

# THE MEETING PROFESSIONAL™

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# Where Do You GO from? Here

BY  
ELAINE  
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**Stuck, burnt-out or  
just looking for a change?**

5 expert tips on how meeting professionals  
can get to where they want to be.

# As a career coach, Jan Spence meets many meeting professionals who feel stuck.

Some would like to move from one area of the meetings world to another—and can't figure out how to make the leap. Others become burned out by corporate life and are looking to reinvent themselves as business owners, but don't know exactly how to pull it off. Many, she says, are wondering: How can I bring the joy and passion back to what I'm doing?

It's a healthy sign. After years of battenning down the hatches to ride out the "great recession" and its aftermath, meeting professionals finally have the luxury of giving some serious thought to growing their careers and their businesses, experts say. The U.S. unemployment rate dipped to 7.6 percent in May as hiring picked up, a big improvement over the 10 percent rate when hiring hit the low point of the recession in October 2009.

But even for those based in other parts of the world, such as Europe, that are still experiencing significant economic turmoil, it's possible to plant the seeds for future career and business opportunities today. The keys, for anyone hoping to engineer career growth today, are planning and patience. Here are some tips on how to figure out what your next steps should be—and how to achieve them.

**Tap your core values.** Whether you want to stay in corporate life or start a business, you'll get more satisfaction from any work you do if it's connected, in some way, to what's most important to you, Spence (MPI North Florida Chapter) says. It's not always easy to pinpoint what you care about most in the hustle of daily living, so, at her firm, Spence & Associates in Jacksonville, Fla., she uses an assessment from Career Direct Global (<http://career-direct-ge.org>) to help clients figure this out.

Another valuable exercise is to look back at key career

milestones and think about which experiences were most meaningful to you. That will give you some clues.

Tapping into your personal passions outside of work can also help you create new opportunities to grow your career. One of Spence's bored meeting industry clients has a new lease on her career by refocusing it on a personal passion: kayaking in nature. She recently became certified as a master naturalist and is now working on the business plan and gathering the funding for a kayak tour business that will supply meeting and convention groups.

"She's doing something she's happy about," Spence says.

Even if you're not in a position to make a radical career change (such as a new job), finding ways to bring what you value to your work can make your job more fulfilling. Spence worked with one meeting planner who, in her time off, loved making chocolate chip cookies and giving them to others. To bring that spirit of giving to her career, she began making the cookies every time she sent a proposal to a client and sending a box as a gift.

"She was incorporating something that brought her joy into the workplace," Spence says. "It was a way of bringing energy and passion to what she was doing."

**Even if you're not in a position to make a radical career change into a brand-new job, finding ways to bring what you value to your work can make your job more fulfilling.**



## HOW ONE PLANNER ENERGIZED HER BUSINESS

When Julie B. Walker, CMP, discovered through MPI's job board that a pharmaceutical company in the Philadelphia area needed meeting-planning help, she jumped at the opportunity. Even though the ad cloaked the advertiser's name, she was eager to win business for Choice Meetings, a meeting planning firm she had just started not far away in the Harrisburg, Penn., area.

"I said, 'Hey, why not? I'll submit my résumé,'" says Walker, an active member of MPI and president-elect of the Middle Pennsylvania Chapter.

To bolster her chances of winning the job, she added client testimonials to her application.

Walker's decision to apply paid off in spades. The advertiser turned out to be a big company (she prefers not to reveal its name), where the in-house planner had just transitioned to another position. The firm wanted to outsource the work the previous planner had been doing. After an interview process, Walker won the assignment.

"I'm a contractor, an extension of their team, and they use me as needed," she says.

That was about two-and-a-half years ago. Today, work for the pharma company makes up about 60 percent of Walker's business. Although the client is based in the U.S., it does business

internationally, and Walker's firm is involved in planning several global meetings this year. Nonetheless, as an independent contractor, Walker has remained in control of her schedule.

"You call the shots," she says.

Choice Meetings, which serves several other clients—such as two groups in the meeting industry—is now so busy that Walker is in the process of bringing on a second planner.

"It has worked out phenomenally well for me," she says.

Walker has some advice for others who are looking to MPI's job boards for work: Don't rule out a position too quickly.

"Even if it doesn't seem to be a perfect match up front, go for it anyway," she says.

For instance, even if a position is in a distant city, it's possible the employer may be open to a virtual work arrangement. Submitting an application could open the door to a conversation, where you can bring up that possibility and share how well such arrangements have worked with other clients—something that can't happen if you don't apply.

"Let the potential employer see other solutions available," Walker says.

Whether you're looking for a job or to fill a position at your company, visit MPI's job board today at [www.mpiweb.org/careers](http://www.mpiweb.org/careers).

**Understand your personality.** If you're unhappy in your work, it could be that you're forcing yourself into a role or work environment that isn't a good fit for your essential nature—and consequently drains your energy. Changing to a different type of employer or running your own business may be enough to bring the spark back.

To get some objective insight into what makes you tick, Joan Eisenstodt (MPI Potomac Chapter), a veteran meetings consultant at Eisenstodt Associates in Washington, D.C., suggests taking a personality test, such as Myers-Briggs or the DISC assessment.

"Learn who you are," she says.

When Eisenstodt took Myers-Briggs early in her career, it showed that she was an introvert. To thrive in a social field like meetings, she found that she was best suited for running her own business. It gives her the ability to work in solitude—which she finds energizing.

**Put your organizational skills to work.** Once you're clear on your future direction, apply the same skills you

use in planning meetings to create a personal plan of action for your career, advises Andrea Nierenberg, an executive coach and speaker from New York City and author of *Nonstop Networking*.

Say you want to get a new job and know you need to network more to make contacts. Create a schedule for yourself to ensure that you do this over the next six months, using the "2-2-2" rule—attend two meetings at two organizations that are new to you and schedule follow-up meetings with two people you meet there, she advises.

**If you're unhappy in your work, maybe you're forcing yourself into a role or work environment that isn't a good fit for your essential nature—which drains your energy.**

"Take what you've been doing for work and use it for yourself," Nierenberg says.

**Think like a C-level executive.** One of the most important trends in meetings in the past few years has been an increased emphasis on the ROI, notes Mark Faust, who has advised general managers, large CVBs and meeting planners as principal of Echelon Management International, a growth



advisory firm in Cincinnati, and author of the book *Growth or Bust!* If you want advancement, it's important to bring a big-picture, bottom-line-focus to every meeting, conference and event you plan.

"The most successful meeting planners, both those that are internal to organizations and work for the larger meeting planning firms in the world, are the ones who look holistically at the organizations they're serving, as well as their vendors and partners," Faust says.

On one project for a Fortune 500 consumer goods company, Faust came across a meeting planner "who would never be satisfied with knowing the goals for the meeting," he recalls. She grilled the executives involved about the challenges the company was facing, its strategic objectives and which of those objectives were most important in the near term. Her ability to get inside of the heads of the company's leadership team put her in demand.

"That was her competitive advantage," he said.

Whether you work in house for a big corporation or in your own business, a similar focus can help.

**Consider your finances.** Fulfilling your career plans isn't always a matter of deciding what you want to do and going after your goal. If, say, you're planning to go after another professional credential or degree or start a business, you've got to figure out how to pay for it—so you don't have to abandon your plan midstream. Before embarking on any major plans, Spence recommends that her clients keep a record of every dollar they earn and spend in a period of 30 to 60 days in order to clearly appreciate their financial situation.

"Most people have an idea, but it isn't specific enough," she says.

Once you have a handle on your budget, you'll be in a much stronger position to find ways to accomplish your goals. ■

## GET SCHOOLED ONLINE, FOR FREE

The "open" ethos of the Internet has lead to a smorgasbord of free online education. Make yourself more attractive in the job market or grow in your existing position.

Visit <http://mpi.to/AugEdu> for links to some of the most compelling and valuable free online courses.

As a professional résumé writer, **Dawn Rasmussen, CMP**, chief résumé designer at Pathfinder Writing and Career Services in Portland, Ore., has helped clients avoid just about every job-hunting mistake there is. Here are some that Rasmussen (MPI Oregon Chapter) urges meeting professionals to avoid.

**MISTAKE NO. 1: Focusing on what you want above all.** Putting an "objective statement" that describes the type of position you're seeking at the top of your résumé is a big mistake, Rasmus-

sen says. A smarter move is to use a headline at the top of your résumé that underlines the fact that you can deliver what the employer is seeking.

"Connect what the employer is looking for and what your background offers," she says.

Your headline should ideally reflect your role at work and your seniority level.

**MISTAKE NO. 2: Failing to quantify the results of your efforts.**

Rather than just list your job duties in each gig, show the ROI and results you delivered, Rasmussen advises. For instance, state that you increased the attendance of one of your events by 10 percent, year over year.

It's not boasting, she says, it tells would-be employers

**Name:** Savannah

**Age:** 279 years old

**Seeking:** Convention attendees of all ages

**About me:** Not to brag, but I've been told I'm incredibly beautiful, warm, and have that old Southern charm.

I have access to over 3,000 committable hotel rooms and 100,000 square feet of state-of-the-art exhibit space, but I also know all the best places to eat and have fun! :)

# SIX MAJOR RÉSUMÉ MISTAKES TO AVOID

and clients that you're able to deliver real results.

**MISTAKE NO. 3: Focusing too much on your education credentials.** "Employers care about education, but they care more about experience," Rasmussen says.

Make it easy for hiring managers to see your experience near the top on your résumé—move the education section further down.

**MISTAKE NO. 4: Trying to be all things to all people.** "People have to understand that employers are in an exact-match economy when they're hiring people," Rasmussen says. "If I'm hiring for a meeting planner, I want to see a résumé that talks about meeting planning."

Instead of using a one-size-fits-all résumé for varying clients, tailor your résumé to the gig you're seeking, she advises. The more focused you appear, the better.

**MISTAKE NO. 5: Describing yourself as a "thought leader."** If you have to proclaim that you're a thought leader, it sends the message that you aren't one, Rasmussen says. Your thought leadership will be implied if you include a "notable achievements" section of your résumé that

mentions awards you've won, conferences at which you've spoken and blogs to which you've contributed.

"You are not overtly saying you're a thought leader, you're demonstrating how you stand out to your peers," she says.

**MISTAKE NO. 6: Flubbing your job title.**

If you started at your organization as an assistant and, eight years later, have been promoted three times, don't lump all of that experience under your current title, Rasmussen says. To avoid mischaracterizing your work history, break out each position within a given employer on your résumé.

"It shows more clearly the progression of your career," she says.

Also avoid changing your title to one that sounds better, a practice Rasmussen calls "uptitling."

Say you are a manager but do the work normally tackled by a vice president in your field. You could accurately describe your title as "manager (equivalent to vice president)," but not as "vice president."

"You can never lie," she says. "You have to be accurate."

For more résumé and job-hunting tips and tricks, get a copy of Rasmussen's book, **Forget Job Security: Build Your Marketability!** at [www.pathfindercareers.com](http://www.pathfindercareers.com).

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