



# Career Planning and Job Search Guide for Mid-Career Health Professionals

## Introduction

William Bridges<sup>1</sup> maintains that personal transition begins with an ending. For something new to start, something else must first end. You may find yourself in the situation where your current employment is ending, or your role is changing. In this initial phase, you begin to identify what you are losing and learn how to manage those losses.

The next phase in Bridges' model is the neutral zone: after the old ending and before the new beginning. While this phase may feel confusing and distressing, it is full of opportunity and possibilities. It is during this phase where career planning and job search activities take place. The challenge is to see this time as a path forward, not a wall blocking your advancement. This may not be the path you wanted to take, but it is full of discovery and learning on your way to a new place.

This Career Planning and Job Search Guide leads you through the reflections and assessments of where you have come from and what you have gained along the way. You map out a timeline of your life and identify the accomplishments you have achieved. You identify your strategic advantage, reflected in the unique combination of your knowledge, skills, values, interests, and attributes.

These career-planning activities prepare you for creating your job search tools, and you receive tips for developing a resume and cover letter. The guide also supports the next step of the process through a look at how to master a job interview.

It's our hope that the information in this document will help you find your new beginning with insight, self-awareness and confidence. According to Bridges, "well-managed transitions allow people to establish new roles with an understanding of their purpose, the part they play, and how to contribute and participate most effectively."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to <https://wmbridges.com/about/what-is-transition/>

<sup>2</sup> Copied from <https://wmbridges.com/about/what-is-transition/>



## Career Planning - Time for Reflection

A career transition is a valuable opportunity to reflect on the experiences you have had throughout your career and the person you have grown into. Take the time to think deeply about what you have done and what you want to do next. Connect with your thoughts and feelings in an authentic way and resist rushing to the “expected” or “right” answer. Be sure to record your responses.

### Complete the following reflections:

**Create a timeline** of your life and career. Record people and events that have impacted your opportunities and shaped your decisions. Include major life milestones, education, job changes, significant accomplishments, travel, leisure activities, setbacks, etc. As you create and reflect on your timeline, consider these questions:

- What significant events or experiences influenced your expectations and outlook?
- Who were your role models?
- What themes are reflected in your choices?
- When did you feel most satisfied and happy?
- How did your goals and career direction change over time?
- What skills did you build along the way?

**Identify your accomplishments** in your career. Think back to times when you felt proud of your work and satisfied with your results. This reflection is about recording the accomplishments you were proud of whether anyone else noticed or not. Record at least five stories of your accomplishments.

As you move through the career planning process, these stories will offer valuable examples of your skills.

For each accomplishment, record the:

- **Situation:** Describe what was happening. What was your mandate? Who was involved? What was the magnitude of the situation? Why did this matter to you? What motivated you to act?
- **Obstacle:** Describe the challenge, problem or opportunity? What obstacles did you face? What could have been the risk if you had not acted or had not been successful?
- **Action:** Describe the action you took. What made those actions successful? Include the skills and thought processes you used.
- **Results:** Describe the result that arose from your actions. Link the results back to the situation and the challenges you overcame.

As you review your collection of accomplishments, ask yourself:

- What are the common elements of your role and/or actions?
- What skills did you use to accomplish the results?
- What themes are emerging?

## Career Planning - Your Strategic Advantage

The path that has led you here and the choices you have made along the way have coalesced into your unique combination of knowledge, skills, values, interests, and attributes. These factors combine to create your strategic advantage. Making use of your strategic advantage capitalizes on your greatest assets and points to the opportunities likely to provide you the highest degree of job satisfaction.

### **Clearly articulate your unique strategic advantage by completing the following activities:**

**Your knowledge** includes your formal education, informal learning experiences and the sum of everything you have learned throughout your life and career. It includes your understanding of various industries, organizations, professions, regulations, cultures, demographics, societal issues and more. Your exposure, experience and exploration has given you an acumen about people, places, things, activities and ideas.

List the following details to record your most significant points of knowledge:

- List the industries you know well. Identify the segments within an industry that you know. For example, within health care, are you familiar with acute care, long-term care, community care, public health, etc.?
- List the organizations you know well. How did you acquire your knowledge? For example, did you work in them, work with people from them, read about them in the news, etc.?
- List the segments of clients you know well. What are the common characteristics? Are the segments defined by the type of care they sought, their social determinants of health, where they sought care, etc.?
- List the processes within your profession can you perform.
- List the languages you can speak fluently or conversationally.
- List the strategic initiatives or change projects have you actively participated in.
- Include other knowledge that you have accumulated that could benefit a future employer.

**Skills** are what you can do. Some skills are job-specific while other skills can be used in many occupations and roles. You may have developed these skills in school, on the job, volunteering or through life experiences. It is important to spend time creating an inventory of your skills, especially if you have not done so recently or if you tend to take your talents for granted – as most people do.

To identify your skills and find the words to describe them, review these sources of information:

- Review your timeline and identify the skills you built through those experiences.
- Review your list of accomplishments and identify the skills you used to be successful.
- Review a list of common career skills (such as Employability Skills 2000+ at [www.conferenceboard.ca/topics/education/learning-tools/employability-skills.aspx](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/topics/education/learning-tools/employability-skills.aspx)) and identify the skills you have demonstrated.

- To identify your leadership skills, review the LEADS in a Caring Environment framework as described in the Executive Summaries or Key Points documents here: <https://www.leadsCanada.net/site/resources>, and list the capabilities you have demonstrated.
- To identify the technical skills required in your profession, review job descriptions or job postings and make a list of the skills you have demonstrated.
- Check your professional association for skill inventories or competency frameworks and use them to identify the skills and competencies you have demonstrated in your work.
- Use the Abilities quiz provided by Service Canada - Training and Careers to help identify your skills: [http://www.jobsetc.gc.ca/eng/toolbox/quizzes/quizzes\\_home.do](http://www.jobsetc.gc.ca/eng/toolbox/quizzes/quizzes_home.do)

**Values** are the characteristics and behaviours that are most important to you. When you are living authentically, your values motivate and guide your decisions. During a career transition, your values can inform your decisions when choosing roles and organizations to work with. Since values evolve and change as you move through your career, spend time now reflecting and identifying the values that are most important to you in your work, in the organization you work for, and in life in general.

- Identify times you felt fulfilled and satisfied in your work. What factors contributed to your feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction?
- Describe the times when your work situation truly reflected your values.
- Describe the times when your work situation was contrary to your values.
- Use a list of common personal values to help you identify the values most important to you. Here is one list: [https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/farmsuccession/files/2016/11/Core-Values-Exercise\\_Integrity\\_Consulting\\_Services.pdf](https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/farmsuccession/files/2016/11/Core-Values-Exercise_Integrity_Consulting_Services.pdf)
- Use the Work Values quiz provided by Service Canada - Training and Careers to help identify your values at work: [http://www.jobsetc.gc.ca/eng/toolbox/quizzes/quizzes\\_home.do](http://www.jobsetc.gc.ca/eng/toolbox/quizzes/quizzes_home.do)

**Interests** are activities you enjoy doing. Interests can be a strategic advantage because when you are excited about doing your work, the enthusiasm and dedication are unmistakable. When you are clear about what interests you, your interests can guide you to work that is enjoyable and rewarding.

- Describe your 10 favourite activities and what it is you like about them (ex: travelling, reading, learning, coaching people, fixing things, building things).
- What social, environmental, cultural, health-related, or political issues do you find most compelling?
- When you choose a course to take, an article to read, or a website to review, what topics attract your attention because you are truly curious?
- If money were not an issue, how would you choose to spend your time?
- Use the Interest quiz provided by Service Canada - Training and Careers to help identify your interests: [http://www.jobsetc.gc.ca/eng/toolbox/quizzes/quizzes\\_home.do](http://www.jobsetc.gc.ca/eng/toolbox/quizzes/quizzes_home.do)

**Personal attributes** are the characteristics, qualities and style that make you unique. You bring these attributes to your work and interactions with others. When you understand your personal style, you are better able to choose work situations and relationships that make use of your strengths and where you can be yourself.

To identify your main attributes, consider the following:

- What words have other people used to describe you?
- What words describe your communication style? For example: enthusiastic, cautious, comprehensive, persuasive, inspiring, reserved, straightforward, assertive, direct.
- How would you describe your work style? For example: collaborative, flexible, process-oriented, implementor, organized, team player, results-focused, decisive, perfectionist, innovative.
- What words describe your thinking style? For example: realistic, visionary, strategic, analytical, logical, creative, perceptive, concrete, curious, inquisitive, practical, original, tactical.
- What words describe your leadership style? For example: inclusive, democratic, coaching, visionary, commanding, transformational, charismatic, laissez-faire, authoritative, affiliative.
- Consider using a list of adjectives to select words to describe your attributes. Here is one: <https://leadthroughstrengths.com/adjectives/>

By completing the previous activities, you have the personal insights and key information for your job search and are ready to write your resume.

## Job Search - Writing Your Resume

Your resume must clearly, concisely and strategically present the qualifications you have for the position you are applying for. It should convey your skills, work experience, accomplishments and education. The resume is used to describe what you can accomplish professionally while illustrating what you can do for an employer.

Even though many organizations have an online application system, having a current, professional resume is imperative. Many online application systems allow for resumes to be uploaded. Even if that is not the case, your resume serves as the repository of the information you will need to enter in online application forms.

For professionals with a consistent, relevant work history, the chronological resume format is most appropriate. Recruiters tend to prefer the chronological resume format since it clearly outlines a candidate's work history and accomplishments.

If you are switching professions, have developed the bulk of your skills outside of paid employment, or have had periods of unemployment in the recent past, consider using the functional or combination resume format.

For a summary of what information goes into each resume format, look here: <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/resume-format-guide-with-examples>

Here are some do's and don'ts<sup>3</sup> of how to write a good resume and what to include:

### Resume Writing Do's

- **Keep your resume clear and concise** - An employer takes an average of 30 seconds to skim a resume. You want them to see right away that you are qualified for the position.
- **Proofread your resume numerous times** - Be sure there are no spelling or grammar mistakes. Have someone else read it over as well. A simple mistake can give a negative impression.
- **Limit your resume to two pages** - Place the emphasis of your resume on your most recent experience. Experience that is more than 15 years old should either be cut out or minimized.
- **Tailor your resume to suit the position you are applying for** - Specify work experience or achievements that are related to the position you are applying for.
- **Highlight what you have accomplished** - Identify the best examples of where you demonstrated your skills. Provide concrete examples of what you achieved in your role.
- **Be honest** - Do not overstate your skills or results as it will mislead the employer. Have confidence in what you have to offer.
- **Quantify your achievements** - Use firm numbers that the employer will understand and be impressed by. For example, state the number of people you supervised, the size of the budget you managed, by what percentage you improved performance metrics, etc.

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from: <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/findajob/resources/write-good-resume>

- **Use simple words and action verbs** - Resumes can be reviewed by Human Resources specialists who may not be familiar with your specific field. Use plain language, avoid acronyms, and use persuasive verbs such as managed, led, developed, increased, etc.
- **Include unpaid work that show off your skills** - If you have volunteer work that relates to the position you are applying for, include it in a "Volunteer Work" section.
- **Include your contact information** - Your resume should accurately list your name, address, email and phone number. This information should be placed at the top of the first page.

## Resume Writing Don'ts

- **Don't use an inappropriate email address** - Make sure your email is easy to read, easy to type, professional and non-offensive.
- **Don't include unnecessary personal information** - Leave out any personal details such as age, marital status, religious preference, political views, or any other personal attributes that could be controversial. This will prevent any potential bias. Never include your Social Insurance Number on your resume.
- **Don't include a picture of yourself** - Although in some countries it may be common to include a photo, it is not the norm in Canada. It can lower your chances of obtaining a position and divert the focus away from your qualifications.
- **Don't use too many bullets** - Make your resume easy to read by limiting each resume section or sub-section to between 5 and 7 bullet points.
- **Don't use personal pronouns** - Do not use "I," "my," or "me." Write your resume in the third person, as if it is being written by someone else.
- **Don't simply list job responsibilities** - Your job duties are often obvious from your job title. Instead, highlight your achievements and provide specific examples.
- **Don't make general statements** - Steer clear from vague statements that don't highlight your actual contribution. Unclear statements such as, "Responsible for improving efficiencies and making cost savings," do not provide useful information to an employer.
- **Don't include reasons for leaving previous jobs** - The main purpose of your resume is to promote you, your skills, experience and achievements. It should be entirely positive and should not include reasons for leaving as it does not add any value to you as a candidate.
- **Don't include references** - An employer only requires references if they are seriously considering hiring you. Keep references on a separate sheet and provide them only when they are specifically requested.
- **Don't include hobbies or interests** - Include your hobbies only if they relate to the position and demonstrate to the employer why you are a good fit for the position you are applying for.

## Job Search - Writing a Cover Letter

Cover letters are an essential part of your application. Even if you are familiar with the organization and hiring manager and they are familiar with you, do not skip this step. Your cover letter is an opportunity to show your personality, attention to detail and communication skills. The cover letter links your experience and skill to the position you are applying for. While some parts of letter can be reused, you should write a new cover letter for each position you apply for.

Consider these points when preparing your cover letter:

- Follow any instructions given in the job posting. For example, the job posting may ask you to identify a competition number.
- Communicate succinctly with an active and compelling voice.
- Avoid acronyms.
- Always be truthful. Never inflate the truth.
- At the top of your cover letter, centre your name, address, phone number and email address, mirroring the way it looks on your resume.
- Include the date you are sending the letter on a separate line, aligned to the left side of the page.
- Below the date, list the hiring manager's name, position title and contact information. Sometimes you can find these details by looking at the company's website or the job posting.
- Start your letter with a standard greeting like "Dear," and the name of the hiring manager.
- The introductory paragraph should include the position you are applying for and a statement about your suitability and enthusiasm with respect to the role and company.
- Use the job posting or job description to sequence the discussion of your qualifications since employers typically list the qualifications and job duties in order of importance.
- Provide concrete examples of how you have demonstrated the skills and experience required. Be sure to use the key words from the job posting since that will catch the attention of the recruiter – or recruiting software – when they scan your cover letter and resume.
- Include accomplishments, skills and specialties that make you well-suited for the position.
- Provide specific details about your successes, including measurable impacts you made.

For additional tips and samples of cover letter, visit: <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/how-to-write-a-cover-letter>



## Job Search - The Interview

The job interview is a conversation where both parties are sharing and receiving information to determine if a partnership would be successful. When you have been invited for an interview, the organization has determined you have the basic qualifications to perform the position. The interview allows the interviewer to learn more details about each candidate to determine which one is likely to be most successful in the role and make the most valuable contribution to the organization. It is an important opportunity for the interviewer to assess if your personality, style and other attributes would be a fit with the team and organization.

Just as with the earlier steps in your career planning and job search, the time and energy you put into preparing for the interview will determine the level of success you experience. Here are tips for preparing for, participating in, and following up on, a job interview:

### To prepare for the interview:

- Research the organization and position.
- Be ready to articulate your strategic advantage and have concrete examples of how it matches the requirements of the job.
- Script and rehearse answers to common interview questions.
- Create a brief outline of the key points you want to share in the interview.
- Think of at least three questions you could ask the interviewer.
- Be ready to share three reasons this opportunity interests you.
- Be ready to share three reasons the organization should choose you for this role.
- Plan your outfit and ensure it is ready for wearing.
- Know exactly where you are going for the interview, where you can park, time for walking, and a plan for inclement weather.
- Take copies of your resume and references.

### During the interview:

- Think of the interviewer's perspective. Hiring mistakes are costly. The more they learn about how you can contribute to the organization in this role, the easier their decisions will be.
- Use strategies to remain calm and relaxed so you are better able to respond to the questions.
- Greet the interviewer with good eye contact, a smile, and a firm handshake (unless social distancing requirements prevent handshakes).
- Project confidence through your voice, body language, listening and responses.
- Avoid any nervous behaviours such as fidgeting, filler words, or checking your phone.
- Highlight your skills and accomplishments, and clearly describe their relevance to the position.
- Be sure your answers refer strictly to the questions. Ask for clarification if you need it.
- Even if the interviewer is familiar with you and your work experience, describe the key aspects of your strategic advantage. If you do not share specific details, often that information cannot be considered when making the hiring decision.

- Demonstrate knowledge of the employer’s needs and your ability to meet them.
- Evaluate if the position, organization and people meet your needs and expectations in terms of values, interests, and career goals.
- Ask for details about the job expectations.
- Do not ask about remuneration.
- Watch for signs that the interview is over and stop talking.
- Ask about the next steps and timeframe, and end with a thank you.

### **After the Interview**

- Immediately after the interview, debrief by writing notes about what you learned about the position, manager, organization and next steps.
- Reflect on your impression of the interviewer, the opportunity, the alignment with your values, interests and goals.
- Assess if you responded to the questions appropriately and if there are specific areas where you need to do more preparation next time.
- Follow up by sending a thank you letter referencing points discussed in the interview. Express appreciation for something you learned as well as reiterating your strengths.

For more tips on successful interviewing, visit: <https://alis.alberta.ca/look-for-work/interviews-and-offers/how-to-succeed-at-a-job-interview/>

For a list of common interview question to script and practice, visit: <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/top-interview-questions-and-answers>

## Additional Resources

This guide gets you started on your career planning and job search. It is not meant to be comprehensive. It is recommended that you seek out additional resources. There are many resources available online. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

### **Manitoba Career Development**

[www.manitoba.ca/careerdevelopment](http://www.manitoba.ca/careerdevelopment).

This site contains information about career planning and helps you discover your interests, work values, skills, attitudes and strengths so you can choose a career path that's right for you. There is up-to-date information and other tools that will help you seek, find and secure employment.

Marge Watters. (2012) **It's Your Move: A Guide to Career Transition and Job Search for Canadian Managers, Professionals and Executives**. Collins: Toronto.

### **A Guide to Planning Your Career**

[http://www.manitobacareerdevelopment.ca/CDI/docs/plan\\_your\\_career.pdf](http://www.manitobacareerdevelopment.ca/CDI/docs/plan_your_career.pdf)

This guide is filled with information and activities to help you through the career planning process. This resource package was developed through a partnership involving Manitoba Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade and Life Strategies Ltd.

### **Assessing You: The First Step in Career Planning**

<https://alis.alberta.ca/media/697159/assessingyou.pdf>

This resource addresses the self-assessment phase of career planning. It helps you explore your knowledge, skills, and abilities and understand how your personal characteristics influence your career decisions. Published by the Government of Alberta, Community and Social, 2008.

### **Winnipeg Transition Centre**

<https://www.winnipegtransitioncentre.com/> or Phone 204-338-3899

The Employment Assistance & Resource Services (EARS) program at the Winnipeg Transition Centre provides job seekers with tools and supports needed in their job search, including resume writing, interview skills and job market research for individuals.