

IDEAS THE AWESOME COLUMN

How to Change Careers

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Joel Stein writes a weekly column for TIME magazine. His book, Man Made: A Stupid Quest For Masculinity, changes people's lives.

Switching gears is all the rage—but what else could I possibly do?

There are subtle signs that you're not advancing at work. Like when you've had the same title, salary and responsibilities for a decade. And when your boss thinks it's a great idea for you to write a column about switching careers. So when I found out that Risk/Reward: Why Intelligent Leaps and Daring Choices Are the Best Career Moves You Can Make was written by Anne Kreamer—a very powerful media executive—I decided that promoting her book could help my career.

Kreamer's book argues that complacency is dangerous in a time of mass disruption, which would be an even more powerful message if it were delivered in an app or a six-second video instead of a book. Still, I knew she was right. I told her that although I enjoy my job, I no longer feel challenged. And while I have no interest in being challenged, I know it's the kind of thing successful people worry about, and I do want to be successful. "You critically need to unjack from The Matrix and try something new," she said. I think a better metaphor for leaving print magazines would be jumping off a horse-drawn carriage, but I got her point.

I took the quiz in her book and found out I'm a "Thinker" with the secondary characteristic of "Defender." I thought this was pretty good, since the other two categories were "Pioneers" and "Drifters," and neither of those did well in any episode of Little House on the Prairie. Kreamer thought this was a bad sign: I was vulnerable to having others determine my course in life. She told me most job opportunities come from people outside my industry. "I don't know if you're part of any groups, like women in book clubs or women in knitting groups?" she asked. I liked the idea of using my career search as an excuse to meet women, but Kreamer thought dating while married wasn't a great idea. I was also wondering if an expensive sports car might help.

In the book, Kreamer seeks advice about risk taking from people she admires, including Sheryl Sandberg and Jim Cramer. So I followed her example and called Tess Vigeland, the former host of Marketplace Money and author of the upcoming book Leap: Leaving a Job With No Plan B to Find the Career and Life You Really Want. She warned that I had to be willing to take a pay cut and relinquish my identity, which seemed insane. I was looking for new challenges, not informing on the Mob to the FBI.

Although Vigeland said she disdained the word networking, she told me to network, just as Kreamer did. So I signed up for Weave, an app that is like Tinder for job searchers. In 15 minutes I clicked yes to the prospect of meeting 20 people, including a manager of a Vine celebrity, a rap blogger and a woman who teaches a practice called orgasmic meditation. One problem was that Weave looks so much like Tinder I kept clicking yes on attractive women regardless of their occupation. I was especially excited about one who I think is a headhunter. For her description she wrote, "Filter is company about People. We are a west coast creative digital staffing solution company. Whether you need to stuff up! Or considering to outsource your projects. We can support you!" She seemed like someone who could use the services of a writer.

No one picked me as a match since I wasn't a venture capitalist, coder or someone who got really, really excited while meditating. So I went to UCLA's career center to see if anyone there could help. Karol Johansen, who has counseled thousands of college graduates, gave me a Myers-Briggs personality test, which pegged me as an Extroverted, Intuitive,

Feeling, Perceiving person. The top three jobs for that type are journalist, screenwriter and columnist. The Strong Interest Inventory Profile listed only one occupation I had very high interest in: reporter. The next best was librarian. So I went to see UCLA librarian Don Spring and asked him what the most fun part of his job was. Whatever he said, it wasn't "taking off my glasses and letting my hair out of its bun," which was the only thing I was hoping for.

It was mostly a relief to learn that I had found the only thing my brain was suited for. But I also knew that I had to attack the job market before it attacked me and that my metaphors were not as sharp as they used to be. Kreamer told me I should stay in my field but try some new things like stand-up comedy, on-camera reporting, acting or doing something else I'll definitely suck at. If anyone is interested, I'm on Weave.

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