



How Long Does It Take to Find a Green Career?

By Carol McClelland, PhD

Although it's hard to predict how long a career change will take, we can tell you we've seen people find a new position within a matter of weeks and we've seen people choreograph a gradual career change over a period of several years.

In each case, the person is making the decisions to balance their passions and their responsibilities.

A career change that takes more than a year can actually be a good thing. If you use the time wisely, you can gain solid green experience, build your network, learn about your new industry, and gain some green education – all of which gives you more of an edge when you go for a job in a new field.

Factors That Will Influence the Length of Your Green Career Journey

Some of the factors that influence your journey depend on you; other factors are beyond your control. I think it's helpful for you to be aware of these factors so you can work with them consciously.

How committed are you to your quest for a green career?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how committed are you to your quest? Is a green career a nice-to-have or a must-have? There is really no wrong answer to this question; you can move forward regardless of your answer to this question. Just know your commitment will influence how you approach your goal. No matter how you do it, changing careers (green or not) is not a trivial undertaking.

How much time and energy can you devote to your search?

Given your work schedule and your personal responsibilities, how much time and energy can you put toward your green career search? Can you reprioritize your commitments to free up some time?

Green Career Central – An Online Resource Center

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In the early phases you will be doing your own discovery process and online research so you need time to think and be online. Later in the process you will be reaching out to talk with others. If you decide you need to get more training or volunteer to gain experience, you will need to work those activities into your schedule.

Don't let your fear about how you'll manage the latter part of the process keep you from starting. You can make a lot of progress on your own at night or on the weekends.

Do you know what industry or profession you are targeting?

Identifying your target industry or profession is the first step in reaching your goal. This step may take some time, but it's a crucial starting point. The clearer your focus, the faster you'll see results.

How closely aligned are your current profession and your target profession?

How similar is your current profession to your target profession? Can you leverage your skills and experience to move into the new career at your current level? Or, will you need to get training and experience to enter into an entirely new field? Obviously, the closer the match between your current profession and your target profession, the easier your career change will be.

If you don't know your target profession yet, you can't answer this question. Making assumptions about your answer to this question could force you into a corner that limits your success. Wait until you see where you want to go and your options first.

How plugged in are you to the green network in your area and in your profession?

I'm sure it comes as no surprise that having a green network will help your cause. If you aren't yet plugged into your local green network, I encourage you to do so. Depending on your region, your green network may be easy to locate through green networking events and green activities. If that's not the case, you may have to search a bit. Talk to friends who share your values as a starting point. Find a local environmental organization to see if they have a calendar of events or can point you to other organizations. Your first attempts may not seem very business related, but keep working it. If all else fails, consider starting a green networking group! Then you'll be sure to meet everyone in town who is interested in a green future.

How comfortable/secure do you feel in your current job?

If you are reasonably comfortable in your current job, you may not want to rock the boat right now. Instead you may want to use the security and income you have in your current job to figure out your green career direction, green your life, volunteer, or get some green education.

If you aren't comfortable in your current job, you may have quite a bit of incentive to get on with your search for your green career. Getting yourself away from a difficult work culture or

manager can be extra motivating. Keep in mind it may not be feasible to jump right into your ideal green career. Use your time in your interim job to become clearer about what you want in your next job.

Factors You Can't Influence

What stage of development is your target industry or profession?

When you know your target industry or profession, your next step is to evaluate their readiness to hire people who have the skills you have. Green industries are maturing at different rates due to funding, policies, technology, regulation, and their own stage of development. As industries mature, their hiring patterns (who they hire and the number they hire) will change.

What other life events are going to influence your ability to move quickly on your desire to have a green career?

The factors that may be out of your control are the events unfolding around while you are searching for your new career. Events and changes that your children, parents, spouse, pets, friends are experiencing can pull you away from your goal temporarily. If you are feeling utterly stretched, it may be better to be present with those who need your support.

When life returns to a more normal pace, you'll be ready to jump back on your quest. Sometimes these life detours help us reprioritize and give us an even clearer picture of what we desire.

Remember, having a clear vision of your target green career is always your first step. When you have that clarity, your path to getting there becomes a lot clearer. You'll know where to network, train, and connect. Wait until you are clear about your target career before you make any rash decisions that "force" you to settle and stay in the non-green job you have.

Finding your green career is possible – it may not happen overnight – but it can happen as long as you stay engaged in the process.

Green Career Expert, Carol McClelland, PhD, is the author of *Green Careers For Dummies* and Founder and Executive Director of **Green Career Central**, an online resource center with easy-to-use tools, coaching programs, and training events to help professionals, students, and career counselors make sense of the green economy. Download our current free report to help you navigate the green economy at www.greencareercentral.com

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