



A Leap of Faith (into Tech)

By Jorina Khoo

It's a dream many people have at some stage in their career, simply walking out of their job to a world unknown. Maybe work is unbearable, boring, underpaid or lack prospects. Maybe the very opposite, the job is good, your performance is good, the boss is appreciative, but it's a rut. A career treadmill. You just want more, a new challenge, a new domain. The problem is, despite the burning desire to move firms, there is often something preventing you taking the leap... especially when it comes to Tech and Start-Ups.

My experience is based on working with hundreds of adult students - individuals who were looking to switch out from their current jobs and embark on a new career in Tech or into a Start-Up. The background of these adult students varies widely; individuals who used to be managers, engineers, accounting and financial professionals, customer service officers, editors, chefs — just to name a few. They were from hugely varying industries such as oil and gas, construction, government, education, healthcare and management consultancy. Taking the leap of faith to switch out of their comfort zone into a brand-new career, with a high possibility they will need to re-start their career (often known as taking up a more junior role) takes a commendable amount of desire, self-motivation and courage. Especially when the leap is not just about you. Virtually all the people I have worked with have endless commitments, families, children to support, bills, transport and housing loans to pay.

I'm always curious to understand and discover the drivers and motivations of these individuals in taking such a leap. Why? Because overcoming the fear, the barriers and the preconceptions that have formed to make a change in career can be a hugely valuable lesson to us all. Moreover, we have found that the barriers to change appear to be much larger and more complex in Tech and Start-Up than in any other markets. So, if you're currently planning, or starting to think about a career change, this article provides a few key themes to consider.

Do your Research

Imagine that you are planning a getaway trip, how would you start planning or prepping for the trip? What type of getaway trip do you prefer — relaxed? adventurous? shopping? Similarly, when you are planning a switch to a career in Technology, you need to read and catch up on the tech news, types of tech roles there are in the specific markets, barriers to entry into the tech roles that you are considering, salary benchmark or market rate for entry level tech positions you are looking at. Look at the growth opportunities available—do you see yourself developing, building or testing products, working with cross functional teams, influencing business stakeholders, mentoring and leading a team? Look at the types of industries and companies you would like to explore career opportunities with. The tech world does not just revolve around big brands such as Apple, Google and Facebook. Indeed, the majority of the tech opportunities are with Start-Ups made up of a team of less than 10 people and these tend to be the firms with the most exciting levels of innovation and prospects. Are you still motivated to make the move?

Network like Mad

Do you know exactly what a developer / UX designer / data analyst / product manager / digital marketer actually does on a day-to-day basis? How do you know if you would enjoy the job scope compared to what you have been doing for the past 'x' number of years? Talk to industry professionals. Attend local meet-ups and networking events to find out more. These events can range from highly technical topics about the subject matter you are interested in, to panel discussions where you can learn first-hand from experts what a day in their professional life looks like, to specific industry-related presentations.

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Networking is not only about meeting industry professionals face-to-face; it can be through different online mediums such as connecting with relevant individuals on LinkedIn, joining or following relevant groups on LinkedIn, Facebook or Medium. Do not just stop there, interact with them or within to gain first-hand knowledge and opinions, as well as the latest news in the market.

Get your Hands Dirty

Passionate? How do you know you are passionate about being a developer if you have never touched code before? Luckily for you and me, there are various online courses and videos available at no cost; so, take advantage of these tools—online tutorials / classes for beginners, online exercises / projects and certifications. You can also search for free tech workshops and classes to attend, and if you are feeling confident and adventurous, start developing your Github / Medium / Personal Portfolio, or even start working on pro-bono projects and participating in local tech competitions and hackathons. Then go further and take a look at the company you'd like to move to. The best way to understand the internal culture of a business and the way it treats people is to talk to those currently employed within the company. Spread your connections wide – from junior to senior employees to really understand how it all works and whether the culture is accepting of career changers.

Rely on your Existing Skills

When you want to move into a specialist Tech firm or Start-Up it's highly important to understand that to be a leader in the Tech Sector you will need to combine it with skills that we associate with the humanities, from communication skills and

emotional intelligence to an understanding of things like behavioural psychology, economics and interpersonal skills. Many of these skills you'll currently possess from your current role, so make sure you bring these to the fore when starting your interactions with the new target firm. Not everything needs to be learned from scratch.

Make it Happen

Once you've done all your background research, networking, meetings and preparation, it's then time to take the big step. There are often two key barriers here. Firstly, you need to believe that the career change can actually happen. One of the hardest things with a change of career is believing that we can actually do it. We tend to think of ourselves as an accountant, an engineer or whatever and we like to be defined by this. Now we have to redefine ourselves and begin to believe we can do the new job and excel at it. Once we believe it, others will just follow. Secondly, you then need to find the best ways to make contact with the relevant firms and take action. This could be through a trusted executive search firm, personal recommendations, or direct approach through LinkedIn or other methods. Do not let the inertia of your current job or people around you hold you back.

Here at Olofsson & Company we have had the pleasure of assisting many people into new careers, especially in the Tech and Start-Up arena. Talking people through the stages of transition is critically important, both to their new employer and more importantly to the individual, helping them to overcome any issues or barriers. They may always want to leap, sometimes they just need support in doing so.

About Olofsson & Company

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