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Ready for a Career Change? Consider Nonprofit Work

Whether in paid roles or through volunteer efforts, many executives add meaning to their second-act career change by using their skills to help a meaningful cause.



Newsletter



(Image credit: Getty Images)



BY ANNE DEBRUIN SAMPLE, CHIEF HR OFFICER

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Whether you're bowing out, taking a step back or seeking an entirely new line of work, a second-act career change to nonprofit work is a move that's becoming increasingly popular with executives from many different sectors. The way they see it, this kind of work allows them to transfer the talents, skills and expertise built during a corporate career to meaningful work in the nonprofit sector.

■ 5 Things to Consider When Weighing a Job Change

Facing a major life change often helps executives realize that they're not ready to be done adding value. Especially for those considering retirement, a solid, satisfying life plan is as important as a long-term financial one, since research shows that negative health outcomes can often accompany a ["purposeless" retirement](#).

Get Started With Discernment

To get started, you'll find there's significant value in spending time on reflection and discovery. Think about what your strengths are, what activities you find meaningful and what you want to spend time on. If you'd like to do this reflection in a more structured setting, consider working with a career-transition counselor.

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Anything can happen during this discernment. You might rediscover a long-buried interest in young people, the arts or animal welfare. Perhaps current events have encouraged you to support issues like affordable health care, equitable education or fair housing. Or you might feel a passion for climate change. One retiring executive recently told me, “When I retire from this job, I want to work on saving the planet for my grandkids.”

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Which Role Makes Sense for You?

Once you're clear about your passions and interests, there are many ways you can make a meaningful contribution:



- **Part-time volunteering.** Many organizations need people to help with marketing, operations, communications, fundraising and development. They're looking for volunteers with significant experience, fresh commitment and lots of energy. The great thing about volunteering is that you can set the pace and level of commitment to work best with your lifestyle.
- **Board membership.** If you'd like to get more involved, consider raising your hand to be a nonprofit board member. Before moving forward, ask plenty of questions about board members' time commitments and fundraising requirements, which are common on most nonprofit boards.
- **Leadership role.** You might be interested in an executive director (ED) position, or perhaps a role as a member of the ED's team. Just remember that the only "downshift" it will represent will likely be in your compensation package. Leadership is always hard work, and many nonprofits are working diligently despite limited budgets and resources. If you're hoping for more free time and flexibility in your second act, a leadership role may not be for you.

How to Find the Right Organization

Next, start searching for a nonprofit that fits with what you learned during your discovery process. Let colleagues and friends know what you're thinking and add a question about nonprofit participation at all your networking meetings. You might be surprised at the range of interests your colleagues represent, and they can serve as good "ins" for you with nonprofit leadership.

When you're down to a couple of candidates, ask for informational interviews with board members and leaders of your top-ranked groups. Attend events hosted by your nonprofits of interest to see

As you're looking for a place to land, you'll need to create a narrative that will make sense for a new role. Make a list of your transferrable skills and interests so that you can convince an organization of the ways your for-profit experience will transfer to their world. Create a clear narrative that outlines the kind of work and organizations you're interested in and update your LinkedIn profile with that information.

Even Volunteering Is Still a Job

Whatever you do, don't minimize the time and effort this pivot can represent. Some executives enter into a board membership or a leadership role with the attitude that it will be a major downshift, only to find that the work is just as challenging as their corporate careers ever were.

Of course, the intangible rewards can be significant, as you find ways to bring all your skills to bear on a purposeful, rewarding second act.

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Want to learn more? Marcia Ballinger has written a terrific book, [Make the Jump: Reinvent Your Career in the Nonprofit Sector](#), which covers each of these topics in much greater depth.

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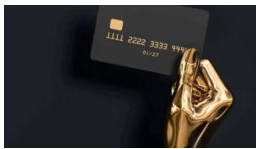
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