

## **How long will this take?** **by Rose Jonas, Ph.D.**

Clients seldom ask me how long this career change process will take. It's an important question, especially in view of the expectation I read in their impatient faces that we'll be finished with this in a jiffy.

How long does it take to choose or change a career? A half dozen times a client, on a first visit, has leapt up with a "Eureka!" insight, given a tearful hug and headed out into the sunshine to start her own business, parley his academic career into an industrial specialty, leave selling security systems for antique-hunting. It is an awesome experience to witness the birth of a new and strong career dream, instantly to be pursued; memorable, too, because of its rarity.

Another time or two, the client has made career change the **ONLY** item on her agenda, carving a career planning work week from family, or stalling the search process so that full time attention is paid to the next career. In those cases, they make it in three to six months. I don't know why it's so, but it seems to take two years for people to dredge around in their attic of dreams and find the next path.

It's hard work just because it's hard work, but add to that the fact that you have a job and have to carve out serious think/planning/action time for yourself. You already have a full life, maybe over-full if the reason for the change is to find something less strenuous. How do you make the time when you've scampered on life's treadmill from dawn till midnight collapse each day?

This is not just a time game; it's a numbers game, too; and you have to do the activities, make the contacts, do the research, write the cover letters. It's also an action game. You are not seriously working at this unless you're writing, phoning, meeting, or otherwise putting yourself on front street. People often protest, when I get to the action requirement, "Oh, man, I think

about this all the time!” Thinking gets you nowhere except whirling in the same mental circle. You must tie your thoughts to actions. Write out your confusions, your goals, your networking list; phone for the class catalogue, the breakfast, the interview; meet with the friend of a friend who does what you want to do; go to the free seminars, the fall fest, the business-card-sharing cocktail parties; do something every day in service to your career quest. (Pushier thinkers will tell you to do three to five things; and I think they’re right. I’ve just never seen anyone do it, unless they’re on an actual job hunt. One thing seems to be challenging enough.)

“I can’t wait that long,” a client will inevitably say; but keep me along on the struggling journey. At its end, 18 to 24 months later, I get a rueful, “You were right,” but the person almost always volunteers that it couldn’t have happened any sooner, even the frustrations were valuable. One client passionately wanted to work for a specific big company, and we were both puzzled that he didn’t get snarfed up by the business that truly needed him. Several months later he took another job that gave him big challenges and high visibility, just what he wanted. A few weeks after THAT Jumbo Co. announced massive layoffs. Whew. He’d found a better job AND dodged a downsizing bullet.

So, set up your space; pick the time of day you’re most likely to work at this; get the Rolodex or the contact program; organize the paper and pens and the “Do not Disturb” sign, and get busy. Two years will pass whether you work on this or not. You might as well be able to point to progress, maybe even success!