

GET THE JOB

Handling Career Regret

Turn Your Missteps Into Motivation for the Future

At some point, nearly every professional looks back and wonders, “What if I’d chosen a different path?”

Whether it’s a job you didn’t take, a degree you didn’t finish or a career choice that didn’t work out as planned, feelings of regret are a normal part of professional life.

The key is not to dwell on what could have been, but to use those experiences to inform better decisions and move forward with purpose.

ACKNOWLEDGE THE FEELING

The first step in addressing career regret is acknowledging it without judgment. Regret often stems from a sense of lost potential, missed opportunity or unmet expectations.

Rather than ignoring the feeling, reflect on what specifically is bothering you. Are you unhappy with your industry, your role or your lack of advancement? Do you feel you’ve outgrown your current path, or did you take a job that was never a good fit?

Once you understand the root of your regret, you can begin to separate emotional reaction from practical insight. Self-reflection helps you spot patterns, recognize your values and clarify what you truly want out of your career.



© ADOBE STOCK

REFRAME REGRET AS A LEARNING TOOL

Regret doesn’t have to be a dead end. In fact, it can be one of the most powerful motivators for change. Instead of focusing on what didn’t happen, ask yourself what you’ve learned. Even decisions that didn’t turn out as hoped often

bring valuable experience, resilience and clarity.

If your regret points to a path not taken, consider how you can still pursue that interest, whether through a side project, additional training or a complete career pivot.

It’s never too late to make a change. Career timelines are increasingly flexible, and many

professionals successfully shift gears well into their 30s, 40s or beyond.

Taking small, concrete steps toward a more fulfilling career can help ease feelings of regret. That might mean setting new goals, exploring a different role within your field or investing in a skill you’ve always wanted to develop.

Every positive step forward can give your career renewed energy and direction.

Regret is a natural part of growth, not a sign of failure. By learning from the past and using it to guide your future, you can turn career missteps into motivation and build a path that feels more aligned with who you are today.