

Advice for bankers changing careers in their 40s

by Sarah Butcher, with expert comments by [Executive Coach Karin Peeters](#)

Career change at 40

Like it or not, 40 is still a watershed age in banking. 40 is the age at which [ageism kicks in](#). 40 is also the age at which bankers and traders who've had successful careers start casting about for something else instead. Headhunters tell us there are few traders over the age of 42 and [next to none over the age of 50](#). No one is immune. In 2013 Chris Carmael, the former CFO for EMEA at Credit Suisse, stood up in court a few years ago and declared that the lack of traders over 50 was simply the 'nature of the industry' – only to be [ejected from it himself a year later, aged 48](#).



If you work for an investment bank and you are aged 40+, it makes sense therefore to make contingency plans. But how?

Career change at 40 is easier for corporate financiers, harder for traders

Changing careers is easier for corporate financiers and capital markets professionals than it is for people on the trading floor. Or at least, that's the perception.

“Staff in corporate finance have a background which is quite suited to working in the finance division of a big company. It's fairly common for corporate financiers to go and work with their clients, either as a finance director or in treasury,” says Clarke Pitts, a former MD in equity derivatives trading at JPMorgan at Daiwa.

“However, if you work in secondary trading, your skills are far less pertinent outside financial markets,” Pitts adds.

While corporate financiers and M&A bankers can simply move to work for their clients, Pitts says traders are often obliged to reinvent themselves completely. Many become entrepreneurs: “It's quite common to see ex-markets professionals with a miscellanea of different businesses to their names,” he says, pointing to ex-traders and salespeople who've left banks to run [mini-cab firms](#), [internet radio companies](#), firms of electricians, and who have returned to family firms selling agricultural equipment.

Pitts himself has opted to run a small fund and to write a book, [‘Structured Products.’](#) which has a foreword by Gillian Tett, managing editor of the Financial Times' U.S. business. “It's a

very general explanation of what structured products are and a look at the scale and scope of the industry,” he tells us. “People talk a lot about hedge funds, but they ignore the far large structured products industry because they don’t understand. This is an attempt at clarification.”

Don’t rush into it

However, before assuming that you need to write a book, set up a side business, or sound out your clients for potential job openings, you’re advised to take a step back. Take a deep breath. Evaluate.

“It’s very difficult to change careers from a place of exhaustion,” says Karin Peeters, [a life and executive coach who works with banking clients](#). “If you’re burned out, you need to first focus on feeling better in the here and now so that you can focus on changing careers from a replenished place.”

Peeters encourages stressed-out banking clients to get some sleep and to spend a few weeks looking after themselves before tackling the big decisions. Philip Beddows, co-founder of talent and leadership development firm [The Silk Road Partnership](#) agrees: “Give yourself time. There are a lot of things you need to do and you don’t want to feel panicked.”

But who *are* you?

Peeters says career changers in their 40s often come to her with ideas about the practicalities of their new career. “People know what their transferable skills are. They know how much money they need to make, and how long they want to commute. They also know what they *don’t* want to do,” she says.

But Peeters says far fewer have thought about what they *really* like to do, what *really* excites them and what their values are. “I work with the ‘iceberg model’” says Peeters. “What’s on your CV is only a tiny bit of who you are. – People go into finance for very different reasons. You need to go back to the core of what you really want from life.”

From this starting point, Peeters says you can look at how the things you like doing align with your values and fit with your practical requirements of a job. This is the sweet spot. This is where you need to orientate your post-40s, post-banking career.

Beddows approaches the same issue from a different angle: he says you need to treat yourself as a company and to give yourself an audit. How’s your cash flow? Which products (transferable skills) do you have? How can you re-brand yourself and persuade customers (employers) to buy your new goods and services? “At the heart of it is understanding what your ‘business’ really is,” says Beddows. “Who are you? What are you? What is that you’ve really been doing at work for the past 20 years?”

Get your ‘shareholders’ (family) onside

It’s no good changing careers at 40 without getting the buy-in of your family.

Peeters says the concerns of 40-something career changers tend to centre on a sense of duty to spouse and children. “People in their 30s still worry about how their parents will react

when they leave a large bank, but for people in their 40s it's much more about how they will continue to pay their mortgage or afford the school fees."

Spousal acceptance is a big issue, says Peeters: "They can feel that a partner married them with a particular financial future in mind, and suddenly that's changing."

Unless it's tackled, this can lead to resentment. The spouse becomes perceived as someone who simply demands money. Before you quit banking in your 40s, you therefore need to discuss the situation with your wife or husband. "It's not just about money," says Peeters. "It's about how you want to live and how you want to treat each other. Is it really worth having a lot of money, but never seeing each other – or only seeing each other when you're tired?"

Continuing the company metaphor, Beddows says you can see your spouse and family as your shareholders. You're making a major strategy change. You need to convince them that it's the right thing to do and that it won't threaten the stability of the enterprise (or at least that it won't be threatened any more than if you simply hang on in banking for as long as you can).

Conduct some 'market testing.' And then rebrand yourself

Having conceived what you want to be, Beddows advises you hit your network to find out how viable the new you is likely to be. Can you make the move from [equity research or equity sales to investor relations?](#) Ask the investor relations professionals you know. Ask the helpful headhunters too – although typically career changes are best effected through networking rather than headhunters, because headhunters prefer to place candidates into roles they fit exactly.

When you've settled on your new career direction, got your family-shareholders onside and prepared your product, Beddows says you need to launch yourself onto the market in a flurry of communication and re-branding. "The main challenge is getting other people to accept the new you, particularly if they're used to associating you with a particular large organisation."

Career change at 40 is perfectly possible, says Beddows. But you need to have confidence in the new person you're becoming. You will need to be especially confident and persistent if you want to become an entrepreneur. Peeters and Pitts say entrepreneurialism is often ex-markets professionals career of choice. "Traders are usually very bright and have a lot of energy. They also have a lot of capital," Pitts concludes.

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