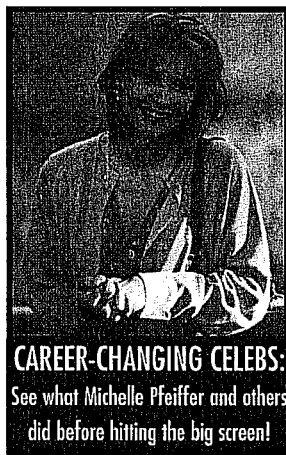
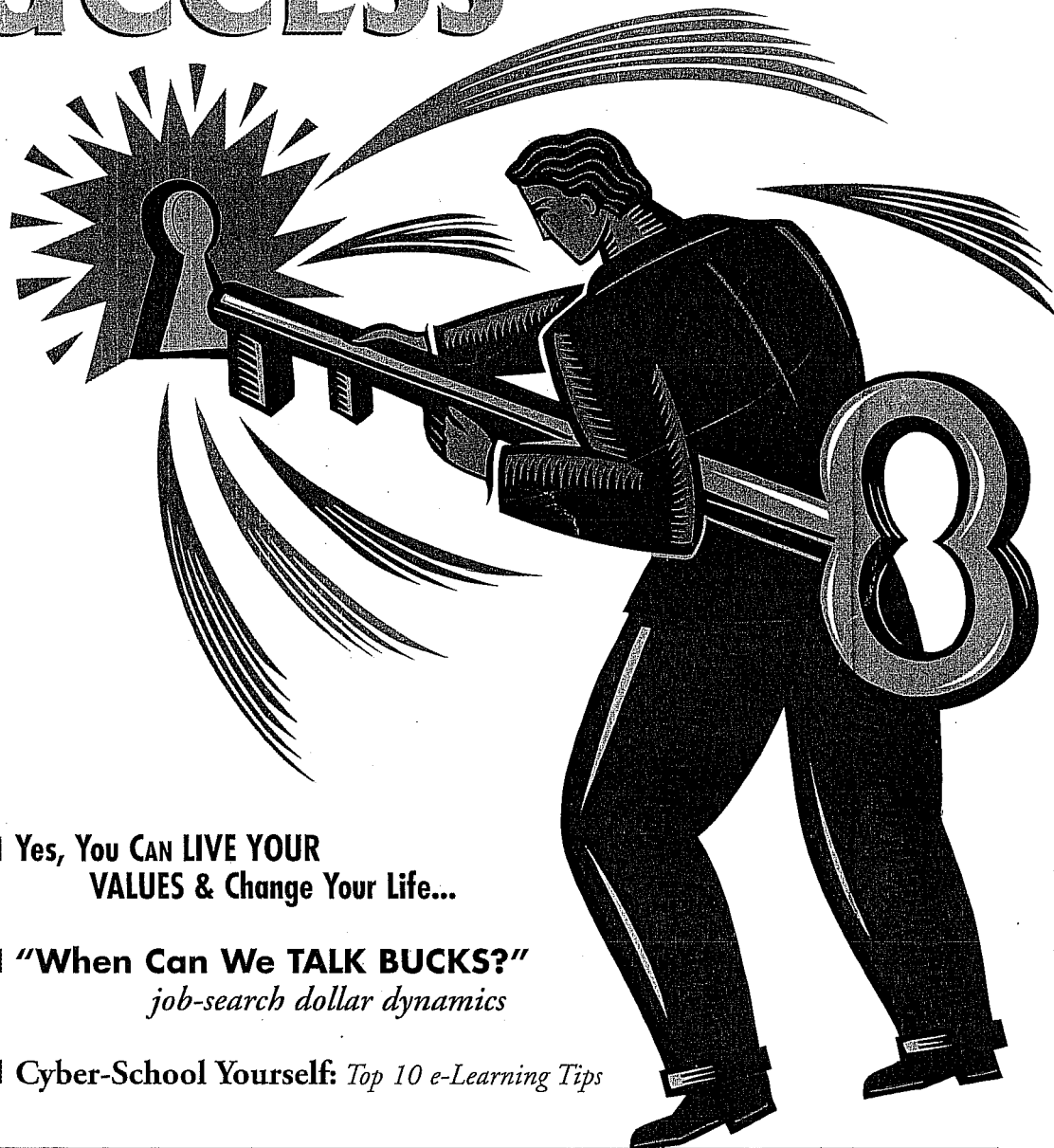


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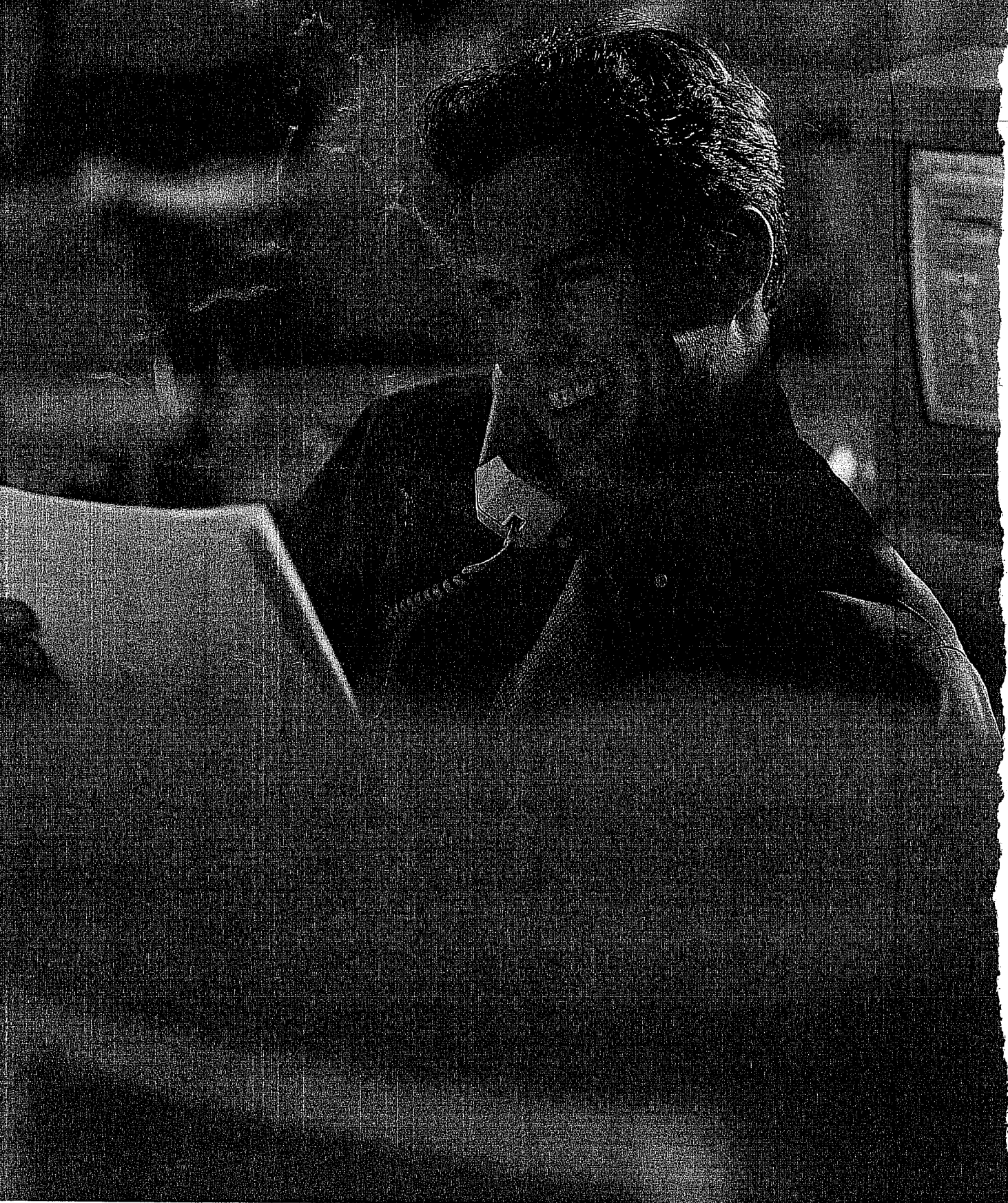
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Changing



Careers with Confidence

by Jim Slaight

Winnemucca, NV. Population 7,800. You've probably never been there.

Now imagine waking up tomorrow completely convinced you absolutely must leave your comfortable, good-paying job and familiar surroundings to move to Winnemucca, NV. You can't explain why, you just know you have to.

Although I didn't move to Winnemucca, I did decide over the course of six months that I had to leave my comfortable, secure, well-paying IBM job and familiar South Florida surroundings to move to Portland, OR. I didn't do a trace of advance planning. I just loaded up the U-Haul and headed West.

I was young. I was foolish. Okay, I was young and foolish. So, imagine my surprise my first Monday morning as an Oregonian. I had no idea what I wanted to be when I grew up. Even if I did know, I'd get lost driving to an office I wouldn't know how to find anyway. My confidence went right out the window.

That was 10 years and two careers ago. I very successfully changed to my third and final career last year, having learned a few things along the way about that swirling whirlwind of reality more commonly known as a "mid-life career change."

You don't have to move on a whim to Winnemucca, NV, or Portland, OR, to feel uncomfortable about leaving a profession you know well and are successful at. Any kind of career change can make you feel apprehensive, nervous, and even a tad bit afraid.

"When people know everything they are supposed to do, but months and years go by and they can't seem to move forward, they are blocked from achieving their dreams and goals," says Carol Lambe, career counselor and founder of the Connecticut Coaches Alliance.

"It's usually not one big fear holding them back. It's fear issues associated with career change activities like networking, interviewing, starting over, and wanting to ask for help. What I do as a career coach is help people identify and release the fear issues that hold them back," explains Lambe.

If you are feeling some measure of career change apprehension, you're not alone. The natural resistance people have to changing careers can be traced back to their basic fears and beliefs. Some are afraid to change or make a mistake. Others dread failure, loss, a change in income, or the very success they desire.

"It takes courage to be the author of your life," says Nicholas Lore, author of the best-selling book, *The Pathfinder: How To Choose or Change Your Career For a Lifetime of Satisfaction and Success* (Simon & Schuster, 1997). "When you are struggling through one of the difficult parts of turning your

dreams into reality, you may wonder why you always get stuck with having to put up with so much fear and uncertainty. 'Why,' you wonder, 'couldn't I feel more courageous, like those other people do?'"

A career change is one of the most life-altering changes you can bring upon yourself, or have thrust upon you. The good news is there are a number of steps you can take to minimize fear, improve your career change confidence, and realize the most successful professional vision you have for yourself. Having a career plan and road map makes the journey easier from start to finish.

"Many people seem to miss out on the idea that every person you meet is a potential resource for you in both your private or business worlds," says Kathy Condon, president of Vancouver, WA-based KC Solutions Career Coaching. "Knowing people is truly a source of power, because they have information that can help you or others you know. The idea is to make every contact count."

"People need to determine their objectives," says Bernadette Kenny, executive vice president and global marketing officer for Lee Hecht Harrison, a national and international outplacement services company headquartered in New York City.

"If someone really wants to pursue a change, they need to define their target, gather marketplace information, network, and begin talking with hiring



managers. When individuals create their marketing plan and implement it with our support, their confidence generally builds as they move through the process," she explains.

"Confidence has little to do with career tests and assessments," says Lambe. "You can get tested and write résumés until you're blue – but if you don't do the self-discovery work first, you'll continue to make choices that aren't in alignment with who you are. A career coach can make the process faster and more fun."

The Journey Begins with

You!



Starting with *you* is a truly good place to begin. In my personal career journey, I was a successful writer, TV producer, and media consultant who wanted to do something different. *Boy, did I.*

I found myself in the mortgage banking business. It's no surprise I was miserable... well-paid, but miserable. I love words, not numbers. Still, I spent nine years building a successful career in a very wrong industry for me. I'm pretty sure I'm not alone.

There's a young woman Lambe worked with who liked the idea of a travel-related career, thought she wanted to be a stewardess, but didn't like the idea of serving food. One of Lambe's professional clients had a hugely successful national network news career, but really wanted to produce documentary films. Another client endured seven years of law school, landed a position with a prestigious law firm, and then realized he hated practicing law.

You probably know at least one person who has made similar kinds of misdirected career decisions. That person may even be you. That's why learning more about yourself is a solid cornerstone in any career change plan...

Know Thyself. How can you get where you want to go until you know what you want and why you want it? Knowing that the place you are headed is truly the right place for you is a great source of confidence. Sometimes you can be so close to your own career forest that it's hard to see the trees. Professional advice at this very critical stage of career planning can be a great help.

Review. Conduct your own annual career review. Ask yourself what parts of your current job you like or don't like. Also, re-tool your résumé on a regular basis to reflect the most recent tangible results you've generated by those work-related activities you enjoy most.

Don't Neglect You. Eat right, exercise, take time to have fun, and make sure those closest to you do the same. Changing careers can be stressful on you, your family, and your close friends. Keep everybody healthy!

Take Action. Join professional associations that match your interests, and arrange informational interviews with hiring managers already working in your future career area. Volunteer for internships in a field about which you are passionate. The more people you know who are already doing what it is you love to do, the greater your chances of getting where you want to go. And be sure to tap into career guidance professionals who can help guide your path.

Knowing When to *Do It!*

A couple of years ago, I went to a Christmas party at a friend's house and sat down next to a well-groomed, professional-looking gentleman I hadn't met before. My friends knew I was in the middle of a career change and must have told him. As soon as I settled into my seat, he said:

"I'm really not happy with my job [either]. I've been at my company forever and there's just not a lot of interest in it for me anymore. But you know the story – there's always bills to pay."

"I know what you mean," I replied. "Changing careers is a challenging proposition."

"But I'm really unhappy. How do I know if it's time to make a career change?" he asked.

I thought for a few moments, and this was my reply: "If all the trials and tribulations, joys and sorrows, peaks and valleys, financial challenges, and professional uncertainties associated with changing careers seems more enjoyable than heading off to the comfortable, well-known job you already have, then it's time to do it."

If you are planning a career change, or find yourself in the middle of one, I wish you all the success and happiness in the world. I also suggest using the professional career resources available to you. One thing you don't want to Winnemucca, NV, sight unseen and not know a few good career consultants in town before you get there.

~ J.S.

Jim Slaight has been a public relations professional, writer, TV producer, media consultant, mortgage banker, and manager of client services for Ace Communications, a Portland, OR, technology communications staffing company. Jim stopped working for a living in September 2000 when he left his mortgage banking job and returned to the communications, marketing, and freelance writing career he enjoys best.