

Are you 3F? Move your career to Forward

By Cathy Goodwin

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When the United States had a military draft, men with "4F" status were banned from military service. Some cherished the designation while others felt cheated out of the experience.

If you're seeking career freedom, you may feel blocked by the 3F's: Fear, Focus and Finances -- and you can change your 3F status to the fourth F, "Forward!"

Fear comes from giving up a cherished identity. Once you move to a new career, you have to find a new way to say, "I am" with pride and excitement. What will your former colleagues say? How will your family greet the new you? And how do you feel about trading in your "senior seasoned" identity for the role of a stumbling beginner?

The risk is real. After starting a business or spending a few years in graduate school, you are no longer the same person. Your old career neighborhood changes, too. Returning home may no longer be an option.

You overcome this block by learning to recognize fear as a powerful ally rather than a threat. Work with and through the fear.

Focus requires you to choose a meaningful goal and then to avoid the siren call of your previous life. If you have wisely chosen to remain in a job while exploring your options, you must resist getting caught up in the politics and reward system of a world where you are no longer a citizen. You may need to find the inner resources to keep going, while sustaining the motivation and excitement of your new world.

Focus requires learning time management skills and creating a career-related support system. A coach can help you feel less alone during the early stages.

Finally, financial blocks are real, not psychological. I recommend a new way to inventory all your resources, not just money. Sometimes a unique skill or a dynamite network can substitute for a bulging savings account.

At the same time, face your own tolerance for financial uncertainty. Some people sleep soundly with a zero-balance checking account, trusting the universe to pay the rent. Others get nervous when their checking account falls below five figures -- to the left of the decimal point.

After years of researching and working with transitioners, I believe the complexities boil down to

transforming yourself from 3-F to F-M: Forward-Moving.

As you work through each block, you gain a powerful burst of energy and insight. To change metaphors, think of moving a boulder off your travel lane on a highway. Now nothing stops you from moving full speed ahead! You need your rear view mirror only to see how far you've come.

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"Helping mid-career professionals move to career freedom"

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