

Changing Your Career? It's Easier Than You Think



You can send your workplace questions to Stephen at: StephenSays@bellow.press.

Questions selected to be answered, will appear in this column. Please use the Subject: Stephen Says for all emails. Stephen Viscusi is a bestselling author, television personality, and CEO of The Viscusi Group, global executive recruiters located in New York. Follow Stephen on Twitter @WorkplaceGuru, Like Stephen on Facebook; and follow him on LinkedIn.

Dear Stephen:

I think that I want to transition my career. I am now a project manager at a furniture dealer, and I want to move into sales. I am good at my job. Maybe too good. Because of this, I do not know if my current employer will let me transition with my company. So, if I do move into sales, I think that I'll need to change companies, and I think I'd like to move to a manufacturer.

I currently work for one of the senior sales producers here and handle most of the account management and project management of his business. When I simply mentioned the possibility of transitioning into a sales role to him I was immediately offered more money to stay exactly where I am. It is clear to me

that they want me to stay, but I know that it is time for a change. I have a very healthy base salary, and I have a feeling I may need to take a pay cut in order to successfully restart my career, which is fine with me. Long term, I know I will make more money in sales than I will in project managing. I am more concerned about the fact that I work for one of the largest Steelcase dealers — one of the largest dealers period — in the country. Because of this, I believe that the manufacturers are afraid to hire me for fear of losing business with my current bosses.

Of course, I also recognize I have no real sales experience or customer relationships. I have been watching the dealer sales

reps I work with for years and, of course, have worked with many, many manufacturer reps, but I do not know the realtors or the architects or the designers who can bring me directly to end users for business. I am sure I know the mechanics of the job and could excel if given the chance, but I do lack the relationships manufacturers and other dealers find so valuable. How can I make the transition? Do I just have to leave the industry and start fresh?

Yours,

Dead Ended

You might also want to explore outside hospitality sales jobs, fabric companies and floorcovering companies.

Dear Dead Ended:

Sounds like you are in a tough place. You're ready to make a change, but are missing the infrastructure to bring your dreams to fruition.

It's true. Dealers of any size have a lot of clout with the manufacturers, and, of course, they do not look kindly on these manufacturers poaching their employees. And, as you mentioned, even if you manage to get your boss's blessing, it is exceptionally difficult to make the jump to outside sales without the customer relationships manufacturers are generally looking for.

However, don't despair, for hope shines eternal in the sales industry. No matter how big the dealer is, there is always a manufacturer's line they do not sell. This

will usually be a wall line, fabric or floorcovering. Approach those companies directly and give them the hard sell. Go straight to the website and apply online. Cut out the obsequious middle man, who might say the right thing but won't market you the right way. Reconstruct your resume to a sales template (but do not lie about experience). Be clear about what you do and the accounts you have worked with as an account manager or project manager. I can't guarantee this approach will bear fruit, but it is the best shot you have and has a higher chance of success than you might imagine.

And if you can't work at a manufacturer your dealer sells, don't make the mistake of forgetting the residential arm of the industry. Holly Hunt, Donghia, J. Robert Scott and many others all

have outside sales positions. The best part is that most of these companies do not care if you work for a big contract dealer. There are even outside sales jobs with major outdoor furniture manufacturers. You might also want to explore outside hospitality sales jobs, fabric companies and floorcovering companies. I heard of a guy who just took an outside sales job at Restoration Hardware! The opportunities are all there, you just need to think a bit outside the box. Chances are a recruiter cannot be of help, so you need to apply directly through the manufacturer's website, but in this case that could be an advantage. Show some initiative, and I guarantee that good things will be right on the horizon.

Stephen