

Career makeover: Logician plans move to nonprofit sector

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By Allison Ellis / Special to NWjobs

After more than 30 years in materials management for large-scale manufacturing companies in the Seattle area, Michael Bury is ready to look beyond finding the lowest price and use his experience to pivot his career toward a higher purpose: nonprofit administration.

This desire springs from experiences Bury has had while discovering fulfilling new pursuits: photography, mission trips through his church and a volunteer role with World Concern, in which he was part of a media team taking photos and video to document the work the organization is doing in Southeast Asia.

"As I get closer to retirement age, I've realized that I can't stop working," says Bury, 54. "What I'm most excited about is not just doing something different, but engaging in the kind of work that benefits others."

To get help in laying the groundwork for a major career change in the next six months to a year, Bury participated in NWjobs' career-makeover series, meeting with three local experts: List Quast of [Career Woman, Inc.](#); Seia Milin, a human resources professional; and career coach [Kathryn Crawford Saxer](#).

"Many people wrongly assume it will be easy to obtain a job working for a nonprofit," says Quast. "Such organizations often require previous nonprofit experience and/or completion of a nonprofit management certificate program, and competition for these jobs can be fierce."

Bury's current résumé highlights his proven track record as a detail-oriented manager with in-depth knowledge of supply-chain management, purchasing and logistics.

"As an HR professional, if I had an open position in manufacturing, I would pick up the phone and call him immediately," says Milin.

But since Bury wants to leave that sector, what's the best way for him to combine his creative passions and managerial skills in a nonprofit role?

As a first step, Milin suggested that Bury highlight his volunteer work on his résumé. He should add "a quick executive summary demonstrating how his manufacturing and photography skills can help drive the efficiency and marketing of an organization," she says.

In terms of his job search, Saxer recommended that Bury educate himself on roles that might interest him by perusing job boards and familiarizing himself with job titles, as well as the lingo the nonprofit world uses for desired skills and experience.

Next, Bury should start talking to people about what he wants to do. "These conversations stir luck into the mix," says Saxer.

Saxer shared with Bury a metaphor that she often uses with clients: "Imagine being invited to a classy garden party. If that garden party is a metaphor for the nonprofit that Mike wants to be a part of, he can dutifully ring the front doorbell [and apply for a job]. Or he can call a friend who is already at the party and ask to be let in via the side gate."

Saxer also asked Bury to come up with a list of 10 people who are affiliated with the nonprofit sector in some way. These could be co-workers, old friends, people from church or parents of his children's friends. Using LinkedIn, he can identify and start conversations with more-distant contacts at the organizations he's most interested in.

Quast suggested that Bury think specifically about the type of work he would like to do. Which organizations fit his values, purpose in life, hobbies or goals? "Through informational meetings, he can find out what is necessary to be successful," and learn which qualifications he will need, she says.



After a long career in materials management in the manufacturing sector, Michael Bury is laying the groundwork to work for a nonprofit. (Michelle Archer / NWjobs)

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Quast also advised paying attention to internal emotional signals. "Do some of the job requirements make you feel excited or make your stomach twist into knots? Analyze those feelings," she says.

All three experts recommended continued volunteering as the best way to get his foot in the door. "Go from the bottom up," says Milin. Many organizations hire from within their volunteer pool, and may not post their best jobs. "If you are good at what you do, you'll stand out," she says.

After meeting with the experts, Bury realizes that while his current résumé format has worked for him for many years, he now needs to revise it to each specific job description. He'll be updating his LinkedIn profile, too.

On the networking side, Bury notes that many of the recommended strategies are paralleling his daughter's. "She just graduated from college and is looking for her first job," he says. "All of this is very relatable to her as well."

Bury is most excited about the potential for translating his logistics experience into the nonprofit field.

"Organizations such as the Red Cross stage supplies and materials at various locations," he says. "That's logistics — getting stuff there and getting it cycled. This is what I know how to do."

