

Career transitions peak twice a year 'Questers' reflect most often in fall and New Year's

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There are two times of the year when career transition experts experience peaks in the number of people looking to change their careers: when fall approaches and after the winter solstice in the New Year.

As summer winds down, career counsellors and leadership experts say it's a natural time for people to explore new career options and reflect on where they can go next.

"If you're a parent and your kids are going back to school, you naturally start thinking: 'What about me?'" says Merge Gupta-Sunderji, a Calgary leadership expert and corporate speaker.

To a lesser extent, spring is also a time of flux for many workers, but as September rolls around the corner, Gupta-Sunderji advises employees to explore their options for the right reasons, not just season.

"The worst is people who get caught in a rut and complain," she says. "In order not to be miserable anymore, you have to step outside your comfort zone."

Author of *Dare to Change Your Job and Your Life*, Carol Kanchier says there are two broad types of people: those who embrace and seek change and those who resist at all costs.

She calls the former "questers" and the latter "traditionalists." Regardless of which category you might fall into, Kanchier says everybody should be aware of the natural signals -- some more overt than others -- that act as cues for career change.

"This questioning happens whether we voluntarily change or whether we get laid off," says Kanchier. "If we don't voluntarily change, the universe is going to help us by some kind of sign."

As a psychologist and educator, she has identified September and January as the two biggest peaks for career change. She's been studying questers and traditionalists since 1981 and has gone through many of her own career changes over the years.

After interviewing hundreds of employees while studying these two groups, she's noticed some fundamental characteristics about both.

"The need to grow and the desire to have challenges is greater (in questers) than the desire to have security and a high income," Kanchier says.

"People that are traditionalists have those qualities, too, but it's a matter of priorities. (Traditionalists) are more interested in prestige," she says.



CREDIT: Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald

Carol Kanchier, author of *Dare to Change Your Job and Your Life*, says there are two broad types of people: those who embrace and seek change, and those who resist at all costs.

Questers also generally anticipate and embrace change in preparation for the next leap, while traditionalists need to push themselves out of that comfort zone to explore what would make them happier.

But it's not just the time of year that can precipitate peaks in career change. Aside from many situational and personal factors, life cycle plays a big role.

When people hit 30, 40, 50 and even 60 or beyond in today's workforce, they reflect on where they've been and where they're headed more than the average crowd in between those ages.

"Now people are even coming back to work at 70," she says. "It's a different world we live in but those are the patterns that exist."

Gupta-Sunderji advises managers to embrace, rather than try to head off, these feelings of career change in their employees.

"Leaving doesn't mean they're going to leave the company," she says. "The worst thing you can do is to squelch any initiative that an employee shows."

Instead, a boss should work with the employees to identify new roles within the company or even within their existing jobs that could provide more stimulation and challenge, whether it's different assignments, a lateral or upward move or working in a different office or team.

"If you don't embrace it . . . you're going to lose them anyway, whether you lose them physically or mentally, so it's to your advantage," says Gupta-Sunderji.

Money is often not the sticking point. Most people are usually seeking new challenges, better work-life balance, more flexibility or they just need a change. There are lots of reasons people feel the need for change at this time of year.

Employees are warned, however, to think carefully before telling the boss.

"When you've got a few options on the table, then make sure you talk to your boss before you take the leap," says Gupta-Sunderji.

Just because the seasons change, remember the grass isn't always greener on the other side. You might just find that what you have now looks pretty good after all.

Either way, she encourages everybody to explore their options throughout the year.

"Your confidence is going to get boosted (because) options always make people feel better," she says.

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