

# FROST INSIGHTS

## Starting and changing jobs

*'Whether professionals have a chance to develop intuitive expertise depends essentially on the quality and speed of feedback, as well as on sufficient opportunity to practice.'*

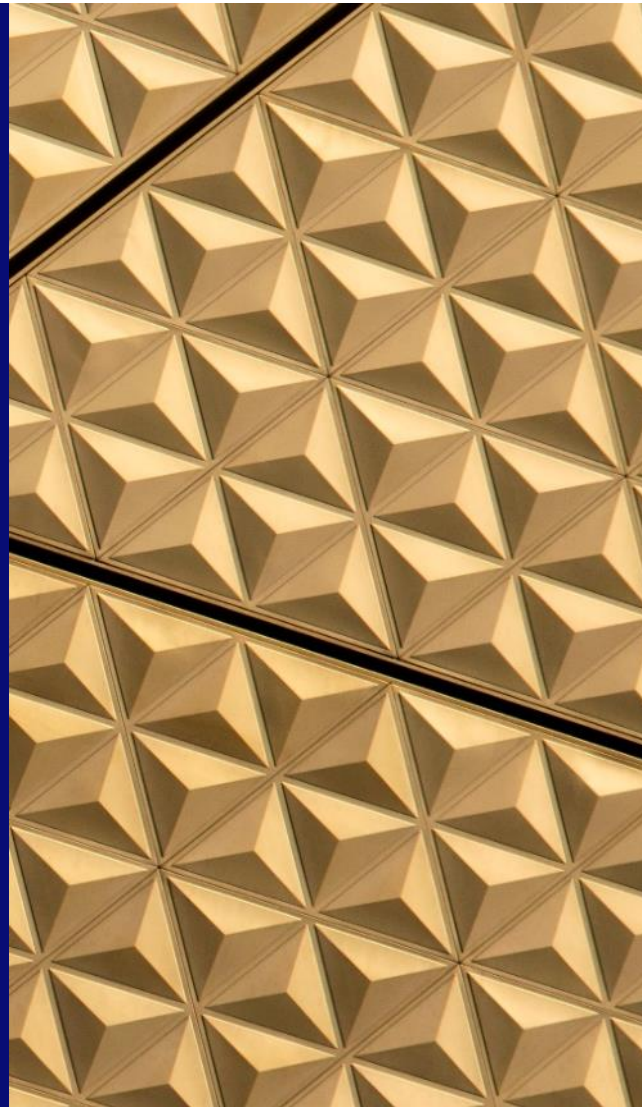
- Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*

### What's in this Insight

- Creating opportunities
- Interviews
- Choosing the right job
- Artificial intelligence
- Salary negotiations
- When to change jobs
- Moving in-house
- Dos and don'ts when starting a new job
- The best way to resign from a job
- Introverts and extroverts
- Personal reflections
- Key Takeaways

**When you are starting your professional career, or you are thinking about changing jobs for some reason, ideally you will have some choice. Whether you have alternatives available will depend on a raft of factors including your perceived capabilities and potential, viewed from an employer perspective, as well as the efforts you make to source opportunities.**

**Assuming you have a choice, how do you decide which job opportunity to take? We will return to the subject of selection after considering how to source opportunities. Spoiler alert: the quote above from Daniel Kahneman gives a clue on what to look for in a job.**



## **Creating Opportunities**

Let's face it, filling in application forms, tweaking CVs and attending face-to-face or online interviews with humans or robots can be pretty soul destroying. To minimise these hurdles, you ideally want a head start with an organisation you might like to work for. Ask yourself, before making an application, who do I already know at this organisation, or how can I meet some people who work there? What professional networking and other events can you attend? Your goal is to establish relationships with people in an organisation who can put in a good word for you with the relevant recruitment personnel. Depending upon an organisation's needs, and the state of the market, sometimes existing staff members can earn spotters' fees for helping to recruit new personnel, although generally with some experience, rather



than at graduate level. Accordingly, the more people you can meet, and impress, in desirable organisations in your sights, the better.

You will want to review, update, and clean up your LinkedIn and other social media profiles. Assume that a prospective employer will check you out online. What will they see? Amongst other things, be careful what you share about any mental health struggles on social media. Although this may seem like a good idea, to help destigmatize mental health problems, unfortunately a study has shown such disclosure could have “*unforeseen (that is, suboptimal) consequences*” when your posts are viewed by a prospective or current employer.<sup>1</sup>

In some professions, the best entry-level jobs with the most prestigious employers often get awarded to university students who have performed well as interns or clerks during employment stints whilst studying or during vacations. The competition to obtain internships in the most glamorous organisations is often intense. If you happen to be reading this Insight as a student, then this avenue is worth considering. Even if you are unsuccessful, it will give you great experience in the often-gruelling process of making applications as well as the art of the job interview.

Whether you are a student seeking a vacation job, a soon-to-be graduate, or you are looking to change employers, you will probably need to fill in an application form, submit a CV and perhaps a cover letter. First up, some fairly basic things. Follow, to the letter, the instructions on the format, length, and content on each element. If they want a two-page cover letter, give them a two-page cover letter, not half a page or three pages. If they don't want a cover letter, don't give them one. Triple check your spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Read your cover letter out loud. Ask someone else to read everything before you hit the send button.

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1. Barker, L. 1 September 2023, *Bosses are tracking — and judging — your social media posts for mental health red flags*: <https://news.ncsu.edu/in-the-news/bosses-are-tracking-and-judging-your-social-media-posts-for-mental-health-red-flags/>.

There is no single, best way to prepare a CV or résumé. However, here are a few tips. Put a 30-to-40-word summary profile at the top of the CV. If they just read this, why should they interview you? Use bullet points and keep each point to two or three lines at most. People like bullet points. Don't write "I developed/analysed ...". Just say: "Developed/analysed ...". Include something about your personal interests and hobbies. Make it interesting. In my CV, I list my personal values and strengths.

Your CV shouldn't just be a bunch of unrelated bullet points. As Jane Heifetz, founder of Right Résumés and a contributing editor at the Harvard Business Review says, you need to tell a compelling story about yourself:

***Start by framing your bigger picture before adding those smaller bullet points. Tell compelling before-and-after stories. What were your previous places of employment like when you started there? What were their biggest challenges, and how did you help meet them? How are those organizations better because of you? Then add the more detailed bullet points to fill in those stories.<sup>2</sup>***

If you wish, use ChatGPT, Google and other online tools to help draft your CV and cover letter, but review, tailor and personalise the results. Assume that your CV, cover letter and other application material will probably be vetted by artificial intelligence tools before any human eyeballs look at them, if at all. So, ask around and go online and look for the latest tips and tricks to try and deal with the use of AI

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2. Heifetz, J. (2016) Improve Your Résumé by Turning Bullet Points into Stories, *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2016/05/improve-your-resume-by-turning-bullet-points-into-stories>.

as best you can. There are lots of items like this one by Korn Ferry online nowadays: *5 Ways to Get Your Resume Past the ‘Terminator’ AI.*<sup>3</sup>

## Interviews

One or more of your applications pay off and you have interviews lined up. Great work. What to do next? When buying real estate, the old saying is that the three most important factors are: location, location, and location. With job interviews, the three key tips are: preparation, preparation, and preparation. Do the basic things well. Check out the organisation and key personnel online. Learn what they say about the organisation’s strategy, culture, and employee development programs. Be prepared to ask a few sensible, informed questions on such topics in the interview. Most interviewers will expect and welcome a degree of curiosity.

Even if you think you are a polished speaker and the ultimate smooth operator, commit to doing some interview practice sessions with a trusted friend, relative or mentor. Write up a list of questions you think you may be asked in an interview and get your friend to ask them to you in a random order, while you film yourself on your mobile phone. Then play the recording back and self-assess your performance. Ask your friend for some candid feedback:

- **Did you look and sound confident?**
- **Did you like your body language?**
- **How was your eye contact?**
- **What about your rate of speech and the frequency of filler words like ums and ahs?**
- **Did you actually answer questions in a logical, well-constructed manner, without being long-winded and repeating yourself?**

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<sup>3</sup> Perkins, S. 5 Ways to Get Your Resume Past the ‘Terminator’ AI: <https://www.kornferry.com/insights/this-week-in-leadership/5-ways-to-get-your-resume-past-the-terminator-ai>.

Rinse and repeat this process until you would hire yourself when you watch a replay. Of course, you will especially want to practice on video if part or all of your job application involves the creation and submission of a TikTok (or similar video). Hilton Australia announced in November 2023 that job applicants could now apply in this manner, although traditional CVs would still be accepted:<sup>4</sup>

### HOW TO APPLY THROUGH TIKTOK

1. **Create Your TikTok Application:** Create a 30-60 second TikTok video that's just as unique as you are. In the video, let us know which Hilton position you're passionate about and share your ideas on how you would go above and beyond to Make The Stay remarkable for our Hilton guests.

As well as asking someone to help you, there are some impressive online offerings which can give you feedback, including the 'Rehearse with Coach' tool in Microsoft's PowerPoint, under the Slide Show tab. This handy tool can provide you with objective data and feedback on things like your rate of speech, voice pitch and use of filler words. Don't just use it to practice for job interviews. Once you get the job, it will help you prepare for presentations you will inevitably need to make in your professional life.

There are endless materials online you can access to help with interview preparation. The one I regularly recommend to my clients is the comprehensive and well laid out Hays Interview Guide.<sup>5</sup> It has lots of useful tips including lists of questions you may get asked. The Hays Guide also gives a great explanation of the STAR method which can sometimes be useful to answer certain questions in job interviews. STAR stands for Situation, Task, Action, and Result and is a technique you can use to not only strengthen your answers but create a narrative and structure as well.

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<sup>4</sup> #HIREMEHILTONAU From TikTok Creator to Ultimate Stay Creator, Hilton Australia, November 2023: <https://jobs.hilton.com/hiremehiltonau>.

<sup>5</sup> Hays Interview Guide: <https://www.hays.com.au/career-advice/interview-tips/interview-guide>.

Another tip, where appropriate, is to occasionally use the consultant's 'rule of three' (google it). People like to hear that there are three (not two, not four, not eight) reasons, points, arguments, benefits etc in any given situation. Three of something sounds vaguely compelling and is memorable. The 'rule of three' has been a favourite trick of orators, politicians, and marketing people since time immemorial.

So, where relevant, say that you have three points that you would like to make in response to an interview question, briefly say what they are and then expand briefly on each of them. Notice the use of the word 'briefly'. Simple, factual questions should typically be answered within 15 to 30 seconds. Answers to more complicated, behavioural questions requiring you to recount situations or experiences should rarely go for more than three minutes at most. Watch for the body language of the interviewers. Do you seem to be boring them senseless? During longer answers, pause occasionally to allow interviewers to jump in if they wish. Also ask them whether they would like any more detail or examples from you.

Avoid mechanically and slavishly using the 'rule of three', STAR or any other technique to answer all questions in an interview. Mix things up a little bit and don't be too formulaic. Allow the real you, your personality, and natural smile to shine through.

The Hays Guide has some excellent tips on what to do immediately before an interview, to make sure you are calm and in the right frame of mind.

If you are required to participate in some type of group interview with other candidates, try not to treat it like some sort of 'survivor' reality TV show. Play nicely and respectfully, say your bit, but don't suck all the oxygen out of the room or use all the bandwidth if the session is online.

If you get through one or more interviews, you may be required to undertake an assortment of psychometric tests to assess things like your intelligence quotient (IQ), critical thinking skills, emotional intelligence, personality and whether deep down you are in fact a psychopath or worse, a narcissist. A bewildering variety of such tests now bound. I know it is easy to say, but try not to be overly anxious about doing such

tests. Just answer them as honestly as you can and try not to second guess what the 'right' answer is. Some people seem to spend a huge amount of time 'practising' for such tests via free or paid for online programs. I am not convinced that this is generally the best use of time or money.

## Choosing the right job

Let's assume that you are in the happy situation of being able to select between two or more job opportunities. Well done. How do you decide which one to take? Hopefully your decision is not based solely on the salary and benefits on offer.

I am a huge fan of Daniel Kahneman's seminal work, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.<sup>6</sup> Just to repeat the quote at the start of this Insight: "*Whether professionals have a chance to develop intuitive expertise depends essentially on the quality and speed of feedback, as well as on sufficient opportunity to practice.*" Seeking feedback and undertaking 'deliberate practice' of your emerging skills are two of what I call the Seven Accelerants to help super-charge your career. (The Seven Accelerants will be covered in a book I am currently writing.) Ask yourself, as regards the organisations you are weighing up as your next employer, what seems to be the likely quantity and quality of feedback, coaching and mentoring that you will receive as a young professional?

Of course, it can be hard to get a clear, honest, and definitive answer to that question, or to gain insights on other critical aspects of an organisation, including its culture, leadership, approach to diversity and inclusion, and whether or not it is really a grim sweat shop. You need to do your own due diligence. You will probably check out Glassdoor and similar websites, but do not rely on them exclusively. The best evidence will usually come not from the people interviewing you, but from current or former staff members who you can find a way to meet and quiz.

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<sup>6</sup> Kahneman, D. (2011) *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.



Remember that in almost any organization bigger than a sole practice, your experience as an employee will usually vary, often enormously, depending upon the members of your immediate team, being your peers and the people to whom you will be reporting. You need to try and get granular and understand the inside story of the team you are likely to be joining rather than just the organisation as a whole. This is not so important if you are coming in as a graduate and will be rotating through a few different teams or divisions before 'settling'.

If performing pro bono work for worthy causes is important to you, make sure you try and get the inside story as to whether an organisation you intend to join really supports such activity. For example, law firms differ widely in what they actually do in this regard.<sup>7</sup>

## Artificial intelligence

An important consideration for a young professional, in choosing where to work, has always been the likely quality and quantity of training and development you will receive. This issue is even more important in the age of AI. The advent of tools such as ChatGPT are already throwing up speculation that fewer junior staff will be needed in certain professions.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, organisations that do not make sufficient investments in AI may find that they are out of business and do not need any staff at all.

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<sup>7</sup> The Australian Pro Bono Centre's website has excellent resources on pro bono work in the legal sector, including the results of its annual surveys and a list of law firms who have signed up to its target for annual pro bono work: <https://www.probonocentre.org.au>.

<sup>8</sup> For example, see the discussion on this issue, amongst others, in the excellent report: Foley, M et al. (2023) Designing Gender Equality into the Future of Law: Final Report, The University of Sydney and Australian National University: <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2023/10/05/gendered-discrimination-and-disrespect--all-too-common--in-legal.html#:~:text=The%20report%2C%20Designing%20Gender%20Equality,the%20changing%20nature%20of%20work>.

There are two key questions on which you want answers when you are looking for a job:

- **First, has your prospective employer embraced the need to invest in AI, to make client service as efficient as possible?**
- **Secondly, is the organisation training its young professionals in the use of appropriate AI tools? Be wary about joining any organisation, unless you get compelling and positive answers to these questions, otherwise you might be missing out on vital training and development at a crucial early stage of your career.**

You should of course ask these questions in job interviews. However, don't rely completely on the answers you are given. Do some background checks, ideally beyond the organisation's website. Try to meet and speak with young professionals currently employed in that organisation who can tell you how things really work.

## Salary negotiations

The single best piece of advice I can give you on salary negotiations is to spend 15 minutes reading this excellent 2014 Harvard Business Review article by Harvard Business School professor, Deepak Malhotra, *15 Rules for Negotiating a Job Offer*<sup>9</sup>, before you undertake any negotiations. This timeless article contains lots of sensible suggestions which are relevant for any professional seeking to negotiate salary for any job. Even better, invest 1 hour and 4 minutes watching professor Malhorta bringing his suggestions to life in a video<sup>10</sup> filmed in one of his Harvard Business School classes.

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<sup>9</sup> Malhorta, D. (2014) 15 Rules for Negotiating a Job Offer, Harvard Business Review: <https://hbr.org/2014/04/15-rules-for-negotiating-a-job-offer>.

<sup>10</sup> YouTube. (2012) How to Negotiate Your Job Offer - Prof. Deepak Malhotra (Harvard Business School): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=km2Hd\\_xgo9Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=km2Hd_xgo9Q).

If you are seeking a graduate or other entry-level job, often there will not be much, if any, room for negotiation. There may be different starting salaries for different graduates based on their perceived capabilities and potential as reflected in CVs, other application materials, interviews, and the results of any psychometric tests. Most of the time you probably will be given a 'take it or leave it' offer.

When you are looking to switch jobs, it is usually a completely different ball game. Before you start discussing salary and any other benefits with a recruiter or a prospective employer, you really need to do your homework and establish what you think is a reasonable salary at a given organisation considering your experience and expertise. Ask people you know, thrash around online for a while. Read professor Malhotra's article and watch his video. Remember that different organisations within a given profession or industry sector may have different approaches to setting salaries. Not every organisation that says 'we pay at market' is in fact telling the truth, whether or not they know that they are out of kilter with similar organisations.

Be prepared for these two questions: '*So, how much do you make at your current job?*' and '*How much do you expect to be paid in a new job?*' If you are seeking a new job via one or more recruitment agencies, you will probably be asked each of these questions by recruiters. In Australia, each question can be legally asked. You are not required to answer the first question, although at some point you will need to negotiate the second question to get hired. Of course, recruiters have all sorts of reasons why they think it is a good idea for you to give them both bits of information.

Prospective employers generally would like to know how much you are earning now to help them with their negotiating strategy. As a result, recruiters try and find out this information for them. Assume anything you say to a recruiter will be passed on to prospective employers, even if a recruiter tells you that they will not do this.

Remember that many recruiters<sup>11</sup> are thinking firstly about themselves, secondly about the organisation that hired them, with you and your interests a very distant third.

I see very little upside in telling a recruiter, or a prospective employer, your current salary. Doing so is likely to unnecessarily reduce your negotiating position. Preferably decline politely, by saying that you don't feel the need to make this disclosure. If you do decide to state your current salary, you should do so honestly and without exaggeration.

As for the question on how much you want to earn in a new job, you will typically need to give a recruiter some idea, perhaps by stating a minimum or a range, for the recruiter to take you seriously.

When you start discussing pay with a prospective employer, at some stage they may ask you how much you want to earn before making you a formal offer. At this point, ideally say that you want to be paid at market, without specifying an amount, as once again this may unnecessarily limit what you will be offered. If you get a prospective employer to put a figure to you first, this gives you a chance to try and negotiate upwards if appropriate. If the offer is too low, and especially if it is lower than what you are currently earning, you may then choose to disclose your existing pay packet, assuming this will not be in breach of your employment contract, or maybe even if it would be.

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<sup>11</sup> I know this assessment of recruiters may seem harsh. I have met many outstanding, highly ethical recruiters over the years. Sadly, I have also met many very dodgy ones. As a young professional, and unless and until you get to know a recruiter very well, the safest stance to take is to treat them with great caution.



## When to change jobs

There is no magic answer on how long you ‘should’ stay in any one job. There are plenty of statistics<sup>12</sup> on how often professionals and other workers change jobs, but it is all about you and such statistics and averages are of only passing interest. Then again, changing jobs every six or twelve months will give you a CV that will make many prospective future employers nervous.

Here are some suggestions on when to consider changing jobs:

- Obvious cases: your current employer is unethical or worse, workplace abuse in any form is tolerated, the culture is toxic, or any other like reason of simply unacceptable practices.
- You consistently get disappointing answers when you ask yourself these three questions:
  - How can I become my best possible professional?
  - How can I add the most value in the age of automation and artificial intelligence?
  - Does my work bring me enough joy and fun?
- You reflect carefully on your personal motivational drivers and conclude that your current job is not ticking enough boxes.
- To return to the quote from Daniel Kahneman at the start of this Insight: your current employer is not providing you with enough opportunity to learn new things and practice your skills with timely, quality feedback. Perhaps you are not being adequately challenged, appreciated, or praised.
- After proper research you come to the view that you really are underpaid or have been unfairly passed over for a promotion. Be careful with this reason, as the grass is not always greener on the other side.

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<sup>12</sup> For example: data on Participation, Job Search and Mobility, Australia, published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/latest-release>.

- Say you wish to change jobs because you dread going to work, or your current job destroys your work-life balance, is too stressful or is causing you physical or mental health problems. Ask yourself whether you are part of the problem and what you can do about it, before throwing in the towel. Otherwise, you might be having the same problems at your next job, and the one after that.

Before giving up on your current job, ask yourself whether you have done enough to try and have your concerns addressed. Who have you raised your issues with, how often and how effectively? Every job is likely to have some suboptimal aspects and it is up to you to try and get things fixed if you can.

## Moving in-house

Young professionals can start their careers in lots of different ways. Some will have the confidence to start their own business from the get-go, others will commence employment with a regulatory body, some will take on an in-house role in a suitable organisation, and many will start work life in a professional service firm (PSF).

If you have started your career in a PSF, at some point you are likely to ask yourself if you want to spend your entire professional life in one or more PSFs, or whether you might like to move to an in-house environment or a regulatory body, start your own business, or perhaps throw it all in and become an Uber driver or take up basket weaving.

As discussed above with changing jobs more generally, there is no one-size-fits all answer as to when is the ideal time to jump from a PSF to an in-house role.

If you have started in a PSF, and you really, really don't enjoy that style of work, then look for an in-house role at any stage. If you work in a PSF and are appalled at (a) having to keep daily timesheets in six-minute increments, and (b) the inhuman number of client billable hours you are supposed to clock up each day, fair enough. However, before you jump ship to an in-house role, try and determine what

productivity-tracking measures you might be signing up for as an alternative to those wretched timesheets.

Even if you can handle the pressures of timesheets and billing targets, maybe you are not excited by your future in a PSF. The obvious goal to aim for in a PSF is to become a partner one day and enjoy the autonomy, security, prestige, and money that usually comes with that role. If you don't aspire to partnership for whatever reason, or don't think that you can make it, then many professionals come to the view that they don't want to hang around in a PSF and watch their subordinates eventually make partner and then boss them around.

Having said all this, generally the sweet spot to switch from a PSF to an in-house role is once you have been working for about seven or eight years or thereabouts. For example, in a law firm, by then all going well, you will have been a Senior Associate for about a couple of years. By this stage you have learned a huge amount and have lots of good experience. Hopefully the partners are trusting you and you are pretty much running many matters. If you are meeting the possibly crazy billable hours targets, you are now one of the most profitable workhorses in your firm. You are also an attractive target for other PSFs and for organisations seeking in-house professionals at a reasonably good level of seniority and pay.

If, instead, you move to an in-house role after only say three to five years in a PSF, you will have less experience and will probably have to accept a job lower down the organisation's food chain. If you seek to go in-house after say 10 or more years in a PSF, organisations will assume, rightly or wrongly, that you have been 'passed over' for a partnership role in your firm and this may weaken your negotiating position or the range of roles on offer.

Another good time to move in-house is after you have been a PSF partner for about five to 10 years. By this stage of your career, you should be able to obtain a very senior in-house role such as a Chief Financial Officer, General Counsel or the head or deputy head of a regulatory agency. This assumes that by then you will have

managed to successfully build a substantial personal brand, which is another of my Seven Accelerants.

## Dos and don'ts when starting a new job

Here are some suggestions of things to do and not do when commencing a job at any stage of your career.

**1. Set boundaries:** there is no better time than starting a new job to think about boundaries on your own behaviour and how you will let others treat you. There are any number of areas where boundaries arise. These are just a few:

- **Work/life balance:** just how often will you allow yourself to devote crazy amounts of time to work activities and how many personal and social events are you prepared to miss? What commitments will you make to yourself on exercise, diet, sleep, socialising, and relaxation?
- **How other people treat you:** what will you say and do if people do not treat you with sufficient respect via their words or behaviour?
- **Displaying your ambition:** ambition is a bit like Goldilocks's porridge. You want to let your ambition shine at just the right amount. Too much and people may start to distrust you, whereas too little may let others feel they can push you around.
- **Personal self-management:** this includes your personal accountability and ability to follow through and meet commitments. What times of day will you, and won't you, check/send work emails and texts etc? Try as far as possible to avoid sending work emails on weekends.

**2. Figure out the lie of the land:** how will you get along with others and get ahead in this particular work environment? Through curiosity, careful observation, and discrete inquiries, find answers to these sorts of issues:



- What is the culture of this organisation and what should I be doing and refraining from doing, to either fit in, or help improve the culture if necessary<sup>13</sup>?
- Who really matters to my development and progression in this job? This will include but not be limited to your immediate boss. Formal organisation charts will help but will probably not be the complete answer.
- What are the politics in this organisation? As a young professional you should generally steer well clear of getting actively involved in office politics and gossip. However, wherever you find humans you will find politics.<sup>14</sup> Don't be naïve. Find out about the organisational politics and how they may affect you and then stay out of them.
- What is the best way to communicate? What is the right mix of face-to-face, email and other online communications? What is the best way to structure written communications?

**3. Build relationships:** one of your most important and immediate tasks is to start building quality relationships with people inside your new organisation and in due course with clients. There are many aspects to relationship building, including development of mutual trust and respect with another person and being sensitive to each other's needs. How we speak and otherwise communicate with people has a huge bearing on the type of relationships we develop. I just love this quote, which I picked up at Sydney University from Dr Sean O'Connor when I was studying for my Master of Science in Coaching Psychology:

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<sup>13</sup> For a good discussion on the cultural aspects of starting a new job, see: Allan H. Church, AH and Conge, JA. (2018) When You Start a New Job, Pay Attention to These 5 Aspects of Company Culture, Harvard Business Review: <https://hbr.org/2018/03/when-you-start-a-new-job-pay-attention-to-these-5-aspects-of-company-culture>.

<sup>14</sup> A good discussion of the role that politics inevitably plays in professional service firms is in this excellent article: Empson, L. (2019) How to Lead Your Fellow Rainmakers, Harvard Business Review: <https://hbr.org/2019/03/how-to-lead-your-fellow-rainmakers>.

***The quality of our conversations determines the quality of our relationships ...and the quality of our relationships determines the quality of the organisations we live and work in.***

How would *you* describe the quality of *your* contributions to typical conversations? In particular, how strong are your listening skills<sup>15</sup>?

**4. Know your key performance indicators and objectives:** do you know what is really expected of you in your new role? Have you been given a clear job description with KPIs, objectives and goals? If not, what are you going to do about this, and when?

**5. Have a personal development plan:** how will you ensure you develop to be the best possible version of yourself at this new job? Personal planning is one of my Seven Accelerants.

## **The best way to resign from a job**

Unless you are a graduate, typically starting a new job requires resignation from the old one. The world is a surprisingly small place, so handle your resignation with as much dignity and grace as you can muster; you never know where or when people will pop back into your life.

**1. Get a written offer from your new employer:** before you resign you will want to have an unconditional written offer from your new employer after they have done all their reference checking. You need to check your employment contract with your existing employer on matters such as notice periods, non-compete clauses,

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<sup>15</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss relationship building and communication in any detail. For great tips and an introduction to quality conversations I can recommend this resource: Waters, S. (2021) How to carry a conversation — the art of making connections, BetterUp: <https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-carry-a-conversation>.

restrictive covenants and leave entitlements. If needs be, seek legal advice to understand and protect your rights.

**2. Sign and return your offer:** the conventional advice is to sign and return your new job contract, and make sure it has been received and accepted, *before* you resign from your current role, for two reasons. First, to maximise certainty that you have in fact a new job to go to, and secondly to make it harder for you to backslide and be talked into staying by your boss. If you are 100% sure that nothing can make you stay, then take the conventional route. Otherwise, just in case your current employer offers you something extraordinarily attractive to stay, consider not signing and returning your new job offer until after you have in fact resigned.<sup>16</sup>

**3. Tell your manager first, face-to-face:** it will be tempting to gossip with colleagues about your intended resignation. This is a bad idea. The bush telegraph can work very quickly, and your manager will be understandably upset to hear about your departure on the grapevine. Don't resign by text, or email or a phone call, even if this is how your organisation fires people or makes them redundant. Instead, meet with your direct boss face-to-face. Whether this is a spontaneous or scheduled meeting will depend on your particular circumstances. Try and keep this meeting as brief as possible. Come directly to the point and give your reasons as honestly and as courteously as you can. Explain that you have made up your mind and don't want to negotiate a deal to stay around. Try and have some nice things to say about your manager, unless of course they have been a toxic monster. If you are asked about the salary at your new job, you don't need to disclose it. However, if you do, and it is a lot higher than your current pay, this may help persuade your current employer to lift salaries for the colleagues you are leaving behind.

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<sup>16</sup> If you accept a new job before resigning, and then get talked into staying at your current job, the situation can get very messy, emotionally fraught, and potentially litigious. I have seen other people (not me) get themselves into this pickle and it is not always pretty to watch how they seek to extricate themselves from the dilemma.

**4. Resignation letter, the briefer the better:** ideally your formal letter of resignation will be as short as possible and typically without the reasons you gave verbally to your manager. Say something nice about the organisation and what they have done for you and your career. If your last day at work has already been agreed, then state it in your letter. If not, seek clarification. Your existing employer may or may not require you to work out your notice period.

**5. Attend an exit interview:** many organisations ask departing employees to attend exit interviews. If you feel up to the task, and you think that it is being undertaken in good faith with an interviewer you feel you can trust, then try and attend. Being constructively honest, but courteous and circumspect, may lead to workplace improvements for colleagues you are farewelling.<sup>17</sup>

**6. Seek references:** do your best to obtain one or more references from your boss and other senior professionals in your organisation, and not just a brief record of service. Unfortunately, many organisations increasingly seem to prevent or discourage the practice of giving references. This may be something you are able to negotiate, e.g., in exchange for attending an exit interview, or agreeing to stay on for longer than your contractual notice period.

**7. Leave on the best possible terms:** maintain your reputation, keep working to your usual high standard until your final day and say goodbyes to people who have helped you on your journey. If you write a farewell email, be extremely polite and preferably get someone else to read it before you hit the send button.

## Introverts and extroverts

People are complicated and labelling yourself or someone else on a binary basis as either an 'introvert' or an 'extrovert' isn't always helpful. Many people are somewhere in the middle and depending upon the circumstances of a given

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<sup>17</sup> For some good tips on how to handle an exit interview, see: Zucker, R. (2020) What to Say in an Exit Interview, *Harvard Business Review*: <https://hbr.org/2020/01/what-to-say-in-an-exit-interview?>



situation, they may display signs of introversion or extraversion. Nonetheless, as someone who tends towards the extraversion end of the spectrum, and based on my life experiences to date, unfortunately I have to agree with eminent American author Susan Cain that society, and especially the business world, sadly tend to undervalue introverts. Cain's landmark book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*<sup>18</sup> was promoted as providing tools for introverts to take full advantage of their strengths. In an ideal world, extroverted people would also read this book to help stop the unwarranted and damaging bias against introverts.

If you tend towards introversion, and after reading all the stuff on networking, creating opportunities, negotiating etc earlier in this Insight, you may have already decided that this article is only for extroverts. That is certainly not my intention! If you have introverted tendencies, you will still need to find a way to network, meet people, and attend job interviews, amongst many other aspects of finding a job and becoming a successful professional. Perhaps this quote resonates with you:

***Corporate life throws up some stressful moments. Bringing bad news to your boss; facing an interview panel; making a big presentation. But few things are worse than networking if you are an introvert.***<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>. Cain, S. (2012) *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, Crown Publishing Group.

<sup>19</sup>. Bartleby column, Networking for introverts: a how-to guide, *The Economist*, online, 7 September 2023: [https://www.economist.com/business/2023/09/07/networking-for-introverts-a-how-to-guide?utm\\_medium=cpc.adword.pd&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_campaign=a.io\\_apac\\_freetrial&utm\\_content=conversion.non-brand.anonymous.apac\\_au\\_en\\_free-trial\\_na\\_non-brand\\_google\\_subs\\_pmax\\_other\\_na\\_na&qad=1&qclid=CjwKCAjwkNOpBhBEEiwAb3MvvcnLFqeYTgJTkOkJwhcl9FIISE2cPVUHUvCpOERLQV2DWvYYVGj\\_ohoCq9YQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.economist.com/business/2023/09/07/networking-for-introverts-a-how-to-guide?utm_medium=cpc.adword.pd&utm_source=google&utm_campaign=a.io_apac_freetrial&utm_content=conversion.non-brand.anonymous.apac_au_en_free-trial_na_non-brand_google_subs_pmax_other_na_na&qad=1&qclid=CjwKCAjwkNOpBhBEEiwAb3MvvcnLFqeYTgJTkOkJwhcl9FIISE2cPVUHUvCpOERLQV2DWvYYVGj_ohoCq9YQAvD_BwE).

It is beyond the scope of this Insight to make specific on how introverts should go about things. There are already many excellent books on this subject generally and on networking in particular<sup>20</sup>, in addition to those by Susan Cain.

## Personal reflections

While at university, I had summer vacation roles at KPMG once, and Price Waterhouse twice. My two summer stints at Price Waterhouse helped me gain a graduate role there at the end of 1984. I worked hard and learned a lot in the 1980s boom years of being an Australian tax adviser and I made manager after three years which may have been too quick for my own good.

Despite excellent experience, training, and promotions at Price Waterhouse, I first got itchy feet in early 1989. Looking back, there were various reasons for this. I will admit to being a bit unnerved by the pressure of my manager role, but I was also keen to get first-hand experience in a bank, as I was developing a great interest in the taxation of financial institutions and financial products. Remember, this was my life, not yours. After extensive interviews and exhaustive psychometric testing, I was offered the role as Macquarie Bank's first in-house tax manager in March 1989. John Masters, my Price Waterhouse mentor, eventually talked me out of this offer, after many hours of discussion. I was still keen to try tax professional life in the corporate sector and an opportunity arose at Westpac Banking Corporation at the end of 1989. This time, I was determined to think through all the issues very carefully and be ready for John's possible attempt to change my mind again. To this end, I went into my main interview at Westpac with more than 40 detailed questions. I somehow got the job, but my interviewers, John Brodie and Ross Lyons, would tease me for years about my unusual approach to being interviewed, and that I was lucky to get away

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<sup>20</sup>. For example, my favourite book on networking for introverts is: Pollard, MO. (2021) *The Introvert's Edge to Networking: Work the Room. Leverage Social Media. Develop Powerful Connections*, HarperCollins.

with it. On reflection, a few questions from the interviewee are a good idea in an interview, not 40.

I look back very fondly on my five or so years working at Westpac. I certainly achieved the goal of getting my hands dirty with the inner workings of a bank and all the weird and wonderful ways that multiple tax laws impacted the bank's operations.

I kept in regular touch with John Masters and he persuaded me to return to Price Waterhouse in 1994. By now I was feeling quite confident about the ins and outs of the taxation of banks, and I wanted to try my hand again as a consultant. John was instrumental in my elevation to partner in 1996.

As with my move to Westpac in 1989, there was no single reason I left what was now PwC for a second time in 2003 to join what was then Greenwoods & Freehills. A key factor was that I enjoyed being very much hands-on in servicing clients and getting deeply involved in writing and reviewing tax opinions. When I left PwC the ratio of tax partners to professional staff was about 1:8, whereas throughout my time at Greenwoods it was about 1:2. This environment was much more in keeping with how I liked to service and interact with my clients. To join Greenwoods, I had three interviews. At each of those interviews I asked just a few questions. I gradually moved into management at Greenwoods before running the firm for the last seven years of my first career.

It took me about a year, with lots of thinking and self-reflection to eventually decide that I wanted to make a career change and go back to university again. Although I was enjoying the firm management role, well most of the time anyway, I came to conclusion that I no longer wanted to keep up with the ever-changing Australian tax laws. Time to let younger professionals help big companies pay the correct amount of tax.

## Key Takeaways

- **Creating opportunities:** whether you are introverted or extroverted, do as much networking as you can, to create multiple potential job opportunities you can choose from. Clean up your social media accounts. Follow instructions very closely when submitting job applications. Use ChatGPT and other online tools to help draft your CV and cover letter, but review, tailor and personalise the results.
- **Interviews:** preparation is critical. Do some interview practice sessions with a trusted friend. Record them on your smartphone and self-critique your performance. Have some pre-rehearsed answers and approaches to likely questions. However, mix things up a little bit and don't be too formulaic. Allow the real you, your personality, and natural smile to shine through.
- **Choosing the right job:** hopefully your criteria include more than just money. What seems to be the likely quantity and quality of feedback, coaching and mentoring that you will receive as a young professional at your preferred employer? The best evidence on this subject, and other aspects of an organisation, will usually come not from the people interviewing you, but from current or former staff members who you can find a way to meet and quiz.
- **Artificial intelligence:** get good answers to these two questions. First, has your prospective employer embraced the need to invest in AI, to make client service as efficient as possible? Secondly, is the organisation training its young professionals in the use of appropriate AI tools?

- **Salary negotiations:** before discussing salary with a recruiter or a prospective employer, do your homework. What is a reasonable salary at a given organisation considering your experience and expertise? Ask people you know, thrash around online for a while. Be prepared for these two questions: *‘So, how much do you make at your current job?’* and *‘How much do you expect to be paid in a new job?’*
- **When to change jobs:** There are many good reasons to switch jobs, but ideally don’t jump around every six months, as future employers will get the jitters. Before quitting your current job, ask yourself whether you have done enough to try and have your concerns addressed. Who have you raised your issues with, how often and how effectively? Every job is likely to have some suboptimal aspects and it is up to you to try and get things fixed if you can.
- **Moving in-house:** the typical sweet spot to move in-house from a PSF is once you have been working for about seven or eight years or thereabouts. Another good time to move in-house is after you have been a PSF partner for about five to 10 years.
- **Dos and don’ts when starting a new job:**
  - Set boundaries: work/life balance, how other people treat you, displaying your ambition, personal self-management.
  - Figure out the lie of the land: culture of the organisation, who matters to your development and progression, organisational politics, best ways to communicate.
  - Build relationships: amongst other things, this will require good communication skills!
  - Know your key performance indicators and objectives: what is expected of you?
  - Have a personal development plan.

- **The best way to resign from a job:**
  - Get a written offer from your new employer, but don't sign and return it until you have resigned.
  - Tell your manager first, face-to-face.
  - Resignation letter: the briefer the better.
  - Attend an exit interview.
  - Seek references.
  - Leave on the best possible terms.

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