

The Five O'Clock News®

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"One organization with a long record of success in helping people find jobs is The Five O'Clock Club."

FORTUNE

Celebrating 25 years—
America's Premier
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Professionals, Managers
and Executives

Time for a Change?

Why Not Consider a Nontraditional Career?

by Joan Runnheim, Certified Five O'Clock Club Career Coach

Have you been blocked in your attempts to move up the career ladder? Or perhaps as a child you dreamt of a career that involved climbing a real ladder. Maybe you've reached the top, but haven't found it as fulfilling as you thought it would be. Or are you in a career that was someone else's dream, not yours? If any of these sound familiar, you may want to consider a nontraditional career.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, **nontraditional careers are those in which more than 75 percent of the workers are of the opposite gender.** For women, these careers include everything from aeronautic engineer to wood machinist. For men, they include everything from administrative assistant to nurse.

The Push for Nontraditional Careers

Over the past several years there have been government initiatives to help encourage men and women to consider nontraditional careers. Initially, the emphasis was on helping more women break into nontraditional careers to level the *paying* field. The Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations Act of 1992 (WANTO) authorized a grant program to award over \$8.6 million to 37 community-based organizations. The money provided technical assistance to employers and labor unions to enable them to recruit, hire, train, and retain women in apprenticeships and nontraditional occupations.

The Carl D. Perkins Act of 1998 provides funds to secondary and postsecondary educational institutions to support collab-

orative projects to recruit more students, both female and male, to enter nontraditional careers.

Why Nontraditional?

Men and women both want careers they enjoy. In addition, more women pursue jobs traditionally held by men because of the higher wages. Many men may find more fulfilling careers in



"My attempt to be a male supermodel didn't pan out as well as I expected. Can I have my job in accounting back?"

Also in this issue

◆ Happiness Is . . . ◆ Mastering Metrics in Your Job ◆ Imagining Your Future



Joan Runnheim,
Five O'Clock Club
Career Coach

the helping fields, which have traditionally attracted women. And with the large number of baby boomers reaching retirement age, as the healthcare industry

expands to meet their needs, **there will be increased opportunities for those wanting to work in healthcare—no matter what their gender.**

Under-representation

While we may assume that women have shattered some barriers, the fact remains that women still tend to be concentrated in traditionally female occupations. In 2002, women represented 76.3 percent of all administrative support workers and 51.9 percent of all service workers. Women make up a small percentage of workers in many male-dominated fields. In 2003, for example, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, **only 7.2 percent of electrical engineers were women. That same year, only 3.4 percent of aircraft pilots and 2.3 percent of aircraft mechanics were women.**

The Case for Nontraditional Careers: Pay Differentials and Labor Shortage

According to the organization Chicago Women in Trades, the primary cause of the wage gap between men and women is occupational segregation, the clustering of women in occupations that pay less. This segregation contributes to the lower earning power of females. As recently as a decade ago, only 14 percent of working women were employed in nontraditional jobs.

Many nontraditional jobs for women pay 20 to 30 percent more than traditional jobs and have better career advancement opportunities. An administrative assistant, considered a traditional job for women, has an annual median annual wage of \$35,000. Compare that to an architect, considered nontraditional for

women, with an annual median wage of just over \$58,000.

The large number of baby boomers reaching retirement age (even if many of them opt for semi-retirement) will continue to create a demand for workers. This will probably mean that the line between traditional and nontraditional will continue to blur or might even eventually be erased. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the demand for computer software engineers is expected to increase 46 percent between 2002 and 2012. For architects, there is a 17.3 percent projected increase. Women can help fill these anticipated openings.

On the other hand, **the need for dental hygienists is expected to increase 43 percent, while the demand for registered nurses will see a 27.3 percent jump. Men can help meet these needs.**

Challenges of Nontraditional Work

Men and women both face challenges when entering an industry dominated by the other gender. Women can face isolation, discrimination, and sexual harassment. During 2006, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received 12,025 complaints of sexual harassment, of which 85 percent were filed by women. Being aware of—and being prepared to handle—these types of situations can be the determining factor in a woman's success.

Men in nontraditional careers can also face isolation and sex discrimination, making it difficult to land a job in the first place. One young man I know graduated at the top of his class at nursing school, and interviewed for a job at a local hospital. But he was passed over in favor of two female candidates. Of course, many factors can influence hiring decisions, but stereotypes of what's considered women's work' and men's work are still entrenched in our society.

The Seven Stories: A Tool for Deciding

Should you be thinking of a nontraditional career? The simple answer is that you've got a lot of homework to do before making any decisions! So many people are in the wrong careers because they don't make the effort to identify what they're

good at and what they enjoy doing. Only assessment and research can help you decide if a nontraditional career *is* right for you. Maybe you feel stuck in your career—that might be because you don't utilize your motivated skills. The Seven Stories Exercise can help you identify those motivated skills, i.e., the skills you *want* to use.

This exercise does require much thought. The first step is to list 25 of your life accomplishments. These can include accomplishments from your childhood along with work-related achievements. For example, perhaps as a kid you earned a Girl Scout or Boy Scout badge. Or maybe you landed a five million dollar contract just this week. But the accomplishment doesn't need to be spectacular or extravagant. However, include only those accomplishments that *you did well and enjoyed doing*. Of the 25 on your list, select the seven that mean the most to you, and rank them according to the satisfaction they provided. On a separate page for each of the seven, write down everything that went into that accomplishment: list the skills and talents required and the types of people you worked with. Look for common themes and denominators. Formal worksheets for analyzing these accomplishments can be found in the Five O'Clock Club book, *Targeting a Great Career*.

Another helpful exercise requires listing all the things that you really like to do. List anything that makes you feel good and gives you satisfaction. Think back over typical weeks or years, the places you've been, the people you've worked or played with, courses you've taken, etc. Think of how you spend your free time. Your interests may be a clue as to what you would like in a job, which may include nontraditional possibilities.

The Rewards

After all this careful self-study and reflection, brainstorm possible job targets, with the help of family, friends, or a career coach. It's important to consider all of your career options, which may include a look at nontraditional work. The rewards can be great: higher wages, good benefits, advancement opportunities, and work you enjoy. ●