

If you do one thing, do more than one thing

I was thinking the other day about a speech I gave years ago titled *Be the Spork* where I talked to a group of incoming masters students about combining multiple competencies to make themselves indispensable and more attractive to their potential employers. I think this advice holds true for every one of us as we progress through our careers. So often we get caught up in what we are doing or working on right now that we forget to take time to develop other areas of expertise in which we are interested. Let me share a scenario I regularly encounter.

I talk to many of my former students after a few years in their first job and the conversation usually starts off with “Justin, I hate my job. What can I do?” After a flurry of probing questions we usually arrive at the next inevitable question “OK, I get it. Well, what do you want to do next?” Usually, the answer is some canned response about the latest and greatest thing they read about but I challenge them to go deeper and describe their dream job. A dream job for which they have no experience, qualifications or credentials. What now?

For this anecdote, let’s say the person’s name is Tim and wants to move from being a “application developer” to an “information security architect” (after all, I am an IT nerd at heart). It really doesn’t matter

if it's technology, human resources, finance, marketing, engineering, etc.; the same advice holds true and the dialog is always the same:

***Me:** So, you want to be a security architect. That's great! Sounds like a good career move. What have you been doing to build your skill set in information security and/or architecture?*

***Tim:** Well, nothing really...it has been difficult to get into that role at my current company since I don't have the experience. And I can't get the experience unless I get into a security architect role.*

Sound familiar?...the old catch 22...

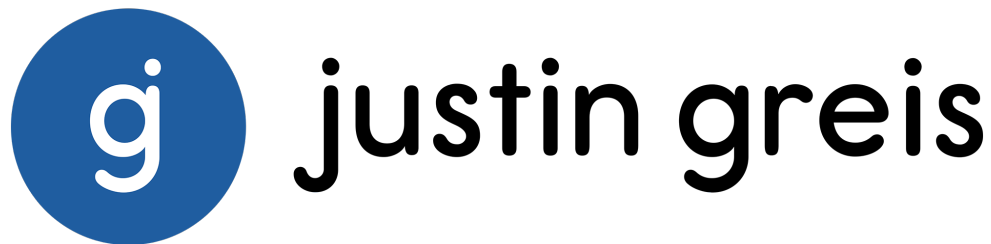
Breaking the catch 22 cycle can be done but it does involve extra effort that can be summarized with one with a simple mantra: *do more than one thing*. Rather than fixating on the reasons why you are not being given the experience in your current job, take the control into your hands and seize every opportunity to build your skills, credentials and knowledge outside of your day job. In Tim's case, I typically suggest things like:

- Take on "extra curricular" responsibilities or projects at your current job that cultivate skills important for your desired job. They may not be directly in the field but they may be important and related skills.
- Attend industry conferences.
- Take training courses.
- Get a certification or two or three.
- Join an industry or professional group.
- Freelance or volunteer and take on a role aligned with your desired job.
- Find a mentor who is in your desired field.
- Read the blogs and subscribe to the industry news.
- Start a blog and join the social media conversation.
- Network, network, network!

When we were little, our parents told us we could be anything we wanted to be; it just took hard work and determination. Somewhere along the way, some of us forget this wisdom, but it is so true.

The point is: there are things that you can do – outside your office walls – to build your professional brand and experience, but it is up to you to pursue those things. They will likely never be in your official company goals or mandated by your employer. You don't even have to wait until you want to change jobs or you are unhappy in your job. If you have a professional interest outside the scope of your current job, pursue it proactively and passionately. You never know where it could lead you. You may discover you actually hate what you thought was your dream job and avoid years of unhappiness in a profession you were convinced you would love. Alternatively, you may discover your next life's mission and find companies chasing after you!

I'm curious how you career changers out there made the jump from one job to the next in a different field and how you made it work. I'd love to hear from you!



hi, i'm justin
(nice to meet you)

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