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Look carefully before you make that leap: Research and good planning can help you escape the pigeonhole writes Valerie Khoo.

YOU'VE decided it's time for a change in your career. But how do you actually go about making the dream a reality?

Career experts say it's a two pronged approach. First, take some time to reflect on what your goals are. Then, with the support of friends and family, take action to achieve them.

Career coach and business mentor Sophie Robertson of YouNique Coaching says the first thing you should do is clarify what you want. Often a moment that could be a career-changing junction is lost due to vagueness. For example, people might know they don't want to continue in their career but don't have an alternative career they'd like to pursue.

Robertson says a firm goal is your best friend when changing careers. If there are serious obstacles in your transition to a new job, such as taking a pay cut or facing significant retraining, being clear about what you want will help you weather the storm. Think about what you are good at and how that may fit in with what you'd like to do.

Don Holley, the managing director of recruitment firm Mindset Group (formerly Odin Consulting) says people may typically think they would have to take a drop in salary but this is not necessarily the case. "It depends on how dramatic the change is," Holley says.

Robertson sees a trend of people wanting to help others. "The people who come to career coaching want to give more back and be part of a community, not just a grey mass that work away anonymously," she says. "I know lawyers who want to do training, personal assistants who want to work in wellness, counselors who want to coach, admin people who want to teach. There is a shift in consciousness out there."

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