

# Tips on moving from Academia to Industry

I was an academic early in my career and I have been working in industry for a decade. Many things I do in a corporate environment often remind me about the academic life. I read a lot industrial development articles (sometimes research papers), mentor people on career development (sometimes graduate students), experiment with different techniques on real data (sometimes toy data sets), write proposals for business clients (no more research grants), and write presentations (not for teaching students in classes).

I hope some of my experience can help you to avoid pitfalls and have a smooth transition.

## Be prepared. It is tough

I believe there are no easy transitions in general starting early on in life. I still remember when the childcare nurses explained to me how to ease the transition for babies from the infant room to the toddler room. Moving from academia to industry is not easy, and it can be much harder than changing fields. The longer you stay in academia, the harder it gets when you move. It is a lifestyle change as well and it can cause discomfort. It could take much longer than you expect, and you may face some culture shock. So, you should be prepared and tell yourself it will be tough.

## Try it out before moving

While you are still working on campus, whether you are doing research, teaching, or both, you should try to get involved with industry work. You should seek opportunities to work on research projects using real data from industry partners to solve real industrial problems. The problem and data could be small or narrowly defined, but it will still provide you with the chance to learn the business logic and understand the industry. Sometimes you will get a chance to work in or visit the company onsite and engage with people in the industry directly. If your focus is on teaching, try to be part of the industry-based learning, teaching, and curriculum development. In both scenarios, you will get connected with people working in industry and exposed to real industrial business cases. In my experience, these are very valuable experiences and they will help you to make the decision about whether you really want to move or not.

## Prepare your CV in industry style and remove your publications

After a few rounds of job searching, you will have collected a list of job openings you are interested in. Before you click 'upload' to submit your CV, please check if your CV is more than two pages long, or if it contains a page of all your publications. I completely understand your feeling when I ask to throw away the publications and grants you have accomplished. I still remember at one time I felt that was the only concrete thing on my CV other than the degrees. Remove them! Change them into a summary of your academic accomplishment that you have published many prestigious journal papers. I do have a copy of my academic CV as

souvenir though. What you should do is to transfer what you have done in research, projects, and teaching into a list of skills that the industry employers desire. For example, highlight your team work, time management, presentation, analytics, communication skills. Include your specialized skills only if they are relevant.

### Get on LinkedIn, attend meetups and speak to recruiters

Applying for an online job opening is not enough to achieve your goal of moving from academia to industry. The response rate can be very low even if you apply aggressively to many jobs. If you are one of the stereotype introverts who doesn't really want to talk to people much in person or in social gathering, do take the advantage of professional social platforms like LinkedIn, publish your knowledge and share your skills, and you will get noticed by your future employer. If you are open to social events, there are many meetups you can attend where you can build connections with people in person. Don't forget to talk to recruiters as well. They could help you to get into a targeted market you haven't considered.

### Find a mentor or someone who has done this before

It is not easy to find a mentor who has done the transition, but you should try to find someone who has done the transition before and seek advice. Even if the person doesn't work in the same field as you, their experience still will be very relevant and helpful. When some comments you received from a failed interview have made you feel down or confused, you can ask for feedback from the person to validate if what you are doing is on the right track. Your mistake could be a common one everyone makes while they are trying to make the jump. If you can find a person from your own field, especially someone you already know and trust they may be able to help with strategies specific for your situation.

### Pick a company with R&D for an easy transition

There are many different types of companies in your industry, ranging from consulting, to corporate, to start-up. In my experience, joining a company's R&D could lead you on a smoother transition compared to jumping directly to consulting or business corporate. Although many R&D organisations do much more Development than Research, the R&D departments still operate in an academic-like style business environment which is much less formal than corporate. You can avoid big culture shocks and often find people just like you who transferred from academia to industry.

### Choose a boss, maybe not a perfect position description

Suppose there are two similar opportunities in front of you: one offers a position description that is not perfect for your dream, but close enough to what you want to do, but you feel that the boss to be will appreciate your skills and see your potential; the other position comes with a perfect description but you don't really feel the vibe from the future boss. I suggest that you pick the boss who can understand and see the value in you. The change from academia to industry is more in the way of working, thinking and style than the actual tasks you will do. You may find that jobs in industry are not as narrowly and strictly defined as the projects and tasks you were doing in academia, and there will be a lot of flexibility to grow and change. Most importantly, a good boss will give you the space to explore.

Give it a go with enough time, and learn from it

Congratulations! You locked in an opportunity and you are ready to move from academia to industry. I will not be surprised to hear some of you finding it too hard to adjust or that it is not intellectually challenging enough for you. Whatever your feelings are, please don't jump to the conclusion too quickly. Your first industry job will give you a baseline to analyse the pros & cons, and the next transition will be much easier.

## Is Data Science a field conducive to leaping to industry quickly?

This topic could become an article by itself. The number of data scientist jobs is growing fast, and the Ph.D. degree has been highly recognized on the candidate requirements, which certainly makes many people leaving academia believe they are more competitive than other candidates. However, it could be misleading as well, as a Ph.D. degree is not the most important thing in the selection criteria and there are more candidates applying as well. If you are interested in business, coding, data, problem solving, and learning new things constantly, you could make a great Data Scientist. There are a lot of materials, courses, competitions, and open source projects, and there are plenty of opportunities if you are willing to make the investment. Just don't assume that, because you have a Ph.D., you are automatically better than anyone else.

All the tips are purely based on my own experience and may not apply to your circumstances, but hopefully you will find something useful. I wish you a smooth transition.