Swinging Through Your Career

Idea In Short

A consulting partner once offered career advice built on a simple image: swing like Tarzan, never releasing one vine before securing the next. Pivoting one variable at a time, industry or function, not both simultaneously, turns a scary leap into a manageable, plannable sequence of moves.

A Common Dilemma

Staying on the same project or in the same specialty for too long creates a familiar tension for consultants and ambitious professionals alike: stick with proven strength, or stretch toward something new, more interesting, but genuinely riskier. A veteran consulting partner once framed the answer around a memorable image: swing like Tarzan through the jungle canopy, never letting go of one vine until the next is firmly in hand.1

Don't Release One Vine Without the Next

The advice applies as cleanly to careers as it does to trapeze artists: nobody enjoys falling.2 Securing the next project, role or opportunity before formally letting go of the current one removes unnecessary risk from a transition that carries enough uncertainty already. The same logic shows up in popular career-change guidance, which often recommends building meaningful income from a new venture before fully stepping away from the security of an existing job.

Pivot One Variable at a Time

Attempting to switch industry and function simultaneously multiplies risk in a way that is easy to underestimate going in. A more reliable path changes one variable at a time: someone on a telecom cost-reduction engagement who wants to move into financial services strategy is better served taking an interim step first, financial services cost-

reduction or telecom strategy, rather than attempting both shifts in a single leap.

Plan Two or Three Vines Ahead

Genuine control exists only over the short term, the current move, and the long term, the eventual destination; the middle stretch stays inherently uncertain and resists detailed planning. The practical approach is thinking two or three moves ahead rather than mapping the entire path in advance, doing solid work in the present while staying clear-eyed about the general direction.

Staying Motivated Through Repetition

Doing similar work repeatedly eventually gets boring, and if intellectual curiosity genuinely drives long-term career success, sustaining that curiosity deliberately matters. Making smart, incremental tactical choices toward a larger goal is not selling out; it is simply staying strategic about the pace and sequencing of ambition rather than abandoning it.

Nobody Is Actually Stuck

Career momentum depends heavily on communicating intent clearly: telling a manager directly what is wanted, building relationships across departments and establishing a reputation as someone who contributes, finds new work and makes a visible difference. Organizations generally do not want capable people to stay unhappy, and passive frustration rarely produces the change that a direct conversation and visible initiative can.

Read the Room Before You Leap

Being unnecessarily clever about a transition rarely pays off. Understanding what skills and networks are genuinely useful, then focusing effort there, matters more than an elaborate strategy. If an organization is growing quickly, that momentum is usually worth getting on directly; if it is drifting sideways instead, finding a genuine breakout role within it, or looking elsewhere, deserves serious consideration rather than passive waiting.

Telling the Difference Between Boredom and a Real Signal

Restlessness alone is a poor guide for deciding when to move, since almost any role

eventually produces some boredom once the initial learning curve flattens. A more reliable signal is whether the learning curve has genuinely flattened, whether the work still connects to a clear next step, and whether the discomfort is about the work itself or simply about the natural plateau that follows any period of rapid growth.

Knowing When Not to Swing Yet

Not every moment calls for a pivot, and part of the discipline is recognizing when staying put is genuinely the smarter move. A role still teaching real skills, building a track record or expanding a network deserves patience even when it has stopped feeling novel. The Tarzan metaphor works precisely because it assumes deliberate timing: a vine gets released when the next one is secure and the current one has already served its purpose, not simply because restlessness has set in.

Careers Move in S-Curves

Career progress rarely follows a straight line; it moves in a series of S-curves, periods of rapid growth followed by inevitable plateaus.3 Sustaining forward momentum through those plateaus, doing consistently strong work while staying genuinely open-minded about the next opportunity, is what keeps a career compounding across decades rather than stalling out at the first flat stretch.

- 1Career
- 2Career Management
- 3S-Curve

Summary

Careers move in S-curves, not straight lines. Swing like Tarzan: never release one vine before securing the next, pivot one variable at a time rather than jumping blind, and think two or three moves ahead while controlling only what's directly in front of you.