the same industry is more challenging than an industry shift. For example, an accounting manager in the pharmaceutical industry wants to stay in pharma and become a marketing manager.

The hardest switch to make is the **double switch** — a professional who makes both an industry and functional change at once. For example, someone in a finance role at a bank shifts to an advertising role in media, or a newspaper editor whose job became obsolete becomes a brand marketer in a startup, and a corporate attorney becomes a human resources executive in a growing nonprofit.

Switchers are excited to make a major change, but many aren't so jazzed about the sacrifices that often come with it — like taking a salary cut, dropping levels on the organizational chart or relocating to another city. We grow attached to our comfortable lives and don't want to give them up.

As Switchers, we need to get real with ourselves first. We must acknowledge that many parts of our current careers that we like — such as salary, title or status — will change. The good news is we don't have to relinquish everything, just some things. Ask yourself, “What are my true non-negotiables?”

No matter what your dream is, trying very hard — diligently and unwaveringly — is absolutely necessary; yet it's not sufficient. You need the magic equation:

Targeted Career Goal + Hard Work + Unknown Factor = Success

The “unknown factor” in this equation is luck, timing, contacts or something else altogether. You might not find that reassuring because it means your future depends, in part, on something beyond your control. But to succeed, you must both work very hard and have faith that the unknown factor will come along if you persist.

On days when faith in your career switch wavers, remember: Milton Hershey started three candy companies, all of which failed, before Hershey's chocolate became a household name. And Tim Ferris' book *The 4-Hour Workweek* was turned down by 25 publishers before it became a best-seller.

The Psychology of the Job Search (and How to Use It to Your Advantage)

To change is to lose — and humans hate loss. We hate it so much there's a psychological term for it. According to Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, *loss aversion* refers to people's tendency “to feel losses more deeply than gains of the same value.” It's why we begin to second-guess our

choice when making a major career switch. We don't want to lose what we've already invested to get where we are in our career.

So, even though you're excited about a career switch, your mind can quickly shift to what you might lose versus what you might gain — and your motivation may wane. But it's important to remember that loss is a risk in any investment equation.

Keep in mind that hiring managers are affected by loss aversion, too. Most people assume that a hirer's primary goal is to choose the best candidate, but initially the hirer is more motivated to avoid loss. The cost of a bad hiring decision can be significant, which is a setback for Switchers. Since you'll automatically be perceived as riskier, a hiring manager will tend to go with a safer candidate to avoid risking loss.

Just being aware of this gives savvy Switchers a clear advantage. Structure your search strategy to address the concerns of your audience, something that every job seeker *should* do but a Switcher absolutely *must* do.

Bias. As a recruiter is scanning for differences, his or her brain's negativity bias and deference to habit kicks in full force. And biases, while unfair, are the recruiter's primary tool for reducing the résumé pile. As a Switcher, you're an easy target to weed out, even if you make it to an interview. No matter what your target market is, do your research and understand the pain points your audience is facing. Be ready to show how you'll use your transferable skills to implement solutions. Resist the urge to get defensive, and rather show empathy: If you were about to hire a Switcher, you'd likely have similar concerns.

Emotions. Business decisions have become more data-driven. While a positive correlation does exist between gathering valid data and making smart hires, with humans involved in the hiring process there's no getting around the role emotions play in swaying outcomes.

Make it simple for the hirer to see the connection between the skills you bring and the bottom line for the company. Her gut will interpret that feeling as relief because her problems will soon be solved. Her brain translates that into the conclusion, “Hire this person!” Add a positive attitude and likability, and you're golden! ●

Clarify Your Plan A

If You Don't Invest, Why Should They? Figure Out Your Plan A

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When people feel anxiety, they often cope by creating a Plan B — a backup strategy they can engage if Plan A doesn't work out as they were hoping. Having a backup plan is a great idea in some situations, like when there's an impending blizzard or you're trying a new recipe for a dinner party.

But in a job search it can mean a longer transition time or, worse, settling for a role that's not what you want. After all, if you're creating a Plan B, in essence, you *expect* your Plan A to fail. There are no guarantees of success if you go in 100 percent. However, there is a high likelihood of failure if you go in at less.

Go all in or you may never know what's possible. Do your homework and have faith in your abilities. You'll get much further, much faster if you give 100 percent.

Most people begin figuring out their next career move by looking at the common ground among their interests, their expertise and the market. Let's examine this from the Switcher's point of view.

Interests. For career changers, "follow your passion" is risky advice, because it usually causes enormous stress. It narrows the search to just one right option, when in today's market that is far from the norm. Most professionals have several jobs throughout their lives, and more goes into job satisfaction than interesting work, such as colleagues, culture, environment, commute, autonomy, boss and compensation. While "follow your passion" is a great motto for life, for your career you should follow your professional energy, which will never lead you astray.

Think about a work accomplishment you're proud of and focus on the parts of the project or situation that truly energized and motivated you. Maybe you loved the camaraderie of working in a collaborative team, the challenge of using your analytic abilities to solve a challenging puzzle, or the buzz of working against the clock to meet a deadline.

Review a few more accomplishments in this way, and then look for patterns in your energy across all the projects. This can help you refine your next career steps.

Expertise. You've gathered a wide array of valuable skills from all the roles you've held, no matter what your titles. To best position yourself as a qualified Switcher, take a closer look at those skills to determine which are marketable and add value to your new employer. Taken together, those marketable skills are your related expertise.

Once you identify the basic ingredients that make up your expertise, reassemble those ingredients to speak to your new audience. Show how you can solve the pain points in their company. It's likely you have more transferable skills

than the hirer initially realizes, and you need to do the work to spell those skills out for the employer.

Market. Many job seekers pay close attention to their interests and expertise but neglect to keep tabs on the market. This is a mistake because there needs to be a customer for what you're selling. Follow companies online through social media, read industry publications, pay attention to business news, scan job boards to see who is hiring and for what roles (this is one of the few times online job boards can be useful!) or simply Google the industry. The internet has made this process much simpler. So don't move forward blindly.

Creating a solid Plan A takes introspection, research and analysis. You'll know you have a clear target when you are able to clearly describe the following to your network: target industry, target function or department, target title or position, target level, target duties or responsibilities, target companies, target geography, target culture, target size, target compensation, target pain points you'll solve, target skills you'll use to solve them and target network.

Change Isn't Linear: Mapping Your Path to a Career Switch

Many Switchers go through a few iterations of their Plan A. Shaping and redefining the details as you go is completely normal, and after all, this is a new career. You may have researched it ad nauseam but haven't yet experienced it, so there is a lot to still learn.

This doesn't mean you should shift course with every new piece of data; simply remain open to novel information, and adjust where needed while staying true to your target.

The stepping-stone switch. Some double switches are tougher to complete in one fell swoop. For these, you may consider a "stepping stone switch" — taking an interim job on the way to your ultimate career goal. If you choose this stepping-stone option, you'll want to research the company culture before accepting an offer. Do they encourage growth from within? Are they supportive of functional switches? If not, you may get pigeonholed into your current role and be unable to successfully complete the double switch.

Should I go back to school? For some career switches, the path is clear cut: If you want to be a dentist or therapist, you'll have to pursue formal education to earn the necessary credentials. For others, there is more to consider: If you want to switch industries or functions (or both) within business, you need to consider the return on investment. Sinking thousands of dollars and possibly years

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of time into additional education may or may not open the doors you expect it to. Consider these questions:

- Are you pursuing a degree to make your job search easier?
- Does the program offer internships or other real-world projects where you can build hands-on experience?
- Will the debt you incur put you in a challenging financial situation once you finish school?
- Can you build experience in other ways, like volunteering, self-created internships or shadowing an expert?
- Is it possible an advanced degree will make you overqualified for the role you're seeking?

Gigs and portfolios. The “gig economy” is on the rise, and it's not uncommon for individuals to create a portfolio of gigs to earn a living. You can be a restaurant manager on weekends, adjunct science professor on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and custom web designer on demand. The sky's the limit when you engage your creativity. With more companies open to contract and part-time work, you may be able to get access to your dream role on an experimental or trial basis. ●

Craft Your Brand Value Proposition

(Re)brand or Be Branded: Craft Your Professional Identity

Over the course of your career, the people you interact with subconsciously notice and catalogue several factors about you through your actions, and then judge and categorize them to determine what becomes your reputation — that is, your brand. This vast array of factors includes written and spoken interactions, body language and tone, social media, marketing and advertising, associations, appearance, hobbies, environment, actions, attitudes and worldviews.

Everything you put out into the world adds to the overall picture of your brand, whether you do it consciously or not. Are you the unofficial technology whiz colleagues seek out when their computers crash? Are you regularly five minutes late? Is your door always closed? Can you be counted on to be the one who celebrates others' achievements?

You cannot pick and choose which behaviors are included in, and which are excluded from, others'

perceptions of you. Everything counts and culminates into your brand.

For Switchers, rebranding is essential. You want potential employers to visualize you as a fit for your chosen role and take a chance on you as a nontraditional candidate. This means you need a clear, consistent brand that aligns well with your target.

Step 1: Know your goal and your audience's pain points. Clearly answer the question, “What do I want to be known for and by whom?” For example, if you'd like to transfer to your company's office in Berlin, you may want to be known for your fluency in German. Your audience will be the hiring decision-makers and your network contacts, and you want to know a lot about them so you can show how your contributions will solve their pain points.

Step 2: Know the product (you!). In a job search, *you* are the product you're selling. It can be helpful to first lay out all your current and former roles, achievements and personal characteristics to get a complete picture of everything that can be used to create your new brand. Determine what will be of most interest to your new target audience.

Step 3: Know your differentiators. You have a unique selling point, or USP, that sets you apart from others who do similar work. No matter what your profession or background, something will set you apart from the competition in your field. Some examples might be that you are bilingual or multilingual, have a rare combination of industry skills (lawyer and MBA), or possess an unusual outside accomplishment (you are an Olympian or Grammy winner). Your USP will help you answer the question, “Why should we hire you over the other qualified candidates?”

Step 4: Identify your brand value proposition. Your brand value proposition (BVP) describes how you solve your audience's pain points. Essentially, a BVP pulls together all the pieces discussed above to create a guidepost for how you introduce yourself, what you choose to post online, the circles you need to network into, the projects you take on, how you show up and much more. It will be the reason a hiring manager selects you.

Step 5: Test and evaluate. A final yet critical part of creating a successful brand is ensuring that others clearly understand your BVP. Share your BVP with a few trusted colleagues and friends, and ask if it resonates. Use an analogy for jobs that are more challenging to describe. For example, “I translate code for computers in the same way that a language interpreter converts

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French into English.” Include a brief example that people can relate to, which deepens their understanding and helps your brand hit home.

Your Career Story: Where Reason Meets Intuition

When a company identifies a market need and decides to hire an employee, they will be evaluating three things in potential candidates: their ability to perform the work (the “what”), their fit with the company or department (the “how”), and their motivation to pursue this job (the “why”).

Hirers will weigh abilities, fit and motivation differently depending on whether they’re looking at a traditional candidate or a Switcher, as well as the type of switch the candidate is trying to make (industry, functional or double switch). This is where logic (the “why” of your career story) matters — it can make the difference between getting an offer and getting passed over.

Switchers face much deeper scrutiny into their motivation. When considering a Switcher, hirers are on alert, so they’ll wonder about your reasons for making a switch, asking, “Why this role? Why here at our company? And why now at this point in your career?” You’ll need strong answers to these questions if you want to earn an offer.

This is where your career story comes in. Your career story is the answer to a common question: “What led you to apply to the open role at our company today?” (Or, to put it another way, “Why do you want this job?”) Even if everything else has fallen into place for the hiring manager, this question is the “make it or break it” one that will tip the scales.

A convincing career story should be attention-getting, compelling, logical and genuine. To begin to craft the career story you’ll use with your network and potential employers during your career switch, ask yourself these questions:

- Why are you really making this change? Authenticity must be the basis of your answers.
- What aspects of the story will resonate most strongly with your audience?
- How can you make sense of your career history to show a hirer this move is a conscious, planned decision in your trajectory?
- How have the above career steps prepared you for this role? Include transferable skills — boil them down to how they match the needs of the position you’re applying to.
- What makes you different (your USP)?

- Lastly, your story might include how this new role supports your future goals.

What Got You Here Won’t Get You There: The Proactive Job Search

When the notion of a career change arises, most job seekers begin their search online. But the internet has become saturated, and what used to be an effective process is now generally a useless time-suck. The jobs are often picked over, and a robot is making the decisions (through applicant-tracking systems).

Sometimes the job is already spoken for, but in some companies, it’s policy to post all jobs publicly and interview external candidates, even if they’ve already identified a qualified referral or internal candidate. Also, everyone’s applying. Jobs posted online receive an average of 200 applicants, with top companies receiving even more.

In a *proactive* job hunt, once you have a clear Plan A and solid brand value proposition (BVP), make networking the first step in your process and submitting your résumé the second step. This gets you past the inherent bias, robots and misinformation, to network directly into an interview. It’s usually the only path to a career change.

But what about working with a headhunter? For most job seekers, working with a headhunter or executive search consultant has even lower returns than applying online. For a Switcher, it’s generally not worth pursuing because headhunters are customarily paid to search for *traditional* candidates.

With these perspectives on applying online and headhunters, adjust your expectations and time accordingly. If you have 12 hours each week for your search, spend at least nine of them talking to your connections and networking, then use the rest for mission-critical research, evaluating your strategy, practicing your messages and building your new brand.

In a job search, not being on social media is the equivalent of not existing. At minimum, you need to have a well-developed profile on a reputable professional site like LinkedIn. Revisit your professional social media profiles to make sure every element is consistent with your new brand and advances your Plan A.

There are several things you can do online to shift your brand from the old to the new. You can build a personal website that demonstrates your skills and passion for your Plan A. You can also create a blog that centers around a core topic in your new field — or, if that feels too audacious, follow industry leaders in your

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target field and repost their work, adding your insightful comments for others to view.

You can join online forums, comment or respond to questions posted on sites like Quora, make podcasts, record short videos, or create infographics or other creative media to get noticed. ●

Create Ambassadors

No Excuses: Your Network Really Is Your Net Worth

A network is the most important tool in the job search arsenal, and it's especially true for Switchers. A network is a group of people you have relationships with, and "relationship" is the key word. Your current network consists of family, friends, neighbors, colleagues or classmates. The good news is that everyone already has a network. You may simply need to expand it, which is less daunting than starting fresh.

Whether you're looking for a new job or a reliable mechanic, networking works the same way: meet and establish the relationship; build trust over time through repeated interactions; exchange mutually beneficial information and resources; ask for help with something this person is qualified to assist with and reciprocate when possible.

The stakes are higher when you're looking for a job, and most people in your inner circle won't have an instant recommendation. This is where second-level contacts come in. Second-level contacts are not in your immediate network; rather, they are people your network contacts know. Research shows that second-level contacts are more effective in a job search than first-level contacts, because they have access to information that you do not. So your goal is to engage the relationships you have already established to get to your second-level and third-level contacts.

Where do you start with networking? You need a structure that is easy to follow and track:

Start with the companies. Research the types of companies (industries, culture, geography, size) that interest you based on your Plan A.

Uncover your current contacts. Use your connections on professional networking sites to identify first- and second-level contacts who are currently (or were previously) employed at companies you're targeting.

Start the conversation. Reach out to your current contacts to relay interest in learning more about their company. If you only find a second-level contact at a

company in your LinkedIn search, ask the first-level connection for an introduction.

Get creative. No connections? No problem. If you can find the company on a professional networking site like LinkedIn, search the profiles of current employees and find something you have in common with them. Use this as an entry point to introduce yourself.

Stay in touch. Approach your contacts from a standpoint of exploration and curiosity. Don't push your résumé on them. Be proactive, but allow the relationship to develop naturally. Soon you'll get introductions to others inside the companies that you're targeting.

The New Way to Network: Create Ambassadors

Let's do away with the word "networking" as it relates to the job search and call it "creating ambassadors" instead. Because the key isn't just who you know but also what they know about you and their brand experience with you. You can have one million connections around the world, but if none are willing or know how to advocate for you, then it won't matter. If you're "networking like crazy" in your career transition and it's still not creating results, you're probably having a lot of interactions but not creating ambassadors.

The best way to create ambassadors is to focus on the relationship, not the outcome. To turn a contact into an ambassador, you must make sure the person with whom you're meeting clearly understands your brand value proposition (BVP) and target (Plan A) and forms a favorable impression of you that they can relay clearly to others.

A networking meeting isn't about spewing your credentials and skills onto your unsuspecting contact until her eyes glaze. Instead, select two accomplishments to share that illustrate your Plan A and the value you bring; then focus on learning about your new acquaintance. ●

Keep the Ball in Your Court

How to Never Have a Bad Interview: What Are They Really Asking?

By the time you get to the interview, you've most likely passed the "basic qualifications" test, so at this point most hiring managers want to know the same general things: Will you be effective in this job, a good fit with the team and motivated to stay? They will also be keen to pick up on any red flags, and as a Switcher, your nontraditional background will likely be a topic of focus.

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For every question in the interview, consider “What are they really asking?” (WATRA), and then decide which of your relevant achievements you want to use to answer the question.

For example, for the question “Why are you interested in this job/company?” the WATRA interpretation is, “How do I know this isn’t an impulsive career change? I need to understand how this fits into your overall career path and that this isn’t just a fluke or running from a bad employment situation.” Your response is to share your career story.

For the question, “Have you ever done (X task or Y skill)?” the WATRA interpretation is “This job requires a specific skill set. I’m pretty sure based on your nontraditional background you haven’t done this, but I want to hear specifically how you’ll be resourceful and overcome this deficiency.”

Before diving in with “No, I haven’t . . .” answer the question he or she is really asking. For example, “I know the Cybextra program is a core software used by your sales team, and although I don’t have direct experience with that system, in my last two roles I was required to learn company-specific technology to be effective in my position and was able to be self-sufficient on the tools within a week of starting. Technology is a lifelong interest of mine, so I enjoy learning new systems and pick them up very quickly.”

Always Sleep on It: Get Ready to Negotiate!

In negotiating a job offer as a Switcher, usually the biggest barrier isn’t “how”; it’s mustering the courage to do it.

If you don’t ask for what you want, the answer is always “no.” There are other compelling reasons to negotiate a job offer. Even if the initial offer is more than you expected, would you (or your partner or kids) be less happy if you earned 10 percent more each month or had an extra week of vacation? No way!

The salary discussion is your first opportunity to have a real conversation with your new boss. It’s an early chance to see if your new manager will advocate for you, which is good to know up front. Negotiating likely will not distance you. It can do the opposite: Having a difficult discussion and finding a mutual solution deepens the relationship.

Also, in some fields, like sales, it can be detrimental not to negotiate. After all, negotiating and influencing are key skills in your new role, so if you skip them, the hiring manager may be concerned.

As a Switcher, you may feel you’re not entitled to ask for more money. After all, you were lucky just to get the offer, right? Wrong. If you were offered the job, the company recognizes the value you bring, and they want you to start the job excited and motivated.

Negotiations don’t need to focus only on your paycheck. While you want to get your base pay as high as possible as a first step, many other aspects of a compensation package can be negotiated: extra vacation time, relocation dollars, a sign-on bonus, virtual work days, tuition reimbursement, parking costs, start date, association dues — the list goes on.

Even when a hirer says, “This is our best offer,” you should still take a day or two to sleep on it. More often than not, you will think of something to negotiate.

There’s a lot of excellent negotiating advice available, but be sure to remember this one vital strategy: Go into the negotiation meeting assuming positive intent on the part of the hiring manager.

You may be sending subtle signs of being on the defensive simply because you expect the hiring manager to push back. While it’s advisable to prepare your rationale (it will give you the confidence and data support you need), you’ll end up with a better outcome by going into the discussion expecting success. Hiring managers anticipate that you will negotiate. Unless your requests are completely unreasonable or presented as demands, managers likely will be happy to revise the offer if they’re able.

Victorious Switchers, like all flourishing professionals, are rarely an overnight success. The obstacles are significant, but are they more significant than realizing your career goals? Only you can decide.

If you choose to forge ahead, with persistence, planning and patience, you’ll become a successful Switcher. ●

MORE SV CONTENT ON CAREER & SELF-DEVELOPMENT

Summary: *Managing Up* by Mary Abbajay. *Managing Up* is a guide to figuring out who you are, who your boss is and finding where you meet. It’s about building real relationships with people who have influence over your career.

Webinar: *How to Become the Person Others Follow* by Joshua Spodek. Spodek walks you through an integrated progression of exercises designed to cultivate key abilities, behaviors and beliefs through experience. These exercises will help you accomplish the inner work and gain the social skills required for great leadership.