

WHY CHANGING YOUR COURSE REQUIRES SOME FINESSE

Summary: Learn how to make an industry change smoothly after earning your master's degree.



Question: I'm halfway through the Masters in Organizational Dynamics program at the University of Pennsylvania. I'd like to make a career change to the human-resources field in private industry, working in organizational development and design. I'm currently working as a senior business analyst for the Defense Department and have 10 years of experience in information systems through a variety of software and **project management positions**. What's the best way for me to make this switch?

Answer: As a student, you have the perfect excuse to approach people who are doing what you want to be doing when you graduate. These informational interviews are one of the best ways to get the scoop on a new career, and in your case, a new industry. Get to know some of the players now, and you'll be further along on a job search when you graduate.

You might wonder, "Where do I find these people, and why would they want to talk with me?" Not to worry: if you do your homework, develop a compelling introduction and are considerate of their time, people love to talk about themselves and their careers. You'll have a ready-made link to open the conversation with contacts if you consult the Penn Career Network, a database of Penn undergraduate and graduate alumni who have volunteered to answer career-related questions for students and other alumni, for leads. Additionally, the university's career-services department will have a plethora of resources to research options and prepare for your job search.

The more clarity you gain on your goals, the easier it will be to market yourself. Projects with consulting firms will offer insights into external consulting, while corporate positions will reveal the role of the internal consultant. Incorporating your business-analysis or information-systems skills into the organizational-development mix will differentiate you and strengthen your position. Consider joining the OD Network or attending one of its events for more insights and potential leads.