

Maybe it's time to consider a lateral move

You might discover it takes you to a happier place

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It's still the new year, although it already seems ground down by bad economic news and growing job losses. No better time to think about hanging on to the job you've got, even as the belt-tightening continues.

Or is it?

You need a strategy for now, say leadership consultants Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans, but take the time to think about the future while you're at it.

If you're stuck in a job that isn't offering much satisfaction, there are ways to rejuvenate yourself and learn something new. It might be time to toss aside the notion of climbing the ladder, especially if company expansion is unlikely and the rungs are already cluttered with people.

Only you can determine your next steps and one of them offers much needed experience without having to fight for a promotion. That is, opting for a lateral move within your company. Once considered the kiss of death, Kaye and Jordan-Evans recommend this type of move as a way to learn new skills and to apply your skills to a job with different duties and challenges.

"Lateral moves can improve and expand your skills or perhaps shift them from a slow-growing part of the organization to one that is growing faster," they write in a nifty little primer, *Love It, Don't Leave It: 26 ways to get what you want at work*.

In order to decide on a lateral move, they advise asking yourself the following questions:

What do I need to learn?

Which of my skills can I use beyond my present job and present department?

If I take a lateral move, how can that job bring me closer to my goal?

What other department interests me?

Solid answers to these questions might point the way to heading from operations into sales, from sales into purchasing. There's no downside, really, to learning more about the company if your ultimate goal is rising through the ranks.

And if you're not sure enough to make a permanent move into another area, how about making a temporary move to research other options. Consider which areas of the company look interesting, advise Kaye and Jordan-Evans, or which assignment or project you might ask for that would give you a better view of other areas of the company. Make it more personal, perhaps, and meet with people in the company whose jobs you find interesting.

Another option, if you've got a creative manager, would be finding ways to

enrich the job you already have. This is also known as professional development, and it can be applied at any level in a company. Consider the following, and you might start thinking of ways to add enrichment to your current job:

What do you enjoy most about your job and how might you do more of it?

What could be added to your job to make it more satisfying?

Which of your current tasks is the most routine and might be switched with a co-worker or enhanced in some way?

The most challenging, and possibly the most liberating choice is what they call "the realignment option," or "moving downward."

It might not sound the least bit positive, but consider the number of people you've encountered who were so much better in the field than stuck behind a desk. Known as the "Peter Principle," in which every employee tends to rise to the level where they are no longer competent, it has taken dynamic workers in every field and usually turned them into managers, no longer able to use their greatest assets.

These are the people who can be liberated by that so-called downward move, the one where they say, "This is why I got into this field in the first place!" The IT manager who really loves to code, the nursing supervisor who really loves to nurse, the list goes on. They are usually folks who do so well that they end up getting promoted right out of the area of their greatest competence.

If, however, climbing that ladder seems the right choice for you, then consider carefully whether you're ready for that kind of change. The vertical option makes sense for you, the authors argue, if you can clearly answer the following questions:

Who is your competition, and what are your strengths and weaknesses relative to that person?

How have you performed during the last year? Have you added responsibilities? Where do you need to improve?

What value do you bring that would ensure the company promote you?

What are the satisfactions and problems associated with this move?

Then there's the final option, leaving the company. You might find yourself here once you realize that your skills and values just don't correspond with the company, or your career goals are unrealistic, your technical skills are no longer needed or your personal life goals don't match.

Before making this move, here's what you need to consider:

Do you know people who have left? What did they think after a few months?

What is it about the situation that makes you want to leave?

What good things about the company will you have to give up in order to do so?

What are your long-term opportunities elsewhere?

Are you taking charge of your career, or just escaping?

Don't make a move, they advise, until you can clearly state what kind of work and environment you're seeking and you understand what matters most. Is it money, creativity, challenge?

Your career is your own responsibility, so take a good look at your interests, values and work skills. Consider what accomplishments you can point to with pride and what type of work you usually try to avoid. Focus on your strengths and how they might best be utilized in a new job. Figure out the trends and new career pathways that might be available at this time.

And make a plan.

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