

BEST LIFE

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The 10 Greatest Career Moves Of All Time

From life altering to Lilliputian, pesky decisions swarm us daily, like mozzies in the Okavango. Most of us just slap at them with the haphazard petulance of a zebra's tail. Some know better. Especially when it comes to bailing out of a stalling career. Here are the men to really meditate on when you reach your next occupational hazard; they are the ones who made the modern world's greatest career moves.

10 | David Bowie

The challenge: Born David Jones, he had been playing saxophone in an R&B outfit called Davey Jones & the Lower Third. But in 1966, another Davy Jones turned up... and he was in the big leagues as lead singer of The Monkees.

Move: He changed his last name to Bowie, traded the sax for a guitar, and dabbled with Buddhism and avant-garde theatre. In 1969, he scored a major (Tom) smash with the song "Space Oddity".

Lesson: Sometimes, the very things that got you where you are can be the same things that will prevent you from going to the next level. "You need to adapt to change, keep experimenting and don't let the small things prevent you from building an extraordinary career," says executive coach Rachele Canter, author of *Make the Right Career Move* (R103, available at kalahari.net).

9 | Elon Musk

The challenge: South African Elon Musk's company PayPal hit the mother lode through providing secure online electronic payments, an essential service for nervous Internet shoppers. Rather than retire to an island to count his cash, Musk turned his attention to two seemingly impossible goals thought of as perfect ways to go from a dot.com billionaire to a dot.com millionaire: turning humanity into a space-travelling civilization with affordable rockets and weaning us off petrol and onto electric cars.

Move: Ignored critics and doubters and is on a roll. Musk's SpaceX rockets are revolutionarily cheaper, more advanced and are fast gaining ground on the established competition. The US Defense Department is a client. Musk's 200km/h electric sports cars, Tesla Roadsters, are selling like hot cakes and the first dealership recently opened in Hollywood. Oil prices have shot through the roof and hybrids are a temporary measure.

Lesson: Think big and believe in the future. "There are often loopholes that yield creative solutions to problems," says Karen Danziger, managing partner at the Howard-Sloan-Koller Group in New York. "Finding the creative way to have a win-win brings respect and admiration."

8 | Charles Bukowski

The challenge: A Skid Row regular who bedded fellow barflies and brawled like a sailor, Bukowski was celebrated for his writing about life lived at the bottom of a bottle. After decades of debauchery, the plot was wearing thin. The acclaim wouldn't stop his lifestyle from killing him.

Move: Relocated to a working-class suburb in California. Didn't sober up completely (it would take a round of chemotherapy a decade later to do that), but managed to keep his life together and a BMW in

the garage. Now a literary lion, he befriended Sean Penn, Madonna and Norman Mailer. Married – and stayed married to – his second wife, Linda, and enjoyed his success with only a fraction of the earlier chaos.

Lesson: “Life is a series of choices,” says Canter, “and you can always make a different choice today.”

7 | Ralph Lauren

The challenge: Having moved from tie salesman to \$10-million-a-year fashion phenomenon, Lauren (whose family changed its name from Lifschitz when he was 16) was good at designing clothes, but manufacturing costs were out of control, and Polo was going broke in the early Seventies.

Move: Farmed out production and marketing on everything but his men’s line; plowed his life savings into the plan. Within a decade, he was doing \$1-billion of business a year.

Lesson: Assessing your strengths with steely objectivity and then concentrating your efforts “is one of the least applied concepts in the corporate world,” says career coach Bill Pullen. “My motto is ‘Do what you do best and find people to help with the rest.’”

6 | Matt Groening

The challenge: Everybody was reading Groening’s weekly comic *Life in Hell*, which featured a cast of existential rabbits and a pair of gay twins named Jeff and Akbar. But in Hollywood, the money he was making seemed like a pittance.

Move: Producer James Brooks asked him to pitch animated shorts for *The Tracey Ullman Show*, but Groening didn’t want to give up the rights to his franchise. So, on the spot, Groening sketched out five scrappy characters based on him and his family. He sold Brooks on the now famous *Simpsons* instead of the rabbits.

Lesson: Just because the idea came to you in two minutes doesn’t mean it’s not genius. “Intuition is our sixth sense and it is the most underused in the human experience, especially in the professional and business world,” says Pullen.

5 | Frank Sinatra

The challenge: In the early Fifties, Sinatra was a has been crooner, being forced by producer Mitch Miller to sing – and woot – novelty tunes such as “Mama Will Bark”. In 1952, Columbia Records dumped its former golden boy.

Move: Sinatra decided it was time to grow up out of his bobby-sox image. He took a challenging role in *From Here to Eternity* and won an Oscar. He parlayed that into a deal with Capitol Records, demanding that he be paired with adventurous arrangers such as Nelson Riddle, and recorded dark brooding records such as “Only the Lonely”. It’s the greatest comeback in pop culture history.

Lesson: The Chairman of the Board has taught us so much that we won’t even try to sum up his vast reserves of wisdom. We’ll just note that he reveled in the spoils of his move. Years later, he reportedly ran into Miller in a hotel. Miller approached, his hand extended, and Sinatra blew him off: “F--k you! Keep walking!”

4 | King Camp Gillette

The challenge: As a worker drone in a bottle-stopper outfit, young Gillette was looking for a way to echo the success of his employer. He, too, wanted to profit from the rapid move toward disposability.

Move: When his straight razor went dull, Gillette had his great vision. Instead of charging a fortune for high-quality straight razors, he’d make cheap blades that could be thrown out. He sold the shave, not

just the razor, inventing a new business model.

Lesson: “He looked for the most meaningful lesson in his past experience: disposability,” says wellness coach Jordan Ciabrone. “You have to put in the time and do the research, then the connections are made and the revelations come.”

3 | Eric Schmidt

The challenge: A programming prodigy, Schmidt was a chief architect of Java at Sun Microsystems and later rose to CEO of Novell. But by the end of the Nineties, Novell was being left in the dust by Microsoft. When the company was bought out, Schmidt headed to Google.

Move: Forty-something Schmidt let his then girlfriend drag him to the Burning Man Festival. He hated it and left early. When he later interviewed to be CEO of Google, founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page hired him... because he was the only candidate who had been to the desert free-for-all. Thanks to one hot, dusty date, he’s now a billionaire.

Lesson: “You have to be willing to take the risk to present something that makes you unique and different,” says executive coach Joel Garfinkle. “If you stand out, you create opportunities for yourself.”

2 | Justin Timberlake

The challenge: In 2002, ‘NSync’s sales were slipping, manager Lou Pearlman was taking most of the group’s money and Timberlake’s dim but- doable girlfriend Britney Spears was said to be cheating.

Move: He dumped all three, scored a triple platinum hit with “Justified” and later hooked up with both Cameron Diaz and Jessica Biel.

Lesson: “The company you keep can hinder or help your potential for success,” says Tory Johnson, CEO of a recruitment services firm. “Align yourself with people who lift you up: those who are smarter, savvier and wiser than you are.”

1 | Koos Bekker

The challenge: With the best of the UK and US programming, apartheid-era, SABC-generated viewing wasn’t as bad as we might remember. The problem was competition. There was none. Opportunities had to open up, the regime would change, people needed choice and entertainment, and Koos Bekker knew it. **Move:** After studying literature and law in SA and working in advertising, Bekker did an MBA at New York’s Columbia University focusing on pay-television, a concept that had just taken off in the US. Recognizing the potential for South Africa, he brought the idea back and formed M-Net with Naspers. With fresh sport, controversial doccies and new films scheduled around the clock, M-Net boomed and eventually became MultiChoice. Bekker is now MD of Naspers and one of SA’s top businessmen. **Lesson:** Performance consultant Neil Tuck says Bekker saw the power in a team whose excellence and diversity resulted in a collective output far greater than that of any one individual. Bekker says, “Entrepreneurs often know most new ventures fail, but they want to prove the exception. One of the lessons I learnt was to build a competent team around you: you don’t need more mavericks like you, rather as diverse a set of people as possible, to compensate for each other’s weaknesses.”

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