

When One Career Door Closes, Another Career Door Opens

Donald W. Mitchell

Salespeople know that if you keep asking someone to buy something, they will eventually purchase. Does that hold for getting a job from an employer to gain a new career opportunity? I don't know of any successes with that method, but there is another way to be persistent that does work: Continually add skills and keep an eye out for career doors that are about to open.

Life is full of career uncertainties and surprises. You can tell that by checking to see how many youngsters who wanted to become television stars, professional athletes, doctors, firemen, and concert pianists actually did so. Most youngsters fail to appreciate the limitations of their choices at the time, and many change their minds about what they want to do when they learn more about the field that first attracted them.

I learned this lesson about career surprises from one of my best friends. Let's call him Jake. His father was a well-respected physician who practiced as a specialist in urology. My friend followed in his father's footsteps, actually taking over his father's practice.

But I could tell that medicine wasn't in Jake's blood. Jake loved the outdoors and craved new intellectual challenges. He spent more time reading nonmedical works than medical ones.

I wasn't surprised when my friend Jake announced that he was retiring from medicine at a young age to be a house husband for his wife, another physician, who had just accepted a challenging management position in a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) located thousands of miles away.

Soon bored with going to the beach, my friend enrolled in an MBA program. After graduating, he was quickly sought after for his medical-business perspective.

After two successful stints in private companies, Jake retired again . . . this time to climb mountains. He's reached the summit of many of the world's highest peaks, despite having begun serious climbing in his fifties.

My friend explained to me recently that whenever one career door closed or his interest in a career waned, a new and better opportunity seemed to open up almost immediately.

I was recently reminded of Jake's experiences and observations while corresponding with one of my former students, Dr. Manuel Evans, a physician who is an MBA graduate of Rushmore University. Unlike Jake, whom I met as a teenager, I became acquainted with Dr. Evans in his late fifties as he was about to retire from his medical post at age sixty after long years of distinguished service in the United Kingdom, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia.

Like Jake, Manuel also found nonmedical fields appealing. He loved numbers so much that he once considered becoming a mathematician. In high school, he began writing and still provides medical articles on a regular basis to several publications.

Dr. Evans was particularly fascinated by the opportunity to combine medical and business perspectives to provide improved health care that emphasized maintaining wellness. Part of his medical work at the time included working with private medical institutions which exposed him to the concept of earning a profit while providing health care. With that opportunity in mind, he enrolled for his MBA studies to learn how to develop care facilities to improve wellness after his "retirement."

After graduating with much praise from his business professors, Dr. Evans made final preparations to launch his new business in Nigeria. Alas, business and political conditions dramatically worsened so that his wellness concept was no longer economically feasible. Clearly, that career door had closed . . . at least for the current time.

What should a good doctor do? He kept practicing medicine, taking on short-term assignments while he reconsidered his options.

Very soon his MBA degree opened a new door. He became deputy medical director of a Clinical Research Organization (CRO) that helps develop new medicines for pharmaceutical companies. This kind of multidisciplinary work greatly appeals to him, and this job will make good use of his great medical education, clinical experience, and many personal interests. The

credibility of his MBA degree helped him make this attractive career change at age 61.

In an MBA course Dr. Evans examined the opportunity to write a book and looks forward to opening that door with part-time writing. The last time we corresponded he was off to a writers' conference to explore opportunities of working with agents and editors.

Clearly, Dr. Evans has found that when one career door closes another career door will open. He also learned that having the right education is important to ensure that the new doors will open the way to bigger and better opportunities, ones that fulfill your heart's desires.

Instead of giving up on those youthful dreams, perhaps you just need to fine-tune them to aim at doing what you now know you love. With your improved career goal in mind, you can start preparing to knock on doors of opportunity by adding to your knowledge and skills.

Online learning can be a great aid in this process by allowing you to keep earning an income while working at your current job, to lower the cost of obtaining more education, and to allow you to substitute life experience for the mind-numbing required courses that dominate degree programs at most campus-based schools.

I asked Dr. Evans to tell me about how he saw online learning as being different from campus-based learning. He said, "Of course I missed the interactions with fellow students which are part of a campus university course. These interactions stimulate discussions and clarify thinking in a way that no online course can do. But the online course advisors were very helpful with their prompt answers to questions, suggestions, and advice as to how to develop subjects, or modify lines of approach to subjects under study."

His advice is to be sure you have outstanding advisors if you go the online education route to open new career doors: Your advisors can be mentors and stimulate your thinking in ways that are essential to good learning. "One big advantage most online learners have over campus students is motivation. Like you, most are adult or mature students. You are doing the course because YOU want to; you have figured out that it is important for you

BEFORE you start. That goes a long way in helping overcome any difficulties or obstacles you may encounter along the way.”

Are you ready to knock on more career doors to see which ones open?

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