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Chances to Use Teaching Skills Abound for Career Switchers

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Edited questions from Career Tracks, Mary Ellen Slayter's online discussion about workplace issues. Her guest was Katy Piotrowski, author of "Career Coward's Guide to Changing Careers."

Washington: I am looking to leave my job as a special education teacher. What kinds of careers have teachers gotten into after teaching? My concern is that I may not make the same money. What can I do?

Piotrowski: Your teaching skills are highly transferable. For ideas, log onto a job-search site and input keywords such as "training," "teaching" and "instructing" to get an idea of the thousands of positions that could use your skills. To hone down your choices, think about which products or services are interesting to you, and then research which roles within those industries would allow you to use the skills you most enjoy. While teaching pays well, there are many other career choices that can pay as well or better.

Richmond: Career switching sounds great, but practically, I wouldn't hire me. I read interesting ads, think about how I could spin my experience to show I'm a quick learner, but the truth is, I don't have the experience they want, and I wouldn't blame them for choosing someone who does. How can a (shy) person ever get past the gatekeepers?

Piotrowski: It sounds as if you're your most challenging "gatekeeper." It would probably help for you to build your confidence/track record in the career areas that interest you by finding small ways to add to your experience base, so that you can then say, "Yes, Ms. Employer, I do have experience with that. Let me give you an example . . ."

When you see an ad that looks appealing and you think, "Yes, I could probably do that," actually find a way to do it -- complete a practice project, volunteer for an activity, take a class, etc. This technique helps you build your résumé while improving your chances of convincing potential employers of your ability to succeed in a new line of work.

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