

# A Guide For Midlife Career Moves



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## Career Practitioners

This book is for those who are 45 years of age or older and looking for work. It will help job seekers

- explore the skills, knowledge and attitudes best suited to adapt to changing work roles
- discover how skills, knowledge and attitudes can be transferred from one work role to another
- understand the concept and meaning of life stages
- explore financial and lifestyle needs and their relationship to work
- understand how career development is a continuous process with a series of choices
- investigate the advantages and challenges of non-traditional work
- understand how labour market information can be used to make life and work decisions
- explore lifelong learning strategies
- connect with further information and resources

This publication is available to view or order online at [alis.alberta.ca/publications](http://alis.alberta.ca/publications). Copies can also be ordered from the Learning Resources Centre by telephone at 780-427-5775 or by fax at 780-422-9750.

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Information in this publication was accurate, to the best of our knowledge, at the time of printing. However, legislation, labour market information, websites and programs are subject to change, and we encourage you to confirm with additional sources of information when making career, education, employment and business decisions.

The Province of Alberta is working in partnership with the Government of Canada to provide employment support programs and services.

All photos in this booklet are for illustrative purposes only. They are not actual photos of any individuals mentioned.

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# Your Life Keeps Changing

## Online resource for mature workers

Visit [alis.alberta.ca/matureworkers](https://alis.alberta.ca/matureworkers) for information about

- finding work
- enhancing the work you have
- your finances and health
- retiring
- services and programs for seniors

## Changes in your life may come gradually, or quite suddenly.

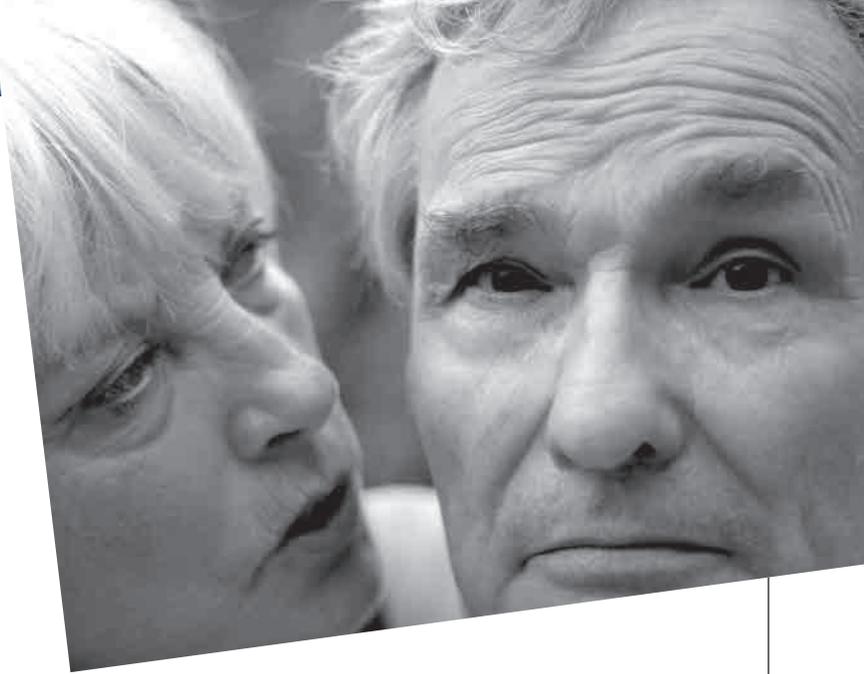
Examples:

- Your family circumstances have changed in ways you would not have chosen or expected.
- Re-entering the labour market after a long absence is not what you had planned.
- Your work has taken a physical toll over the years. Now you are ill or injured and must find a different way to make a living.
- You expected to retire at your age, but you want or need to keep working.
- You knew it might happen, but company downsizing still took you by surprise.

If you were not expecting to make a midlife career transition, it can come as a shock. Sudden changes are especially upsetting because they throw everything into question. One day, you see your future stretching like a well-marked path ahead of you. The next, you round a corner and find a totally different landscape. The path divides and you have no idea where any of the branches might take you.

This guide is about career planning and looking for work in midlife. It can help you to move forward, one step at a time, until you are able to see your way ahead more clearly.

- Be sure to read the next section, *Stages of Transition*, if you are having a hard time dealing with the emotional ups and downs that follow major changes.
- Check out *Your Experience Is Valuable* if you are worried your skills are out of date or that your age may pose a problem.
- Skip to *Money Matters—Only You Can Decide How Much* if money is an issue.
- Read *Career Planning Puts You in Control* if you want to get into a line of work that is different from what you have done before.



- Check out *You Have More Work Options Than You Think* if you are feeling trapped.
- Read *You Can Learn New Skills* if you need to improve some of your skills but do not want to go back to school full time.
- Skip to *Let Others Help With Your Work Search* if you are feeling alone or would like some help with your work search.

Each section of this guide includes information about where to get assistance, such as other print materials, telephone hotline services, information on the Internet, and programs and services in your community.

## Stages of transition

Change can be hard on you when it is unexpected and affects your whole life. It helps if you understand the stages of transition that most people go through when experiencing change.

There are three basic stages of transition—**looking back**, **caught in the middle** and **looking ahead**. You may take days, months or even years to move through a stage, depending on

- the depth and number of changes you are experiencing
- how you feel about yourself
- how much support you receive from others
- whether you had a choice in the change

You may find that you move through the stages in order or slide back and forth between stages sometimes. Where are you *right now*?

### Looking back

A transition usually begins with an ending of some kind. You may need to spend some time recognizing and grieving your loss before you are ready to think about the future.

Shock, anger, sadness and fear are some of the strong emotions you may feel. You may also feel some excitement about where this change could lead. These emotions are natural responses to change. Try to express them without taking your feelings out on the people around you.

Let your friends and family provide emotional support and support them in turn. Their lives will be affected, too, and they may also need some time to accept that things have changed.

### Caught in the middle

This stage can be very uncomfortable. You are past the first shock, but you still have no idea how this change will affect your future. You may feel depressed, lonely, frustrated, anxious and even helpless.

Getting things done at this stage may seem to take a lot more effort than it usually does. Creating and maintaining a regular routine will help to keep you going, especially if your routine includes lots of rest and exercise.

This stage offers an opportunity to reflect on your life and consider making some improvements. Take stock of your skills and where they might be needed. Talk to people about your feelings. Find out what services are available in your community. Get your finances in order, and spend some time dreaming about how you would like this change to turn out. Investigate local employers and work opportunities, learn new skills and brush up on existing ones. Above all, keep moving forward.

### Looking ahead

You will know that you have reached this stage when you start to feel more energetic and hopeful. You have done some of the thinking and exploring you needed to do and are ready to move on.

You may feel excited, nervous or happy, but do not let these relatively pleasant emotions sidetrack you. Put your plans into action. Keep learning more about work search strategies and fine-tuning your research, resumé writing and interview skills.



Roy had 37 years of experience in the meat packing industry and hoped to retire in five years. But the longer the strike at his plant went on, the less likely that became. He knew he would have to improve his reading and writing skills to qualify for other types of work, so he enrolled in an English class during the strike. When the plant closed, he was prepared for change, unlike many of his co-workers.

Roy's success in improving his literacy skills made him more willing to sign up for other learning opportunities. He attended a work search workshop and enrolled in a building maintenance course through continuing education at a post-secondary institution. Before he had even finished the course, he got a job as a custodian in a large building complex. His new employer was impressed with his willingness to upgrade his skills and offered to pay for the course if Roy passed.



If you are interested in reading more about change and stages of transition, check out the following publications.

*Change and Transitions: The Path From A to B* is a booklet that explores change and the emotional transitions and stresses that go with it. It is full of examples, exercises, practical tips and strategies.

*Creating a New Future: The Job-Loss Workbook* offers a whole range of practical information. It includes exercises and options to ease the transition from employment to unemployment. Topics include response to job-loss, negotiating a severance package, financial planning, coping, building a support network, retraining and work options, and much more. Read about how others have handled life's challenges and successes, and how they turned crises into opportunities.

*My Choices, My Work, My Life* is a book for people who are at crossroads in their lives or career journeys. It is designed to help them visualize their ideal futures and make the choices and decisions that will lead them towards those visions.

For free copies of these publications

- call the Alberta Career Information Hotline toll-free at 1-800-661-3753 or 780-422-4266 in Edmonton
- download or order a free copy online at [alis.alberta.ca/publications](https://alis.alberta.ca/publications)



You may have grown up at a time when many people worked for the same employer from the time they left school until they retired. That all started to change in the late '70s. At that time, global competition and economic change forced many major employers to choose between letting employees go and losing the company. Employees started losing jobs that everyone, including their employers, had thought they had for life.

You may be feeling betrayed if your hard work and loyalty have not been rewarded with the job security you were expecting. It can be hard to let go of old expectations, even when you know they are no longer realistic. But you will find it easier to move forward if you can put them behind you.

# Your Experience Is Valuable



Anu was a community college principal before immigrating to Canada almost 20 years ago. He was not able to get an education administration job in Alberta, so he worked as a cook for years. Finally, he saw an opportunity to build on his life experiences. He upgraded his computer skills and got a job with an immigrant serving agency. Now he helps immigrants adjust to their new life in Alberta.

**You have probably learned a great deal from both good and bad events in your life. Think about your experiences and what you have learned from them.**

*Example:*

If you have helped to organize a community event or large family reunion, did you learn something about how to resolve disputes? Negotiate agreements? Co-ordinate the activities of several people? Manage your time effectively? Set and stick to a budget? Promote communication and co-operation? Deal with stress effectively?

**No matter where or how you acquired your knowledge and skills, some employer somewhere needs those skills.**

Even experiences like raising a child or losing a loved one are learning experiences. You learn things about yourself and gain a better understanding of what other people may be going through. That understanding can be very important in work situations that involve dealing with people in similar circumstances.

The skills you have learned and refined through life experiences can be put to use in a wide variety of work settings. Although, in some cases, specific training might be required to meet the needs of the job. See the *You Can Learn New Skills* section for further information.

*Examples:*

- Are you good at organizing the activities of others? You could put that skill to good use in occupations such as activity co-ordinator, dispatcher, retail supervisor, tour operator, travel consultant or volunteer co-ordinator.
- Have you helped children to become better athletes? You might be interested in building on the coaching skills you have developed. Training skills can be applied in a wide variety of work settings. For example, coaching skills are a valuable asset for trainers, tutors, driving instructors, English as a Second Language instructors, early childhood

educators, child and youth care workers, fitness instructors and sports instructors.

- Do you have experience with people who have disabilities? Then you probably know a lot more about coping with disabilities than most people do. You may even have learned to use specialized teaching or treatment techniques. Would you be interested in applying what you have learned to a work situation? For example, would you be interested in becoming a teaching assistant or working in a facility that offers speech, physical or recreation therapy?

## Recognize your skills

Employers are looking for people who can do more than perform a set of tasks. They are looking for people who have soft (transferable) skills as well as hard (technical) skills. In fact, a Canadian Federation of Independent Business survey found that members ranked the following soft skills as the top three employee skills and qualities

- willingness to learn
- willingness to stay at the firm
- customer service skills

New employees may be able to learn the required hard skills, such as how to operate equipment on-the-job or through short-term training. Soft skills are much harder to teach so employers want to hire people who already have them. For example, employers are looking for people who have good personal, communication and interpersonal skills.



### *Examples of personal skills:*

- confidence
- positive attitude
- reliability
- trustworthiness
- adaptability
- efficiency

### *Examples of communication skills:*

- follows directions well
- communicates ideas well, in person or in writing
- willing to ask questions to gain useful information or insight
- willing to share information freely
- contributes ideas and opinions in a positive way
- provides *constructive* feedback when others make mistakes

### *Examples of interpersonal skills:*

- gets along well with other employees
- accepts responsibility for actions
- accepts feedback and learns from mistakes
- treats everyone with respect
- willing to share knowledge and coach others
- good at resolving conflicts and negotiating

*Examples of other types of soft skills:*

- good at problem-solving, information-gathering or decision-making
- resourcefulness
- knowledge of safety practices and procedures
- fluency in a second language
- an interest in innovation
- initiative

(Examples adapted from Conference Board of Canada Employability Skills 2000+)

You probably have many of these soft skills, and more. But employers are not mind readers. Your task as a job seeker is to communicate, clearly and concisely, what you can do for employers. Listing previous job responsibilities does not communicate that very well, especially if you are applying for different types of work than you have done in the past. Make it easy for employers to see what you can do by going a couple of steps further:

1. Identify the skills you used to fulfil your responsibilities.
2. Describe situations in which you have demonstrated your skills.

Employers are much more impressed if you can back up your claims with evidence. For example, instead of simply telling employers that you are a self-starter, follow up by describing a situation in which you showed initiative. Be specific about what you did, why you thought it was necessary, what happened as a result and how results benefited your employer (describe how it improved production or communication). If possible, show employers samples or pictures of things you have done.

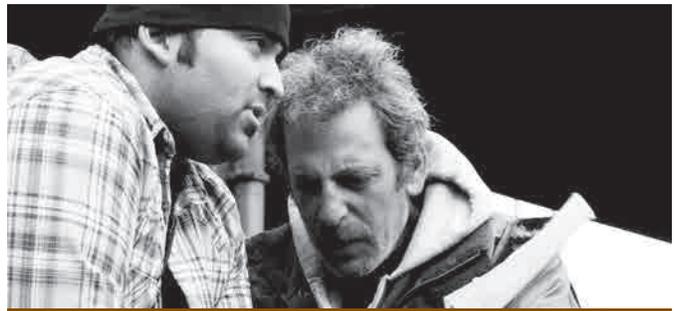
Employers usually contact references to check the information you provide on applications and in interviews. The people you ask to be your

references should be former supervisors or others who can back up what you say about your skills and accomplishments. Give your references a copy of your resumé and keep them informed about the interviews you have. Then they will be better prepared to answer questions about you and talk about how you have demonstrated your skills.

Having lots of experience to draw on makes the process of identifying your skills both easier and harder. You have more skills now than you did when you were younger, so it may be relatively easy for you to identify quite a few soft skills. But having so many skills makes it harder to decide which ones to emphasize in your resumé and covering letter.



Lois was really scared. She had over 25 years of experience in a very industry-specific clerical job that would soon be automated. She was afraid she would never be able to find another job because her hard skills were no longer needed anywhere. She mentioned her fears to a friend in the career development field who helped her to realize that she had many soft skills to offer employers. When Lois did lose her job, she prepared a resumé that emphasized her strongest soft skills and signed up for a short-term course to learn some basic computer skills. She found work in a different industry in less than three months.



George decided to focus on his strong teamwork and interpersonal skills, not his work history in the trades. He wanted to get into some type of social service work. That meant he had to learn some basic computer skills and take a training program. The program included a work practicum that led to his new job working with street people.

If you still have problems putting your skills into words, call the Alberta Career Information Hotline or visit the nearest Alberta Works Centre. For information about these services, see the *Let Others Help With Your Work Search* section of this guide.

### Take advantage of positive beliefs about aging

Common beliefs about aging can work for you or against you when you are looking for work. That's because most stereotypes of older workers include some positive beliefs and some negative ones. For example, surveys of human resource professionals have found that many believe older workers

- have a strong work ethic
- are reliable
- are committed to their organizations (do not change employers often)

#### Focus on

- your strongest skills
- the skills you want to use in the future
- the ones that are most likely to interest the employers you are contacting

The following publications, available to download or order at [alis.alberta.ca/publications](http://alis.alberta.ca/publications), include exercises that can help you identify your soft skills.

*Advanced Techniques for Work Search* is a workbook for job seekers who have experience in the workforce or post-secondary education and training. It will help you identify your skills and accomplishments, update your work search tools and skills, focus your work search and access other resources.

*Assessing You: The First Step in Career Planning* is a self-assessment workbook. In it, you can read about the skills employers are looking for and work on exercises that will help you identify your strengths. This book also includes suggestions for keeping track of your skills and ideas for repackaging your career assets to suit your current needs.

*Workability: What You Need to Get & Keep a Job* is a workbook that lists the attitudes and skills employers look for in workers. It defines each attitude and skill, provides a checklist of the knowledge and attitudes required, offers suggestions on how to develop or build on your skills and provides other resources to help you.

These resources can help you identify your skills and organize them into groups of related skills. People who know you well can also help you with this exercise. In fact, if you ask them to help you list things you do well, your friends and family will probably surprise you by listing skills you take for granted.

This may give older workers a bit of an advantage when applying for some types of jobs.

*Examples:*

- Employers are always looking for people who are reliable and have a strong work ethic.
- Employers may be particularly interested in your level of commitment if the job requires on-the-job training. If you quit in a few months it will cost them time and money to hire and train someone else.

Show employers that you have the positive characteristics often associated with older workers. Draw their attention to things you have learned from experience and any advantages there may be in hiring you. For example, if these statements apply to you, let employers know that

- you are a steady, mature worker
- you have learned to manage your time well
- you have demonstrated the ability to work co-operatively and effectively with a wide variety of people
- you know lots of people in your community or have contacts in other communities
- you see problems in a broad context and use common sense to solve them
- you have learned how to achieve and maintain a balanced, healthy lifestyle
- your confidence is based on a realistic understanding of your abilities
- you are willing to do seasonal or evening and weekend work



Sophia decided to accept an early retirement offer so that she could be closer to her family but found that retirement was not what she had expected. She contacted a community employment agency and found out that a local retail mall owner was looking for a promotions person who could also do some office work. The mall owner was so impressed with Sophia's maturity, personality and experience in customer service that he hired her on the spot. He said she could learn the necessary computer skills on the job.

## Deal with negative views about aging

The other side of the coin is that you may have to convince employers that you do not fit negative stereotypes about older workers. But before you will be able to convince others, you must believe that yourself.

Examine your own thoughts. You may think that older workers are

- inflexible or unwilling to change or try new ways of doing things
- likely to quit soon
- unwilling to accept criticism or instruction
- not productive
- not interested in learning new skills
- not able to learn new skills

Research does *not* support *any* of these ideas. Instead, scientific studies suggest that older workers are just as adaptable to changes in the workplace as other workers. Older workers are comfortable being supervised by younger colleagues and do not change jobs as often as younger workers.

Studies also have found no connection between age and job performance. Differences among workers who are in the same age group are usually greater than differences between age groups. In other words, if you were a productive worker when you were younger, you are probably still a productive worker.

Likewise, curiosity and desire for information and knowledge do not decrease with age. If you were interested in learning new things when you were younger, you still are. You may prefer to learn things at your own pace and in your own way, but you are still just as able to learn as you ever were.

**Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.—Mark Twain**

If you believe negative stereotypes about aging, they become self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, if you believe you are less enthusiastic and energetic now than you were 20 years ago, that is how you behave. Actions speak louder than words, and employers will believe what your attitudes and actions say about you.

Employers hire people they think will get the job done. If you believe you are the right person for the job, it will come through in a job interview. If you believe you are too old to start something new, employers will sense that and probably agree with you.

Negative views about aging do exist. Observation and experience have taught some employers that they are not true, but you may meet employers who believe them. There are three ways to deal with the possibility of age discrimination:

1. Do not reveal your age.
2. Make it obvious that you do *not* fit negative stereotypes.
3. Address potential concerns indirectly, without being asked.

### **Do not make it easy to screen you out**

Most employers use resumés and cover letters, or application forms, to screen job applications. When they receive lots of applications for a position, they may reduce the number they have to seriously consider by looking for reasons to screen applications out. Your application may be screened out early *if*

- you do not make it clear that you have the skills required for the job
- your application does not look business-like (for example, your resumé is hand written, badly photocopied, tattered or contains spelling or grammatical errors)
- you provide personal information that is not related to your ability to fulfil job requirements (for example, early employment experience, dates of training certificates)

Do not make it easy for employers to screen you out because of your age. If you have a high school diploma or other credentials, such as licences, training certificates or a post-secondary diploma, that information should be in your application. If you acquired a credential recently, you may want to include the date to show that your knowledge and skills are current. But if you earned a credential a long time ago, leave the date out.

Likewise, you do not have to list every job you have ever held. Include only your most recent and relevant work experience in your resumé and on application forms. Let employers know how long you were employed in specific jobs, but avoid making it easy for them to guess your age. For example, if you worked for one employer for a very long time, say that you worked for that employer for over five years (or 10 years, or whatever number of years you think appropriate). At this crucial stage of the hiring process, you do not want to give employers any reasons for screening you out before they have even met you.

### **Make it obvious you do not fit negative stereotypes**

First impressions are extremely important in job interviews. Without saying a word, *show* employers that you do not fit negative stereotypes. Look energetic and confident. Be enthusiastic about your work. Make a good first impression. Then, follow up by talking about your interest in new techniques and technologies, and describing situations in which you have taken informed risks.

**You will not get a second chance to make a first impression.**

Make sure your appearance says what you want employers to know about you. Your clothing, shoes, grooming and the way you hold and express yourself say a great deal. If you look up-to-date, employers are more likely to assume your skills and ideas are up-to-date as well.

Ask people, whose sense of style you respect and whom you trust to be honest with you, to help you create a look that is appropriate for the type of work you want. If they suggest that you should update your appearance, you may be able to do that without spending a lot of money. Your goal is to look like you have relevant skills and ideas, not like you are trying to look younger than you are.

If you do not feel confident, energetic, enthusiastic or passionate, you probably do not look it either. Pretend you do, just for now. Pretending can lead to actually feeling the way you want to appear. Even if you get the impression that an interview is not going well, keep up a good front. Maintain a positive attitude no matter what. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

**Even if you have had a bad experience, do not assume that all interviewers are biased against older workers. Assuming the worst makes you look and sound defensive.**





When a 65-year-old woman returned to work from medical leave, she was told there was no longer a position available for her. But her employer was still advertising available positions, so she made a complaint to the Alberta Human Rights Commission. She said that her employer had discriminated against her on the basis of her age. An investigation revealed that her co-workers and employer had assumed she was going to retire, partly because she had said she was looking forward to her birthday and the age-related benefits she would get. The Commission found there was merit in her complaint.

- Talk about your interests and what you have learned recently. Let employers know that you are willing and able to learn new skills (for more information, see the *You Can Learn New Skills* section).
- Talk about your commitment or good attendance record. Your references should be people who can support your statements.
- If your supervisor might be someone who is much younger than you, talk about situations where you have worked successfully with younger people.

Most people are nervous in job interviews. Anxiety can work for you by keeping you sharp, but it can also work against you. If you become so nervous that you cannot present your qualifications well, order or download a copy of *Change and Transitions: The Path From A to B* at [alis.alberta.ca/publications](http://alis.alberta.ca/publications). It offers suggestions on handling fear and tips for reducing stress.

### Address potential concerns indirectly

Employers may have concerns about your age, but human rights law prohibits them from asking about age-related issues. Let them know, indirectly, that their fears are unfounded.

*Examples:*

- Provide evidence that you are a productive worker. Talk about your performance record, and any recognition you have received (for example, a letter of appreciation for volunteer work, a good performance appraisal, an Employee of the Week award, a letter of commendation from an employer or a thank-you letter from a satisfied customer or client).
- If the job is physically demanding, talk about things you have done recently that required as much or more physical stamina and strength. Or talk about how you have learned to work smarter.
- Tell employers about how this job fits into your career plans (see the *Career Planning Puts You in Control* section of this book). If true, let them know that you will stay with the job at least as long as most other employees.



Convincing others that you can fulfil job requirements may require persistence. The late John Glenn's experience is a good example. The astronaut and United States Senator wanted to be involved in medical and scientific experiments planned for a 1998 NASA Discovery mission. He had been out of the space program for years and was over 70 years old, but he believed he was the right person for the job. People at NASA were not easily convinced. Mr. Glenn had to talk to NASA dozens of times before he finally got the go-ahead for the mission.

**Age discrimination is against the law. In Alberta, if you are 18 or older, employers are not allowed to ask your age or ask other questions that might reveal your age.**

If you think you have been discriminated against because of your age, you can contact the Canadian Human Rights Commission or the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission.

- The **Canadian Human Rights Commission** deals with human rights inquiries and complaints involving federal government departments and agencies, Crown corporations, federally regulated industries, such as the prairie grain industry, banks, national airlines, and some inter-provincial agencies, such as inter-provincial transportation and telecommunication companies. For more information, call one of the telephone numbers listed below or visit the Canadian Human Rights Commission website **chrc-ccdp.ca**.

In Edmonton 780-495-4040

Access for deaf and hard of hearing people (TTY)  
1-888-643-3304

Toll-free long distance 1-888-214-1090

- The **Alberta Human Rights Commission** deals with human rights inquiries and investigates complaints involving all other types of employers and service providers in Alberta. For more information, call one of the telephone numbers listed below or visit the Alberta Human Rights Commission website **albertahumanrights.ab.ca**.

In Edmonton 780-427-7661

In Calgary 403-297-6571

Access for deaf and hard of hearing people (TTY)  
1-800-232-7215

Toll-free long distance 310-0000, then dial the 10-digit Edmonton or Calgary number after the prompt.

# Money Matters—Only You Can Decide How Much

**Take stock of your financial situation at the beginning of your work search. Not only will you spend less time and energy worrying about money later on, you may have more financial options now than you will later.**



Worrying about money uses up energy that is better spent looking for work.

1. List your monthly sources of income, amounts of income and any other financial assets.

*Examples:*

- Employment Insurance (EI) payments
- spouse's income
- severance pay
- savings
- benefits from the province such as Income Support, or Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped.

2. List monthly expenses and amounts and other financial commitments. Do not forget to list annual expenses such as insurance costs and property taxes.

*Examples:*

- rent or mortgage payments
- utilities (power, heat, water, telephone)
- transportation costs
- debts (such as car payments or credit card debt)
- food
- clothing
- medical expenses
- commitments to children or elderly relatives.

3. Discuss any shortfalls with others who will be directly affected by changes in your budget. Ask them to help you make a list of possible ways to increase monthly income and reduce expenses.

*Examples:*

- Prepare lunches and other meals at home instead of eating out.
- Reduce your entertainment expenses. For example, cancel a cable TV subscription.
- Use public transit more and your vehicle less. If necessary, sell your vehicle.
- Take in someone who will pay for room and board.
- Take a paper route to bring in extra income, get more exercise and still be free to look for work during standard business hours.

4. If you will not be able to meet your financial obligations while you are unemployed, talk to a financial advisor as soon as possible. You may be able to consolidate your debts or take other steps to avoid serious financial problems.

Talk to someone you know and whose financial management skills you respect. If appropriate, contact your bank or credit union, and ask about obtaining financial advice. Or contact a not-for-profit consumer debt counselling service such as Money Mentors **moneymentors.ca**.

Toll-free in Alberta 1-888-294-0076

### Look ahead

Think about your long-term financial future as well. Do you need as much monthly income or as big a home as you once did? How much income do you really need? If you were offered an ideal job, but at a lower salary than you are used to being paid, would you accept it? How much would you be willing to give up to gain greater job satisfaction?

What are your long-term financial goals? For example, do you dream of retiring in your late 50s or early 60s and doing some travelling? How much money will you need to have saved to make your dreams come true, and still live comfortably in your retirement years? If you are not sure, do some reading about retirement planning, talk to a financial advisor or sign up for a pre-retirement seminar.



Plan for several possible scenarios, ranging from best case to worst case. In the best possible scenario, it takes you less than three months to find a job that pays well. How much money will you have to save each month to achieve your long-term goals, assuming you get a reasonable rate of return on your investments? What if the rate of return on your investments is lower than expected? Will you put off retirement? If interest rates or stock market returns go way down after you retire, would you have to go back to work?

In the worst possible scenario, you do not find work for over a year and you are offered a lower salary than you would like. How would that affect your long-term financial goals? Would you be better off to accept a lower-paying job early in your work search, and keep looking for a better offer? Or would accepting a lower-paying job make it more difficult for you to negotiate a higher salary later?

Answering these questions may require some information gathering. For example, to answer the last two questions, you need to know the typical salary range for the type of work you want and how employers determine salary offers for those positions. The *You Have More Work Options Than You Think* section of this book talks about how to gather information.



# Career Planning Puts You in Control

**Have you considered the possibility that you might live to be 90? If you started working when you were 20, retire when you are 55 and live to be 90, you will be retired for as many years as you are employed. Will your retirement income be sufficient to support you for 35 years? If you decide not to retire until you are 65, will your retirement income be sufficient to support you for 25 years?**

Just as important, do you want to be retired from the labour force for that long? You may be able to think of a number of things you would like to do when you retire, such as travel or fix up your home, but will those things keep you busy for 20 years or more? Will you miss things you used to get from paid employment? For example, will you miss the larger paycheque, the sense of accomplishment you get from your work, the opportunities to learn new things or the opportunities to meet and work with people?

**I** Alberta has never had a legislated mandatory age of retirement.

Many baby boomers (people born between 1945 and 1966) expect to work at least part-time during their retirement. Do you? If so, what type of work do you see yourself doing? If you can see yourself working into your 70s or longer, how many more years could you be in the labour force?

You have been making career decisions ever since you were in school. You chose which optional classes to take and what to do after you left school. When you started looking for work, you chose to apply for some types of work and not others.

Career planning can help you make your years in the labour force as interesting and enjoyable as possible. But it is not something you do once and then forget about. Career planning is a cycle that repeats many times over your lifetime. As your circumstances change and you learn more about yourself and the labour market, your ideas about what you want out of life change, too. When your goals change, so do your plans.

Career planning gives you a guide for making these types of decisions. Having experience in the labour market makes career planning easier in some ways and harder in others. It makes it easier because you know a lot

more about yourself and the labour market now than you did when you were starting out. You have a clearer idea of what interests you, what motivates you, what you are able to do and what you enjoy doing. That makes defining what you want easier. But having a lot of experience in one type of work can make it difficult for you to recognize other possibilities.

## What do you want?

The first step in career planning is to develop a clear picture of what you want. Often, that is not as easy as it sounds. But it is worth the effort because it leads to much better results in the end: work you really enjoy, in less time. If you know what you are looking for, you are less likely to waste time looking in the wrong places.

It is a lot easier to appear enthusiastic and interested when you are applying for work you really want.

Your first reaction might be to say, “I want a job just like my last one,” but do you really? This could be an opportunity to make some long-desired changes in your life. You may not have chosen to be looking for work at this stage in your life but, now that you are,

*Example:*

Things I Liked	Things I Did Not Like
steady paycheque	record-keeping
seeing the results of my work	heavy lifting
good salary and benefits package	cranky customers
skilled co-workers	working alone
interesting work	no clear instructions

why not do what you can to make this transition a change for the better?

You probably enjoyed some parts of past work and volunteer experiences, and did not enjoy other parts. If there were many things you did not like, or you cannot go back to your former type of work, try the following exercise.

1. Down the left side of a blank page, list the things you liked about your last jobs or volunteer activities. Down the right side of the page, list the things you did not like. Work quickly and put down whatever comes to mind. Start another page if you run out of room on the first one.
2. Go back through both of your lists and check off or highlight the items that are important to you, the ones that made a big difference to how much you enjoyed your work.
3. Turn important negative items around by stating them in a positive way. For example, if you did not like working alone, put down that you prefer to work with others. Likewise, if you did not like working without clear instructions, say that you want clear guidelines for your work.
4. On a new sheet of paper, list the things you want, from most important to least important. Take your time and be as specific as you can.

*Examples:*

- If you want to work with others, describe how and in what work settings (for example, providing a service in a health-care setting, working with a small group of people toward a shared goal, selling wholesale goods or services to companies, instructing people in a recreational setting).
  - If you want interesting work, list the types of tasks that interest you.
  - If a good income is important to you, put a minimum amount on what you mean by good income. If benefits are important, list the benefits you want, such as vacation pay, sick leave, pension plan, dental plan or supplementary health benefits.
5. Think about the priorities you have listed. Has your definition of success changed from what it once was? If you found work that satisfies the most important requirements you have listed, would you consider that success? If not, add whatever is missing to your list.

Things that may limit your options	Ways to get around them
Child-care or eldercare responsibilities	Is there someone who could take over if you have to travel sometimes, or work some weekends and holidays?
Do not have a vehicle	Can you use public transit to get to distant locations in a reasonable amount of time?  Could you catch a ride with a family member, neighbour or co-worker?  Could you ride a bike in warmer weather or find some other way to get to work?
Cannot afford to go back to school full time	Could you take part-time courses that are offered evenings or weekends? Could you learn the skills you need from someone you know? Could you take an Internet course or a distance education (correspondence) course?  Identify the types of volunteer work that might require the kind of training you need. Is there a free training program for volunteers, or would someone in the organization be willing to train you?

Add a title to your list of important requirements: My New Career Goal. Because you are one of a kind, your career goal will be different from anyone else's. It may point to a particular type of work, or it may not.

*Example:*

It may be very important to you to have positive relationships with the people you see often at work. That is a good thing to know when you are considering whether or not to accept a particular job offer. If you get a good feeling about the work environment when you go for an interview, or you have heard good things about staff morale there, you probably will be able to build co-operative, supportive relationships in that environment. But knowing that good working relationships are important to you may not be very helpful in identifying the types of work you would like to pursue. There are a great many jobs that involve working with others!

When you know what you want, it is easier to decide which career moves will bring you closer and which ones will move you farther away from your goal.

## What do you *not* want?

Take a hard look at the things you are not willing to do to move toward your goal. For example, you may not want to

- move to another location
- accept shift work
- be away from home often
- do a lot of driving

- try new things if you are not sure you will succeed
- risk the disapproval of family members and friends
- upgrade your skills
- accept a lower salary than you have earned in the past

Make a list of things you are not willing to do. If there are things you cannot do, such as heavy lifting, list those, too.

Each item on your list reduces the number of work options open to you, so make sure you are not limiting your options unnecessarily. Ask yourself how you might be able to get around limitations. If everything else about a job offer is really good, what could you do?

*Examples:*

You may box yourself into a corner by putting too many restrictions on the types of work options you are prepared to consider. On the other hand, it does not make sense to compromise if you do not have to. The following section *You Have More Work Options Than You Think* describes how to find out if your expectations are realistic.

If you would like to learn more about career planning, order or download Career Planner: Choosing an Occupation at [alis.alberta.ca/publications](https://alis.alberta.ca/publications).

If you prefer to do your career planning online, log in to [alis.alberta.ca/careerinsite](https://alis.alberta.ca/careerinsite). CAREERinsite is a one-stop guide to career planning where you can do online activities to generate occupational options and develop a personal action plan.

# You Have More Work Options Than You Think

**If you have worked in one occupation or industry for many years, you may not be aware of other work options that may be open to you. Even if you have worked in several fields, you probably know more about those options than you do about other occupations or industries. That is why gathering information is such an important part of a successful work search. It opens your eyes to opportunities you might not see otherwise.**

The labour market keeps changing. As some types of work disappear, new ones emerge. If you limit your search to familiar work options, you could be unemployed longer than necessary. If you are willing to consider various types of work, work settings and work arrangements, you may find work a lot faster.

**Caution:** If you are receiving Employment Insurance benefits, find out how taking advantage of a non-traditional work alternative would affect your EI payments.

Depending on your situation, you may be interested in

- exploring non-traditional work alternatives
- gathering information about different occupational alternatives
- interpreting labour market information about occupational or industry growth
- gathering information about advertised and unadvertised work opportunities

## Non-traditional work alternatives

There is always work to be done, but it does not always take the form of a full-time job.

Consider the following non-traditional work alternatives. They may not interest you as long-term options. However, they may give you some ideas about ways to earn money while you are looking for other work.

## Temporary or contract work

Accepting temporary work or contract work is a good way to earn money. It also helps you meet potential employers, get to know the local labour market better, build your self-confidence and keep your skills current. Further, if employers are impressed with your work, you will have a definite advantage if those employers have job openings in the future.

Temporary employment agencies usually specialize in providing workers for particular types of short-term work, such as reception, payroll, construction, engineering, information technology, display set-up, assembly-line work, driving and warehousing. Before you submit applications to temp agencies, check them out. Find out how long they have been in business, what qualifications they are looking for, what types of work they supply workers for and how workers are recruited and paid. You can usually get answers to these questions by phoning agencies. Agency personnel should be willing to answer general questions about the way the agency operates. However, they may not be willing to name the employers who use their services.

Some temp agencies are also employment agencies. Employment agencies usually charge employers a fee to find suitable applicants for permanent or contract positions. Some employment agencies charge job applicants a fee.

## Casual (on call) work

Casual workers are called in to work whenever the employer needs them, often on short notice. You may be able to specify the days or hours you are available to work, but you probably will not know which of those days you will be called in. You could be called in

to work one or two days a month, or almost every day that you are available.

Some employers hire permanent employees by selecting good workers from among their casual workers. In these companies, the only way to get a full-time job is to work on a casual basis first.

## Telecommuting

Telecommuters work for one or more employers from home, and keep in touch with staff and customers primarily via technology (phone, email, fax). For example, some people employed in the insurance industry are telecommuters. They may be required to attend some face-to-face meetings, but they do most of their work from home.

As a telecommuter, you may be employed full time or part time or be self-employed.

## Multi-tracking

Multi-trackers have more than one job at the same time.

*Examples:*

- You could have two or three part-time jobs instead of one full-time job.
- You could have a full-time or part-time job, and operate a home-based business as well.
- You could work full-time for one employer on weekdays and occasionally work a few hours for another employer.

Multi-tracking may be a good option if you would like to pursue a variety of interests at the same time, or if you would like to start a small business on a part-time basis before making a full-time commitment.

## Part-time work

If income is not as important as activity or if you would enjoy multi-tracking, why not look for a part-time dream job? It might involve doing things you have always dreamed about doing or provide benefits you would really enjoy.

*Examples:*

- If you enjoy golfing, would you like a part-time job that gives you golfing privileges at a local golf course? If so, find out if any of your favourite golf courses need a part-time person to help out with tasks such as lawn maintenance or equipment rentals. The pay may not be what you are used to, but the golfing privileges could be worth a lot.
- If you love driving, consider the possibility of driving a school bus, city bus or van for people who have disabilities. Or look for work with a limousine service or a car dealership that needs drivers to transport vehicles from one location to another.
- If you know a lot about your community and its history, and enjoy meeting people, find out if local tourist attractions employ tour guides. If there is a major international sporting event planned, find out if organizers need guides for foreign guests.
- If you love creative design, find out if a craft, framing, scrapbooking or home renovation business needs your talents.
- If you enjoy answering questions and directing people, look for opportunities to work in an information booth or similar type of work setting.
- If you are a knowledgeable tennis fan, find out what it takes to become a tournament umpire.
- If you enjoy helping seniors, find out what services for seniors are offered or needed in your community. Look for work with existing services or start a service of your own.
- If you have dreamed of being a model, contact some modelling agencies. Find out which ones are interested in older models for catalogues or magazine ads. Ask for a free assessment of your potential.
- If you love children, find out how local stores or shopping malls hire a Santa or Mrs. Claus.



## Self-employment

Self-employed people may operate home-based businesses or businesses that employ others. They may produce or market products (such as clothing, jewellery, pottery, willow furniture) or offer services on a freelance basis (such as bookkeeping, consulting, renovations, web design). Home-based business owners usually work alone, but they may form temporary alliances with other self-employed people to bid on large contract opportunities.

Their incomes depend entirely on how well self-employed people develop, market and deliver their services or products. That may scare you, but self-employment has advantages that may outweigh the risk. Since you are your own boss, self-employment gives you a lot of flexibility about the hours you work and what you do on any given day.

If this work alternative appeals to you, do some very careful research. Beware of self-employment opportunities that promise great returns for very little effort. If they sound too good to be true, they probably are.

The following booklet is a good place to start your research. To order or download a copy, visit [alis.alberta.ca/publications](http://alis.alberta.ca/publications).

*Self-Employment: Is It For Me?* outlines the benefits and challenges of self-employment and examines the motivation, skills, traits and background of successful entrepreneurs. Self-assessment exercises help you determine if you share these characteristics and, if not, how you might acquire some of them. It explores various forms of self-employment and how to get started in business.



## Volunteering

Volunteering is a rewarding way to keep active and healthy. Volunteers devote their time to a worthy cause. As well as the difference you can make in the lives of others, volunteering helps you

- get more work experience on your resumé
- learn new skills
- meet people and make connections that may help you get work
- try out career ideas by working in fields that interest you

To find volunteer opportunities in your community, visit the Go Volunteer website at [govolunteer.ca](http://govolunteer.ca).



Dawna worked part-time from her home for a not-for-profit organization for eight years. She answered telephone and email requests for information, spoke to groups of school children and helped to organize conferences and information seminars. Then her family circumstances changed. She wanted to work more hours but did not want to quit a job she enjoyed. Instead, she accepted a part-time position as a teacher assistant that she could work around her first job.

## Occupational alternatives

There are thousands of occupations in today's labour market. Some require specific credentials such as a licence or training certificate; some do not. Some credentials can be earned in a matter of weeks; other credentials take much longer.

Information about a wide variety of occupations is available from the Alberta Career Information Hotline and Alberta Works Centres. For information about these services, see the *Let Others Help With Your Work Search* section of this guide.

Over 500 Alberta occupations are listed in OCCinfo at [alis.alberta.ca/occinfo](http://alis.alberta.ca/occinfo). Each occupational profile includes information about

- typical duties and responsibilities
- working conditions
- personal and educational requirements
- types of employers
- occupational growth and salary ranges in Alberta. *OCCinfo* allows you to sort profiles by title, keyword, interests, subject, industry, education requirements, lifting requirements, emerging occupations and occupational growth rate.

To give you a sample of the possibilities, the following is an alphabetical list of occupations you may be able to enter if you have completed all or part of high school.

Aboriginal Liaison	Heavy Equipment Operator
Agricultural Equipment Technician	House Cleaner
Animal Care Attendant	Illustrator
Animator	Insurance Agent/Broker
Auctioneer	Interior Decorator
Auto Detailer	Kitchen Helper and Food Preparer/Assembler
Baker	Lather-Interior Systems Mechanic
Bartender	Life Skills Coach
Building Superintendent	Machinist
Bus Driver	Materials Technician
Bylaw Enforcement Officer	Mental Health Aide
Call Centre Agent	Messenger/Courier
Carpenter	Millwright
Carpet and Upholstery Cleaner	Nanny
Cashier	Occupational Health and Safety Advisor
Chiropractic Assistant	Optical Laboratory Technician
Computer Service Technician	Pharmacy Assistant
Construction Estimator	Postal/Wicket Clerk
Cook	Property Manager
Cosmetician	Purchasing Agent
Crane and Hoisting Equipment Operator	Recreation Therapy Aide
Custodian	Retail Salesperson
Direct Seller	Retail Shelf Stocker
Dispatcher	Sales Representative (Wholesale, Non-technical)
Drilling Rig Leasehand	Sandblaster
Driving Instructor	Security Alarm Installer
Electrical Contractor	Security Guard
Esthetician	Speech-Language Assistant
Financial Customer Services Representative	Sports Instructor
Floral Designer	Sprinkler Systems Installer
Food and Beverage Server	Steel Detailer
Food Service Helper	Surface Mining Equipment Operator
Group Exercise Leader	Telemarketer
Hair Stylist	Travel Consultant
Health-Care Aide	Truck Driver

After you have done some reading about occupations that interest you, select a few promising ones. Talk to people who are knowledgeable about those occupations. Ask what training, if any, would be required for you to qualify.



### Interpreting labour market information

Every week, there are news reports about expanding and downsizing businesses, growing and declining industries, and overall trends affecting the labour market. When Statistics Canada publishes new labour market information, news and business reporters analyse it and present their conclusions.

When you read or hear reports about labour market trends, ask yourself a couple of questions.

*How could this trend affect me?*

*What opportunities might this trend create?*

For example, you may have read or heard stories about the potential effects of large numbers of baby boomers retiring. Since an unusually large number of babies were born in Canada between 1945 and 1966, an unusually large number of people will probably retire over the next 15 to 20 years.



When Linda started researching occupations, the job of administrative assistant at a local school caught her attention. She recalled thinking it seemed like an interesting job when her children went to the school. She contacted the local school to find out what qualifications were required for the position. She learned that her current typing speed would not meet their minimum requirements. However, instead of giving up, she started practising and inquiring about positions in private schools. The principal of a private school asked her to come in for an interview and she got a job.



### *How could this trend affect me?*

The prospect of losing large numbers of valuable employees over a short period of time has begun to worry some employers. This is particularly the case in those industries that employ a high proportion of older workers, such as transportation and warehousing, education services, health services, utilities and public administration. Some employers have stopped offering early retirement packages and started making it easier for older employees to stay on staff longer. Some are even offering incentives to encourage older employees to defer retirement. If you would like to work past the traditional retirement age, you may want to target those employers in your work search.

### *What opportunities might this trend create?*

Canada could suffer labour shortages if many baby boomers retire at the same time. If that happens, employers may begin to offer more flexible, non-traditional work alternatives to entice retirees back into the workforce. For example, employers may be more willing to hire people part time or allow employees to work flex time or take time off without pay so they can take longer vacations. If you would like to keep working but want more flexibility than you have now, you may be able to negotiate terms of employment that work well for both you and your employer.

Another often-reported trend is that service industries are growing faster than goods-producing industries. If you have worked in a goods-producing industry most of your life, this trend could have a huge impact on your work search. Or it could have very little impact. You need more information to figure out how a general trend like this one might affect you personally.

1. Which industries are considered goods-producing industries and which ones are service industries?

Agriculture, construction, forestry, manufacturing, mining, and oil and gas are goods-producing industries. Many types of goods are manufactured in Alberta, including petroleum and chemical products, and pulp and paper products.

Service industries are listed in the chart on the following page.

Service Industries	Examples of workplaces that provide services
accommodation and food services	hotels, restaurants, cafeterias, resorts, bed and breakfast accommodations
administrative and support services	travel, pest control, landscaping, investigative services
arts, entertainment and recreation	artistic and athletic organizations, leisure facilities
communications	publishing, movies, broadcasting, public relations, advertising
educational services	public and private schools, post-secondary institutions, driving schools, tutoring services
finance, insurance and real estate	banks, financial management services, property management firms
health care	hospitals, long-term care facilities, physiotherapy services, medical laboratory services
information services	libraries, archives, information processing firms
personal services	funeral, pet care, photo-finishing, personal history services
professional, scientific and technical services	accounting, architectural, engineering, legal, information technology services
repair and maintenance services	automotive, appliance, furniture, musical instrument repair services
retail trade	retail stores, e-commerce, direct distributors
social services	childcare, eldercare, emergency shelter, relief services
transportation and warehousing	trucking, air transport, rail transport, courier services
waste management and remediation services	garbage collection, recycling, site clean-up services



## 2. Are there exceptions to general trends?

There are always exceptions to broad generalizations. Before you jump to any conclusions, do some reading and talk to people who are knowledgeable about the industries that interest you. You may find that some goods-producing industries (such as the food processing industry) are growing faster in your community than some service industries.

## 3. What other factors will affect future employment prospects in different industries?

Industry size and employee turnover rate—rate of people leaving existing positions—are just as important as industry growth in determining the number of employment openings there will be. For example, the retail trade industry is not growing as quickly as information technology, but there are often more job openings in the retail industry. That's because the retail industry is much larger than the information technology industry, and some types of work in the retail industry have high employee turnover rates.

News stories may provide other types of information you can use in your work search as well.

### *Examples:*

If you read or hear about a planned new facility, find out who will be constructing and operating the facility and what types of work will be involved. If you are qualified, apply for positions before they are advertised.

If you read or hear that there is a growing demand for a particular type of service, consider how you might be able to take advantage of that trend. Could you provide that service as a self-employed person?



If not, will existing service providers be expanding?  
If so, will they soon need more people to work in their growing businesses?

Learn as much as you can about national labour market trends and local industries. For information on the global and provincial trends affecting Alberta's economy and society, order or download *Alberta Career and Industry Outlook: Economic and Other Trends Affecting the World of Work* at [alis.alberta.ca/publications](http://alis.alberta.ca/publications).

## Finding work opportunities

Most job openings are not advertised, and competition is often keen for ones that are. If you are willing to do the necessary detective work, you will find a number of work opportunities. And you may not have as much competition for them.

You can gather information about work opportunities in many ways. Talk to people, research employers, pay attention to news items, drive around and generally keep your eyes and ears open.

Your local public library and Alberta Works Centre are good places to start researching employers. Ask librarians and career and employment consultants to help you find information about the types of employers that interest you. They can show you how to use business directories, periodical indexes and other resources to locate information.



Maria had years of experience working in the oil and gas industry in South America. When she moved to Calgary, she hoped to find a similar job. It was hard because she did not know many people in Calgary. At a Stampede pancake breakfast, she happened to meet someone from her apartment block who worked in the oil and gas industry. They talked and she offered to give him a copy of her resumé. He took it to his employer. Soon afterward, the employer offered her a six-month contract position. She gladly took the opportunity to demonstrate her skills and meet more people.

When you have identified a number of potential employers, gather as much information about them as you can. The Internet is a great tool for this. Many employers have websites that provide information about their products and services. Some also provide information about key personnel, the structure of the organization, career opportunities in the organization and how to submit job applications.

You probably will not find all the information you want in print materials or on the Internet. The rest you can gather by networking. Do this by telling people that you are looking for work and asking for their assistance. People can and will help you if you ask them for advice, information or a referral to someone else.

You never know what you will learn when you start asking questions. Be ready to take advantage of unexpected opportunities.

Networking is not something new. You have been building and maintaining a network of contacts for years. Some of your relationships are social, including your family and friends. Some relationships are work related, such as those with co-workers and customers. And some relationships are connected to volunteer experiences or group memberships in community service groups, religious groups, hobby clubs or sport leagues. You have probably asked your contacts for information and advice many times in the past. For example, you may have consulted them when you were looking for a family physician or thinking about making a major purchase.

Call people you know. Go to gatherings they are likely to attend. Briefly describe the type of work you are looking for and your strongest qualifications. That way, when your contacts hear about suitable job openings, they can do more than just tell you about them. They can tell potential employers they know someone who would be interested and is looking for work. You could get an unexpected phone call from a potential employer. It happens more often than you might think!

If you are new in town and do not know very many people yet, contact a service club or some other organization in your community. Meet two people who could introduce you to two more, who could introduce you to two more, and so on, and so on.

The question is not “Where are the jobs?” but “Who needs my skills?”



Another good way to find opportunities is to keep your eyes and ears open as you go about your daily business. Look for work that needs to be done, not necessarily a job.

*Example:*

If you are good at persuading people and enjoy the challenge of selling products, services or ideas, there are a great many organizations that need you. Obviously, retailers need good sales representatives, but so do manufacturers, wholesalers, business services and charities.

If you notice organizations that could use some help promoting their products or services, let them

know what you can do for them. They may not have a current job opening, but they might create one. Or they might hire you on contract or remember you when a job does come open. Give them your resumé, or at least your contact information, so they can get in touch with you.

If you have done some volunteering for a community organization, would you be interested in getting paid for promoting that cause? If there is no such paid position now, but there is a need for one, could you persuade the organization to create one?



Ed developed heart problems in his early 50s and had to take a medical leave from his job. He knew his health would be at risk if he went back because his job was both physically and emotionally demanding. A single parent with two teen-aged children, he needed to find an alternative as quickly as possible.

For years, Ed had worked as a volunteer building housing for low-income families. The last couple of years, he did more work organizing and training other volunteers than he did actual construction. When he heard that a social service agency was having problems, he started asking questions. He realized that the agency really needed someone on staff to recruit, train and co-ordinate volunteers. He approached the agency and was hired on a trial basis. Ed did such a good job as a volunteer co-ordinator that the agency created a permanent position for him.

# You *Can* Learn New Skills

**Jobs that do not require some type of formal credential are getting harder and harder to find. But that does not necessarily mean you have to go back to school.**

Don't assume that you need a particular credential. Talk to people employed in fields that interest you. Ask them about the knowledge and skills they need to do their work. You may find that you already have an equivalent combination of experience and education. Or, you may find that there is more than one way to obtain the education or training you need.

You have learned a great many things from experience. Most employers recognize that. If a position asks for a high school diploma and you do not have one, employers may be willing to hire you anyway. Or they may want to see other evidence of your general knowledge and learning ability, such as a high school equivalency diploma or a training certificate.

- People over 18 years of age can earn a high school equivalency diploma by successfully completing five General Educational Development tests on writing skills, social studies, science, interpreting literature and the arts, and mathematics. A preparation guide and GED practice tests are available for a fee from Alberta Education at 780-427-2767 or online at **education.alberta.ca**. The booklet of practice tests is also sold at many bookstores.
- People over 18 years of age may *not* need a high school diploma to get into a college, technical institute or private vocational school program. Mature students may be admitted if they have successfully completed specific courses such as Grade 10 Math or Grade 12 English, or they can demonstrate that they have equivalent knowledge and skills.



Jenny had worked in a variety of administrative positions in the public and private sector for over 20 years. After participating in an Aboriginal healing program, she decided to make some changes in her work life as well as her personal life. Math had always been her favourite subject in school and the jobs she enjoyed most involved bookkeeping, so she enrolled in a two-year Accounting Diploma program.

It was a struggle to work and go to school at the same time. But she had learned a lot about accounting systems on the job and that made it much easier for her to succeed in her studies.

## Are you willing?

If necessary, would you be willing to study for exams or take a short training program to qualify for the type of work you want? If not, why?

*I should not have to.*

Anger is a normal reaction when your life changes in ways you do not want, but do not let bitterness prevent you from getting on with your life. If you are so angry that you have begun to behave differently, talk to someone you trust and respect such as a friend, counsellor, religious leader or family doctor.

*It's not worth it.*

What are the costs of *not* upgrading your qualifications? Will you have to settle for a lower paying job? If so, how much less would you earn each year? Multiply that number by the number of years you expect to stay in the work force (10 years? 20?). When you look at it that way, is the cost of upgrading worth the potential payoff?

What about other potential costs? When you are not happy with your work, it shows. It shows in your attitude, your relationships and your work. Therefore, your performance appraisals are not as good as they could be. That makes it harder to get hired elsewhere.

There may be ways you could “test the waters”.

For example, can you attend a class as a visitor to see what it is like? Can you take one course before you sign up for a whole program? Can you take a placement test to find out if you need to upgrade your literacy or math skills before you start a program?

Do you have trouble reading or writing? If so, improving your literacy skills might be a good idea, whether you intend to take further education or not.

- If your literacy skills are just rusty, practise by reading things that interest you such as newspapers, magazines or short stories. It probably will not take a long time to brush up your reading skills. And the more you read, the easier it becomes to write correctly.



- If your reading and writing skills have never been as good as you would like, this might be an ideal time to improve them. Call the Alberta Career Information Hotline for information about literacy programs in your area.

*My computer skills are limited.*

Most people learn how to use computers by trial and error. Sometimes, you learn more by making mistakes than you would otherwise.

If family members or friends have a computer, ask them to show you how to play a simple game like Solitaire, and other things that interest you such as email, word processing or searching the Internet. Take it slowly, one step at a time.

Find out where introductory computer courses are being offered in your community. Ask at the nearest Alberta Works Centre or local public library, or call the Alberta Career Information Hotline. Many introductory courses are offered weekday evenings or on weekends. After you have taken an introductory course, you will be able to use the public access computers at the nearest Alberta Works Centre for your work search. If you are still unsure of your computer skills, take along a friend who is comfortable using computers.

Another possibility is to volunteer to do work that involves using a computer. There may be a volunteer training program, or another volunteer may be willing to train you. Then you can learn and do work that benefits your community at the same time.

## **Literacy and computer skills**

Literacy and computer skills will help you in your work search: to prepare resumés, research employers and submit job applications electronically. They are also valuable on the job. Even low-tech jobs often involve reading instructions and writing reports, and using computerized equipment, such as electronic cash registers, photocopiers, hand-held recording devices or invoicing software. Sometimes, job applicants are required to pass computer-based training programs, even when the jobs they are applying for do not involve working with computerized equipment.

If you are not convinced yet, here are three more good reasons for learning how to use a computer.



1. It is a good way to show employers how well you adapt to changing work requirements. It is clear evidence of your initiative and interest in learning.
2. Learning new skills is the best kind of employment insurance you can have. It keeps you up to date.
3. On the whole, workers who use computers on the job retire later than those who do not, regardless of the worker's level of education. That could be a big bonus if you would like to work full-time or part-time for as long as possible.

If you are interested in upgrading or taking a post-secondary program, the following books can help you choose a program and get ready. All of these publications are available at [alis.alberta.ca/publications](https://alis.alberta.ca/publications).

*Adult Back to School Planner* describes how to make a plan and anticipate challenges and where to go for support. This workbook deals with how to cope with change, organize your life, take care of the kids and more. It also covers effective study habits so you can get your homework done and maintain some balance in your life.

*Education and Training Planner* is a workbook that will help you through all of the steps—deciding what you need to learn and what you want to learn, choosing the right program and the right school, applying for admission and thinking about money.

*Time to Choose: A Post-Secondary Education Program* helps answer many of the questions a prospective post-secondary student may have: What programs are offered and where? What's the difference between different types of post-secondary institutions? How do I choose an educational program? How do I apply? It also includes overviews of educational institutions, a features chart and up-to date program information.



Amy was 90 when she decided she wanted to write her family history. A stroke made writing difficult, but that did not stop her. She arranged to have a trainer come to her assisted-living facility once a week to teach her how to use a computer. Now she is teaching others in the residence.

Education program information is also available on the ALIS website [alis.alberta.ca/edinfo](https://alis.alberta.ca/edinfo).

# Let Others Help With Your Work Search

**If you walked out of school straight into a job or into homemaking, you may not be prepared for the realities of today's competitive labour market. Today, you need to know how to actively seek out employment opportunities (not just read the help wanted ads). And you need to know how to present yourself as the answer to an employer's problems. Fortunately, there are lots of programs, services, books and other resources in your community that can help you learn effective work search strategies.**

## Programs and services

### Alberta Career Information Hotline

Career advisors are available by telephone. Ask them about career planning, job search methods, occupational descriptions, educational options, resumé services, educational funding or anything else related to career, education or employment planning. They are available Monday to Friday from 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Toll-free number (within Canada) 1-800-661-3753

In Edmonton 780-422-4266

### Alberta Works Centres

Alberta Works Centres are located throughout the province. For information about office locations and services available in your area, call the Alberta Career Information Hotline or visit [alis.alberta.ca/awc](http://alis.alberta.ca/awc).

Alberta Works Centres have information on finding work, career options, education programs and funding. Many offices have a career resource centre with books, newspapers, magazines and software. They also may have equipment you can use for work search purposes: phones, fax machines, photocopiers and computers for Internet use and word processing.

Many Alberta Works Centres offer free workshops or information sessions. Workshops cover topics such as how to make career decisions, how to write a resumé and cover letter, and how to present your skills well in a job interview.

If you would like to discuss your work search with a career and employment consultant, call the Alberta Career Information Hotline or the nearest Alberta Works Centre.

### Community-based programs

Your community may have community service agencies that also offer work search assistance programs and services. These programs and services help people write resumé and get ready for interviews. They also may help job seekers contact local employers or find transportation to interviews.

Community-based programs often serve specific groups such as women, recent immigrants or people in a particular age group. To find out what programs and services are available in your community, call the Alberta Career Information Hotline.

### Service Alberta

For general inquiries about Alberta Government programs and services, contact the Programs and Services Call Centre between 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Monday to Friday. Voice mail is available after hours. Phone 310-0000 toll-free from anywhere in Alberta or 780-427-2711 from outside Alberta. Or go to [programs.alberta.ca](http://programs.alberta.ca) for online information.

## Print materials and Internet sites

Free print materials are available from any of the Alberta Works Centres. Bookstores and public libraries also carry a wide variety of work search publications.

The Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website at [alis.alberta.ca](http://alis.alberta.ca) is Alberta's online source for career, education and work information, including

- Alberta Work Search Online—information, examples and activities to make the most of your work search using the Internet
- CAREERinsite—online activities to generate occupational options and develop an action plan
- Edinfo—Alberta post-secondary schools and programs and distance-learning options in Western Canada
- Job Postings—links to federal, provincial and regional job banks, Alberta newspaper postings and more
- Mature Workers—information about working for people over 50 and for people contemplating retirement
- OCCinfo—job descriptions, education requirements, salary information, employment and advancement opportunities, and projected growth data for more than 500 occupations
- Occupational videos—more than 200 online video clips showing real people in real jobs



## Work search support

Joining a support group is a good way to get out and meet people and find out that you are not alone. Some communities have support groups for job seekers. Members meet to talk about their work search experiences and exchange information about work search resources, local employers and work opportunities.

Another possibility is to set up an advisory group for your work search. Ask people you know and respect if they would be willing to help with your work search. Ideally, they should be people who think positively and are good at solving problems. With today's advanced communications technology, they may not have to be people who live in your community.

Give your advisors a brief description of your background and skills and the type of work you want to find. Depending on your needs and preferences, and theirs, you may have regular meetings to report on your progress and gather suggestions. But be careful not to take up too much of your advisors' time. It might be better to contact them only when you need specific information or advice regarding a particular issue.

When you succeed in finding work, include your advisory group members in your celebration! And be prepared to return the favour when they need your support.

## What to expect

Work search programs and resources can help you

- find employment opportunities where none are advertised
- prepare and use work search tools such as resumés and cover letters
- prepare for and handle interviews successfully
- learn to negotiate the best possible salary and benefits

It is your task as a job seeker to apply what you learn to your particular situation. You will achieve better results if you are

- patient—your work search may take longer than you hope
- efficient—you probably do not want your work search to take any longer than necessary
- creative—opportunities that are hard to find are often easier to get
- flexible—your best options may not be the obvious ones

## Reach out

If you have always been proudly independent, being unemployed can be a real blow to your self-confidence. You may feel like avoiding people because you do not like admitting you are out of work. But that is the worst thing you could do.

Unemployment is shameful only if you believe it is. Today, the labour market changes rapidly. Very few people will reach retirement without going through at least one period of unemployment.

Contrary to the 1960s folk song, you are not a rock or an island. Don't try to be!

Talk to people. You may be surprised at how much support and encouragement you receive from unexpected quarters. For example, teenaged children may be far more understanding than you think. They already know about the uncertainties of today's labour market.



Bill had been a successful building manager for many years, but he was getting older and used a cane to get around. At 70, he decided to look for less physically demanding work. It took some time, but he found a job with a construction company training new employees.

Share your ups and downs with family members and friends. Recharge your batteries by spending time with people who are upbeat and supportive. If you can, avoid people who make you feel bad. If they are family members, be as understanding as you can. They may be experiencing the same stages of transition as you are. For more information, see *Stages of Transition* at the beginning of this book.

Talking to people will do much more than provide support and encouragement. It could get you a job. In fact, more people find jobs by talking to people than by any other work search method.

## Keep moving forward

Not many people would describe looking for work as fun. But, looking back, many people describe having to make a midlife career move as the best thing that could have happened to them. You could be one of those people if you

- spend some time thinking about what is important to you
- define what you want, now and in the future
- explore your options with an open mind
- face your fears and look for ways to overcome them
- keep your eyes and ears open
- take advantage of unexpected opportunities
- keep learning new skills
- gather information so you can make informed decisions
- follow through on your plans



Do everything you can to maintain your confidence and positive outlook: take good care of yourself, share your ups and downs with others, and deal with any financial concerns you may have.

Take a break when you need to, but never give up! Your perseverance will pay off in ways you may never have imagined possible.

- strengthen your current relationships, meet new people and build new relationships
- take advantage of the many resources and services available to job seekers



Al was 59 when drought and high operating costs reduced his farm profits to the point that he had to look for a job. With some help from the Alberta Career Information Hotline, he prepared his first resumé and started networking. Eventually, he was hired by an industrial equipment company to do assembly work. His many years of practical experience on the farm made him a good fit for this job.



# Feedback

We'd like to hear from you...

## A Guide for Midlife Career Moves

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Send your comments to the address or fax number provided at the bottom of this page:

What specific information in this publication did you find useful? How did it help you?

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How could we improve this publication? What was not useful?

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Do you have any suggestions for other information or other publications that would be of value to you?

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Please return this form to:

**Career and Workplace Resources**

Alberta Human Services

**Mail:** 12th Floor, South Tower, Seventh Street Plaza,  
10030–107 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5J 3E4

**or**

**Fax:** 780-422-5319

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## **A Guide for Midlife Career Moves**

Changes in your work life may come gradually or quite suddenly, sometimes completely beyond your control. Regardless of why you are going through a career transition, this book for job seekers 45 years of age or older will help you take stock of where you are now and where you ultimately want to be. You'll learn to

- identify the skills you currently have and how to apply them in a wide variety of work settings
- discover that it's never too late to learn new skills
- recognize the many positives for hiring mature workers and learn how to combat some of those negative beliefs that employers may have
- find out more about the different work options available to you
- determine your financial and lifestyle needs
- gather more information and resources to get you moving forward as you begin your midlife career transition