

Dealing with **mid-career issues**

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Introduction

You’ve been climbing the academic or the corporate ladder for 15 to 20 years, and you’re now in the middle of your career. So far you’ve had several jobs or postdocs at different employers, or maybe at the same one. But now you start to question whether you’re in the right position, and wonder if this is what you want to do for the rest of your working life. You’re feeling unfulfilled in your job and long for something different, but you have no idea what that might be. You’re experiencing what one may call a ‘mid-career crisis’.

In this article we go into the causes of mid-career issues and what you can do to make the most out of this situation.

Causes of mid-career crises

A mid-career crisis can be considered a phenomenon, or a product, of modern times. These days we have high expectations of our lives and careers. We want to experience everything, not miss out on anything. We not only want to have a great career, but also a fantastic relationship, a great social life, a great house and lots of interesting hobbies. This can cause distress and a growing sense of uneasiness with our lives. Many people in their mid-career therefore start looking for new meaning both in their personal lives and inside their work. If this is not given due consideration it can cause unhappiness at work, and the feeling of being lost and incapable of deciding on the right career path.

Discontentment about one’s job can happen for a number of reasons, including:

- A bad career choice at the start of one’s working life.
- Distress at work, such as a new boss or colleagues that cause conflict.
- A major change within the organisation, such as acquisition, merger or redundancy.
- A change in the values of the employer or a change in personal values.
- Lack of challenge in work, due to the monotonous nature of the job, when it remains the same for a long period of time.

Personal circumstances that cause a revaluation on one’s professional life, such as family expansion, relationship break-up, death in the family, children leaving home, or financial commitments. Peer pressure, such as working in a competitive environment that requires keeping pace with technological and scientific changes.

One or a combination of the above factors can initiate a mid-career crisis, leaving you with the feeling that the job no longer meets your expectations. At this point you start to look at other options, like a job switch, self employment or higher education. Although the term mid-career crisis might sound disturbing, a major career dilemma is quite common and experienced by most people somewhere during their career pathway. Having said that, the consequences of the crisis should not be underestimated. When the mid-career blues truly sets in it can cause a mind block and result in irritability, poor punctuality, lack of contribution at work and increased stress levels leading to a deterioration of health.

When all of this sounds familiar, then you are probably on the onset, or even in the midst, of a



Advice from a professional career coach,

Geraldine Sinnema – Een wereld van verschil:

“As a career coach I work with a lot of people who are tired of putting up with work that is a compromise. What helps them during the career coaching process?

First I tell them that our educational system did not prepare them for making career decisions that suit them. Our educational system mostly looks at your capabilities and less at what you desire to achieve with your work. So it is quite normal that you have no idea on how to manage your career. What you need is to get to know your personal goals. When you define them you can choose the career and life that is fulfilling for you. This means letting go of the expectations of others, and definitions of success that are not truly yours.”

Besides personal one-to-one coaching Een wereld van verschil also organises career cafés, informal evening meetings where peers can discuss career issues in small groups with guidance from professional career coaches. For more information: www.eenwereldvanverschil.nu.

mid-career crisis, and it may be time for a change. Changing profession when you’ve been working in the same field or for the same employer for decades can be scary. However, you can also approach it with a positive mind and consider it a challenge and an opportunity to seize control of your career and propel your career to reach a greater height.

Although for some of us a career crisis is just around the corner, it can be avoided by regularly reviewing your situation. Questions that you can ask yourself in this process are:

- Am I still in the right role and the right business?
- Does the job I’m doing reflect my level of skills,

experience and personality?

- Should I do any re-training?
- Have I changed, or has the organisation changed to such an extent that there is a mismatch in needs and values and I should no longer be there?
- What new options are open to me and what businesses and organisations should I be talking to about new opportunities?
- Should I be looking at re-negotiating my job description and/or salary with my existing employer first?

And if you already find yourself in a mid-career crisis, then you can try to make the most of it by:

- Recognising when you’re burnt out or bored stiff.
- Gaining the confidence to take action and seize new opportunities.
- Taking advantage of your mid-career experience.
- Searching inside yourself to find your next career path or goal.
- Adjusting to changes in the modern workplace.
- Switching to a part-time or flex-time schedule.
- Finding a career that matches your interests.
- Mining emerging trends for new opportunities.
- Using continuing education as a transition into a new profession.
- Talk to a friend or a professional career coach to deal with the crisis.

In conclusion, with these tips and advice of the career coach we hope that you will be able to avoid a mid-career crisis or at least deal with it effectively. The bottom line is to try to have a clear career vision early on, and make your career choices carefully. Talking to peers, friends, family and career coaches can help you to get your career objectives in sight.