

The C word has sent the world into meltdown and the economy into free fall. But what about the other C word: your career? Five months ago, we'd never heard the word "furlough", but now more than 4 million Brits have been furloughed and 1.5 million of us have applied for Universal Credit. But even if you're still working, albeit from home, you might be wondering what your job will look like on the other side - or you might be so sick of your daily grind, you just want to plan an escape.

"Although there's a lot of anxiety and uncertainty at the moment, it's also a unique opportunity for people to take stock of their career and re-evaluate what they want their working life to look like," says Emma-Louise O'Brien, head of career coaching at Renovo. "There's not a single industry that won't be affected by the coronavirus pandemic - for good or bad - so a lot of my clients are looking at their core strengths and skills and thinking about how they can make the most of this time and adapt accordingly."

THE FURLOUGHED

If you've been furloughed, you'll have a lot more time on your (over-washed) hands. "So, you could try volunteering," says Emma-Louise. "Many volunteer jobs can be done from home, or there are exceptions to the stay-at-home guidelines for those providing care to vulnerable people. Get in touch with charities or look for schemes such as the Trussell Trust food bank network (Trusselltrust.org), while Reach Volunteering (Reachvolunteering.org.uk) matches professionals with opportunities that suit their skill sets." And it's not just warm and fuzzies you'll get in return. "This is a great way to show employers that you're adaptable and self-motivated," says Emma-Louise. "Also, you never know who you might meet, what new skills you'll pick up or what opportunities might come from it."

THE JOB-SEEKER

With many companies on a recruitment freeze, you might think there's no point looking for a job right now - but this is the time to lay some groundwork. "This is a good opportunity to reconnect with old colleagues and form new connections," says careers coach Alice Stapleton. "So jump on a Zoom call or have a catch-up on the phone. Although companies may not be hiring at the moment, you can start to develop these relationships and plant the seed for when an opportunity does come along." Get your LinkedIn and CV in shape, your social media sounding pro and a website up and running. "Engage with the community in your chosen field. Can you comment on people's pages or write a blog for Medium.com about your industry?" says Alice. "And we could all do with brushing up on our digital skills. Tap into free courses, such as coding with Code Avengers (Codeavengers.com) or learn the difference between SEO and SEM with a course from Google's Digital Garage (Learndigital.withgoogle.com)." Plus check out the government's free online learning platform at Theskillstoolkit.campaign.gov.uk to improve your digital skills.

THE CAREER-CHANGER

If you've been thinking of making a career pivot or going freelance, this natural break from the norm could be a good time to make the switch. "I'm coaching a lot of clients through career changes at the moment," says Victoria McLean, founder of City CV. "Either they're not sure they'll have a job to go back to after this, or it's the shove they were waiting for. The first step is to ask yourself: 'What do I want from life? What gets me out of bed in the morning?' Write down these core values. Then make a list of your strengths - generally, people are happier doing something they enjoy and are good at. You also need to look at your roadblocks - what's stopping you? This could be practical (not enough money, childcare) or emotional (lacking confidence). Talk these through with someone you trust and see whether any can be overcome. Now you should be able to see more clearly what kind of role, industry and company might be best for you. If you need to re-train to make your dream job a reality, FutureLearn has lots of free online courses, from cyber security to becoming a nutritionist (Futurelearn.com)."

THE HOME-SCHOOLER

Of course, you might have already had a career change - suddenly becoming a teacher at the Corona Academy For The Home-Schooled. "Having kids learning at home can be a real inspiration to brush-up on some skills yourself," says Victoria. "My kids are loving the free language app Duolingo, and I've been refreshing my French with them. Learning a language is a great skill to add to your CV, and studies show it helps with decision-making, multitasking and problem-solving, which are all useful skills." This might also be a chance to reconnect with your more creative side, whether it's colouring books, creative writing or, er, egg-box caterpillars. "Studies have found that exercising your artistic muscles can improve memory and cognitive function," says Emma-Louise. "And, who knows, you might discover a passion or a talent you didn't know you had!"

'It's a unique time to think about what you really want'

THE ENTREPRENEUR

If being at home has given you a lightbulb moment about a gap in the market, or if you're one of the 56% of women who dream of starting their own business, listen up.* "Use this time to research and understand what's already out there and be really clear about what you're offering potential customers," says Victoria. "What benefits do you bring? What problems will you solve for them? Startups UK is a great first port of call, with free advice on writing a business plan and finding an accountant (Startups.co.uk)." But maybe don't give up the day job just yet. "Portfolio careers [those earning money from more than one job] were already on the rise before Covid-19 and I think we'll see a lot more of them," says Emma-Louise. "Think about whether you can use your existing skills as a consultant or on a freelance basis, and then bolt on a side line. That way you have a financial stream while you build up the new business." There are some great podcasts out there to keep you motivated, such as *Girlboss Radio* With Sophia Amoruso and Emma Gannon's *Ctrl Alt Delete*. "One of my favourites is *Work Like A Woman* by Mary Portas because she looks at how you can put kindness at the core of a business," says Victoria. And that's definitely something we'll all need post-Covid. **F**