

How Career Changers Can Identify Transferable Skills

This article is part of an exclusive month-long program on CAREERREALISM to help readers break free of The Golden Handcuff Effect. [Click HERE](#) to learn more about the Professional Emancipation Project, [a.k.a. The P.E.P. Talk](#).

So, you're ready to move on in your career. The problem? You have little to no experience in your new chosen field. While formal training and education may boost your appeal for prospective employers, you probably already possess many of the skills they're looking for.

“[Transferable skills](#)” are the capabilities you've learned and demonstrated in your current role that also apply to the new role. Typically, transferable skills are soft skills—those dealing with people, communication, creativity, problem solving, and leadership, for example. Hard skills are technical or procedural, and they're a little harder (though not impossible) to transfer from one career to another. When shaping your resume and cover letter and prepping for interviews, you want to highlight your transferable skills. Here's how to do it.

1. Identify What You Need

Take a look at the job descriptions in your new chosen field. What skills and qualifications are they seeking? Visit professional associations and conduct informational interviews to gather additional, underpublicized information about the role and/or industry.

2. Identify What You Have

Next, look at what you offer and see how things line up. Here's where it gets tricky. There might not be a perfect, easy-to-see match, and that's okay. You are free to be creative here.

Start by looking at your work experience. Examine every aspect of your role including day-to-day responsibilities, projects in which you played a part, and various tasks you handled.

Then, break down the steps involved and identify the combination of skills that each required. And finally, compare your list of skills to the list of desired skills and see where there's overlap. Those are your transferable skills.

For example:

As a sous-chef, Jon was responsible for prepping the kitchen, managing inventory, and supervising the kitchen staff, among other things. Jon is now interested in changing his career path and he's set his sights on an [entry-level position](#) in the marketing department of a busy real estate firm.

He has identified the following transferable skills:

- Organization
- Time Management
- Project Management
- Team Work
- Quick Decision-making
- Composure Under Pressure
- Creativity
- Problem-solving
- Ability to Motivate Others
- Multi-tasking
- Budget Management
- Delegation

Jon also demonstrated a lot of leadership skill in his role as a sous-chef and, though his new role doesn't specifically require it, he may want to highlight this as well. Doing so may help prospective employers see him as a potential future manager.

You can also look for transferable skills outside of the workplace. This is especially important for those re-entering the workforce after an extended period of unemployment as well as recent graduates.

Consider the following:

- School experience
- Volunteer work
- Hobbies
- Other life experiences

Here's another example:

After graduating from college, Melissa took a year off to travel overseas, during which time she held a variety of short-term positions at cafes and coffee shops. She is now looking to start her career in event planning. Looking at her experience traveling, she has found the following transferable skills:

- Budget Management
- Travel Planning
- Cultural Awareness
- Organization
- Time Management
- Customer Service
- Project Management
- Multi-tasking

How To Use Your Transferable Skills

Whether identifying your transferable skills in a cover letter, resume, or interview, it's important to cite specific examples of when and how the skills were used. Prospective employers aren't interested in generic statements. They need proof.

Some career advisors recommend using a "skills resume" or "functional resume" when you're relying on transferable skills more than experience in the field. However, these resumes tend to send up red flags for prospective employers, as they can appear to hide information.

I recommend, if at all possible, using the typical chronological format while still focusing on the transferable skills you demonstrated in each of your previous positions. Write a knock-it-outta-the-park cover letter that describes your passion for this new field and why your unusual background makes you uniquely qualified. And then get out there and network. When you're breaking into a new field with little to no experience, you're better off relying on non-traditional job search methods.