

Agility and Lifelong Learning

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about tools and resources that can help you stay competitive and professionally satisfied in a world filled with continuous change.

Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Case Study: Agility in Life and Business
2. Knowing When to Change
 - a. Upskilling
 - b. Job and Career Changes
 - c. Volunteering
3. Overcoming Your Fears

1. Case Study: Agility in Life and Business

One aspect of your agility skill is anticipating new opportunities, so you can grow personally and professionally. Growth prevents you from falling behind your competitors. But what if those opportunities on the horizon aren't very well-defined? How can you be sure the time is right to go after them?

There are no easy answers when it comes to deciding to try something new. But sometimes life gives us subtle clues to know when we need to change course. Watch this video about Jill, a seasoned lawyer, who had reached a **plateau** in her career. As you watch the video, pay close attention to Jill's motivations for making a change.

Video Transcription

[MUSIC PLAYING] In today's changing world of work, the most successful professionals share one important trait.

If you're not adapting, if we're not changing, then you're failing. And you're falling behind.

If anyone understands the importance of agility, it's Jill Vacchina Dobbs, who leveraged this fundamental skill to get her dream job.

You've got to be willing to take the challenge and to be excited about an opportunity to do something different.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Jill was a successful professional with an enviable job.

I was trained as a lawyer. I had an assistant and a nice office and fancy phones and nice computers.

But something just didn't feel right.

I kept trying to change my work environment, thinking that that's what I needed to do in order to really be satisfied and happy in my job. I worked for a couple of different law firms. And then I worked as an in-house counsel. And then I tried to be a sole practitioner.

But in every new job, Jill felt the same discomfort.

At the end of the day, I realized it was the day-to-day workings of being an attorney that I didn't love. And that's when I really started looking at how would I make an entire career change.

Part of being agile is staying open to new opportunities. And Jill did just that.

While I was a practicing attorney, I joined the board of directors for the Humane Society of Truckee Tahoe. I was involved in the operations of it, as well as fundraising and planning to build a new shelter.

While she was volunteering, the board presented her with the chance to try something different.

I had an opportunity fall in my lap where I could be an executive director of a small nonprofit.

Jill faced a risky decision-- stay in her comfortable job as a lawyer, or pivot to something new and unfamiliar.

I was coming from a very well-established industry, which has the money and the resources to provide you with-- the assistance, the nice materials.

This new opportunity would be a bit less cushy.

It was such a dramatically different environment. I would be working out of one of the board member's barns. It wasn't heated, barely had lighting.

Jill made the choice to be agile-- to embrace a new experience, despite the risk. She took the job and didn't look back.

It was really a challenge in a lot of ways, but I found out that I didn't need the nice office. That didn't bring me job satisfaction. What brought me job satisfaction was the substance of what I actually did on a day-to-day basis. And so for me, the non-profit world was a much better fit.

Jill's risk paid off. And soon she was presented with an opportunity she never would have dreamed of.

When I think about how I was able to make such a significant career change, I have to take it a step back. I grew up having dogs. When I was a kid, we were a very outdoorsy family. We would go exploring down by the river and watch beavers, and go hiking in the hills around my house. I just couldn't imagine living life without an animal.

Jill's experience in the non-profit world brought an opportunity her way that combined her expertise with her passion.

I became the executive director of the SPCA of Northern Nevada. We save lives of homeless pets throughout northern Nevada and beyond. And we help match them with loving humans.

The same agility that led Jill to her dream job served her well in her new role.

When I first joined our organization, there was a huge segment of our community who didn't even know we existed. So I knew we needed to do a lot of work there on community outreach.

Jill wasted no time implementing major change. She and her team built a new website and launched a series of public events and promotions.

My ability to build up resources into new areas is incredibly impactful. And that's all agility. That's all seeing opportunities and responding accordingly.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

One of the things that I think has really benefited the SPCA of Northern Nevada is the fact that we can be agile, that we can change our direction. In sheltering, you cannot have 100% detailed plan and think that's what you're going to just stick with because it doesn't work that way. You need to be so much more agile and so much more flexible with it.

We have just had the best year in our entire history. We had a new adoption record of 2,146 animals, which is hundreds more lives saved than ever before. And we are so proud of that. That means that our process that we have with the public is working because we're making successful matches so these animals stay in loving homes. And that's our ultimate goal.

Exercising her agility skill has helped Jill achieve success across multiple careers. And it can do the same for you.

People often ask me if I feel that I wasted time going to law school and practicing for almost 10 years. And it's anything but that. It was all those varied experiences that have really prepared me for this job. If you fear change, you're not going to be able to really step up and give yourself the opportunity to make the change that you're craving. It takes courage to make a change and to embrace that change.

[MUSIC PLAYING]



THINK ABOUT IT

What life event did Jill recall that helped her decide on her second career?

In the video, Jill recalled fun childhood activities centering around her family dog. The step back in time made her realize how much she loved animals, propelling her in a new professional direction that was right for her.

When it comes to agility, only you can decide when the time is right to make a major life change. As Jill showed us, the decision hinges on your personal wants and needs. You must also consider the needs of those dependent on you, whether it's a spouse, partner, or child.



TERM TO KNOW

Plateau

To be in a state of little or no change, sometimes due to inaction.

2. Knowing When to Change

There's no formula to know when a change at work or home is necessary, but the following indicators might signal that your current situation needs improvement:

- You feel unfulfilled or unsettled.
- Your physical, emotional, or mental health is at risk.
- Your environment isn't safe.
- You tend to dwell on the past.
- You seem jealous of what others have.
- You feel unhappy.
- You can't articulate your life's purpose.
- You wonder if past decisions have derailed your long-term goals.
- Your skills feel outdated in today's competitive job market.

These types of feelings are a call to action so you can stay agile and live your best life possible. What are some of these actions when it comes to the workplace? Let's take a look.

2a. Upskilling

Learning a new skill, or **upskilling**, is a terrific way to stay agile. It can energize you physically and emotionally to try something new and different. People often upskill without changing jobs by taking courses or completing **certificate programs**. Certificate programs are low-cost, non-degree programs that take about three to nine months to complete. They offer specialized education and training that help you apply skills to the job you're in. Most employers also offer internal training for continuous improvement for free. Take this example:



➦ **EXAMPLE** When Paulo and his wife, Yanis, had their second child, Paulo decided to stay home to take care of the children in support of Yanis' career. He temporarily put his career in marketing on hold. After five years, the children had reached school age, and Paulo was ready to reenter the workforce. But the landscape of marketing looked quite different than five years prior. The Internet, smartphones, and 3-D printing had changed how people do business and Paulo didn't feel quite ready for it. Instead of searching for his next job, he turned to an online university to start a certificate program focused on digital marketing. With a skills certificate in hand, Paulo knew it would make for good conversation in any upcoming job interviews.

Upskilling is one aspect of your agility skill that admittedly isn't always easy. You might be juggling commitments at school, work, or home that make skill attainment seem impossible. However, upskilling can lead to opportunities for advancement in your current role. It's a good idea to check with your manager to see which types of added skills might lead to pay increases, reassignment of duties, or even job transfers. Your manager can describe the steps you need to take to find a new trajectory to match your goals.



TERMS TO KNOW

Upskill

To learn new skills.

Certificate Program

Low-cost, non-degreed skills training that typically lasts about three to nine months and has high rates of completion.

2b. Job and Career Changes

In addition to upskilling, many employees who are feeling unfulfilled will often change jobs, alter their careers, or even go into business for themselves. They seek out positions that better match their values, interests, and preferences. Doing research in your field or area of interest often uncovers jobs that you're qualified for and didn't know about. Using your agility skill to make those discoveries can be motivating.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Ellen has been teaching fifth grade for 22 years. While it's difficult to imagine life without her students, she's looking for a change to slow the pace of her busy life now that she's older. Working from the comfort of home sounds appealing. During the spring semester, Ellen did some research online. She discovered that many former teachers work from home in the educational technology sector. They build lesson plans, design curriculum, write test questions, and even tutor students through live chat. As a teacher, Ellen certainly knew about educational technology, but what she didn't realize was the vast number of institutions looking for talent and the variety of positions that were available.



REFLECT

Think about a dream job that you'd like to have. What skills does it require? What would it take for you to achieve that job? Do some research if you'd like.

If you're looking to change jobs or careers, start with a few small steps. Look through an online job board or professional networking sites such as LinkedIn to see what types of jobs are out there and the skills they require. Contact people in your network who might know other people who can help. Set up informational interviews with people who do the type of work that you desire to do. These first few steps are often the hardest, but they can also be the most motivating.

Keep in mind that finding a job that suits your values, interests, and preferences could mean you have to make sacrifices in other areas. This is called a **trade-off decision**. Maybe the job you're pursuing pays less or has fewer benefits. Perhaps it will require you to relocate to a different city. (You'll learn how to navigate such decisions in an upcoming lesson.) In many cases, the joy and fulfillment that a person feels by aligning with a career they're passionate about often outweighs the perceived trade-offs.



TERM TO KNOW

Trade-off Decision

Choosing one option as more important than another.

2c. Volunteering

A person does not always need to look to their employer or an academic institution to attain new skills or explore new interests. Volunteering is a great way to show your agility and take part in causes you're passionate about while also giving back to the community. Along the way, you'll meet people, learn new skills, and improve the quality of life for you and others. **Volunteering** allows you to experiment with a new interest without rearranging the core makeup of your life, and it even helps to bolster your **resume**. A volunteer's hours are often flexible which gives you options around the clock—days, nights, or weekends. Most cities list volunteer opportunities directly on their websites. Many employers offer paid volunteer days and usually have direct connections to organizations in need. Additionally, faith organizations participate in volunteer work that centers around social issues like hunger and food insecurity. You can start by researching a cause that's important to you and reach out to organizations directly through their websites.

If volunteering seems too structured for your life right now, consider starting a hobby to explore what you love. When you can complement your daily work routine with stress-releasing activities, like hobbies and volunteerism, it can lead to happiness and fulfillment.



TERMS TO KNOW

Volunteering

Offering and performing a service for free.

Resume

A formal document used to apply for jobs that includes your academic training, work experience, and skills.

3. Overcoming Your Fears

It's energizing to be able to upskill, change jobs, or volunteer, but it can also be stressful or even frightening for some people. Agility does not come easily for everyone. At times, we get so comfortable in our daily routines that we don't see a way out, and we become unable to make decisions. Consider this example:



➦ **EXAMPLE** Rheana is a graphic designer who specializes in website design. She works alongside Dimitri who is responsible for coding and computer programming. During team innovation meetings, Dimitri has noticed that Rheana frequently complains about the work she's doing. She tends to criticize people and processes, especially when new ideas get presented that don't align with hers. She just seems altogether unhappy with work. One day, Dimitri said to Rheana, "You don't seem yourself lately, is there anything you'd like to talk about?" Rheana hesitated at first, but then confided in Dimitri that graphic design just didn't feel like her life's calling. She described feelings of unfulfillment. It was a difficult and emotional conversation for both of them, but by the end, Rheana knew in her heart that it was high time for a change.



THINK ABOUT IT

If you were Rheana, what steps might you take to achieve fulfillment at work?

Rheana recognized that working in graphic design wasn't what she longed to do and it was affecting her professional relationships. In this situation, upskilling might not be enough. It's likely that she will need to look into making a career change for her physical and mental well-being. Rheana can get started by comparing

jobs with parallel skills, exploring job boards, networking, and surveying her interests. She might even choose to start slowly by volunteering in a field she's passionate about.

Like Rheana, everyone experiences the need to break free from a comfortable routine at some point in their life. In most cases, you can trust your instincts, ask for help from family and friends, or turn to a trusted mentor or advisor. In extreme cases when your health or safety is at risk, it's best to look to professional therapists, counselors, and physicians for help.

In closing, remember that more people today are competing for fewer jobs. This means that speed and flexibility in response to change are critical. By taking inventory of your employment situation and applying learned skills in agility, you'll establish your unique place in the world of work.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about tools and resources that can help you stay competitive and professionally satisfied during times of change. You saw the importance of **agility in both life and business** through a **case study** that delved into one person's experience with a career change. A difficult aspect of your agility skill is **knowing when to change**. We tend to seek new pathways when we feel unfulfilled or unsettled, or we've plateaued. In these times, there are several ways you can make a professional shift through **upskilling, job and career changes, or volunteering**. Each method can be mentally and emotionally invigorating and improve your quality of life. But these decisions don't come easily, so **overcoming your fears** of uncertainty is commonly an important first step.



TERMS TO KNOW

Certificate Program

Low-cost, non-degreed skills training that typically lasts about 3 to 9 months and has high rates of completion.

Plateau

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Resume

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Trade-off Decision

Choosing one option as more important than another.

Upskill

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Offering and performing a service for free.