

TD as a Second (or Third) Career

2023



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Contents

- 2 Introduction
- 6 Talent Development as a Second (or Third) Career
- 8 Conclusion
- 9 About the Author and Contributors

Survey Overview

Target Survey Population

The target population for this research was talent development professionals across different organizations and industries. Surveys were completed by 497 talent development professionals.

Survey Instrument

This report is based on a sub-section of a survey about salary, benefits, and skills. The entire survey was composed of 65 questions, including those related to the demographics of the respondents. For this report, we focused on seven questions from the survey.

Procedure

ATD Research distributed a link to an online survey to the target population in May and June 2023. The survey closed in June 2023.

Introduction

When AARP conducted a study of people over the age of 35, it found that workers make their first career change at the mean age of 31; a quarter of the population changed careers a second time at the average age of 36.¹ “While a third (15 percent) and fourth (6 percent) career change are less common,” the study went on to say, “many people nevertheless continue to learn new skills or hone existing ones, either for career advancement or change.”

ATD members are constantly sharing stories about how they found a career they enjoy in the talent development field, even if that’s not where they started out. ATD Research wanted to dig deeper into this idea of professionals who start in one career and then transition into talent development as a different career.

As organizations understand the importance of training and developing their staff, the TD field will continue to grow. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), employment opportunities for training and development specialists are projected to grow 8 percent between 2021 and 2031.² This is faster than the average for all occupations (estimated to be 5 percent growth). As a result, the BLS is projecting approximately 36,500 openings each year, including those to replace employees that leave the field or retire. Training and development managers have a similar outlook. The projected 7 percent growth from 2021 to 2031 translates to approximately 3,700 openings each year.³

With these growth projections in mind, ATD Research determined that it was necessary to understand how people become talent development professionals.

About the Participants

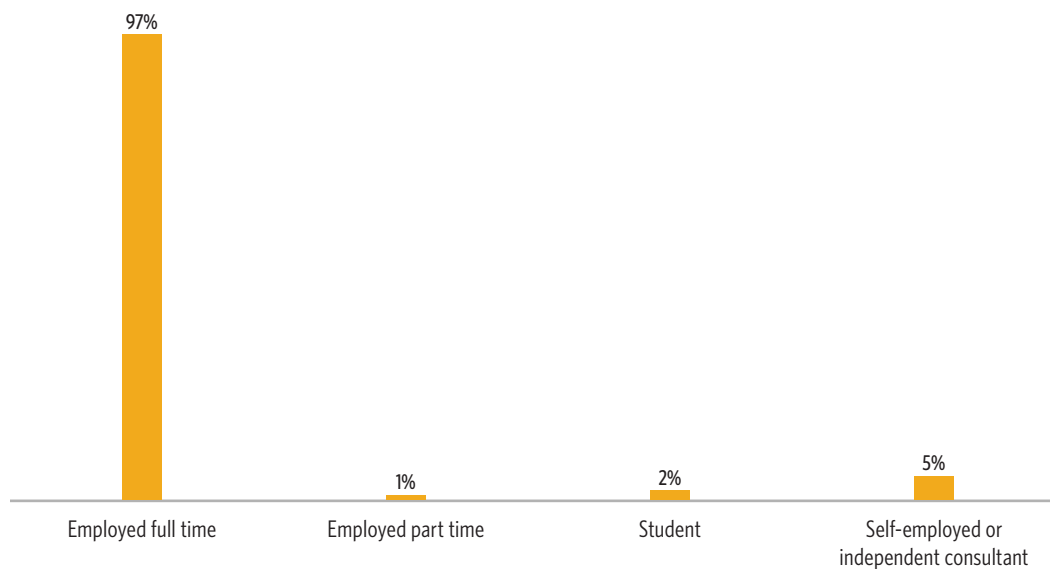
ATD Research surveyed 497 talent development professionals. All participants lived in the United States and two-thirds were ATD members.

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- 1 R. Alwin and L. Choi-Allum, “Career Changes Are Becoming More Common With Increased Longevity,” AARP, April 23, 2020, aarp.org/pri/topics/work-finances-retirement/employers-workforce/adults-career-journeys.html.
 - 2 Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Occupational Outlook Handbook, Training and Development Specialists,” US Department of Labor, November 16, 2022, www.bls.gov/ooh/business-and-financial/training-and-development-specialists.htm.
 - 3 Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Occupational Outlook Handbook, Training and Development Managers,” US Department of Labor, September 8, 2022, www.bls.gov/ooh/management/training-and-development-managers.htm.

To get an understanding of professionals in the talent development field, participants were asked about all their jobs. This means that respondents could select more than one job type. Ninety-seven percent of participants were employed full time, 5 percent were self-employed or independent consultants, 2 percent were students, and less than 1 percent worked part time (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
97% of Respondents Worked Full Time

What is your current employment status? (Select all that apply.)

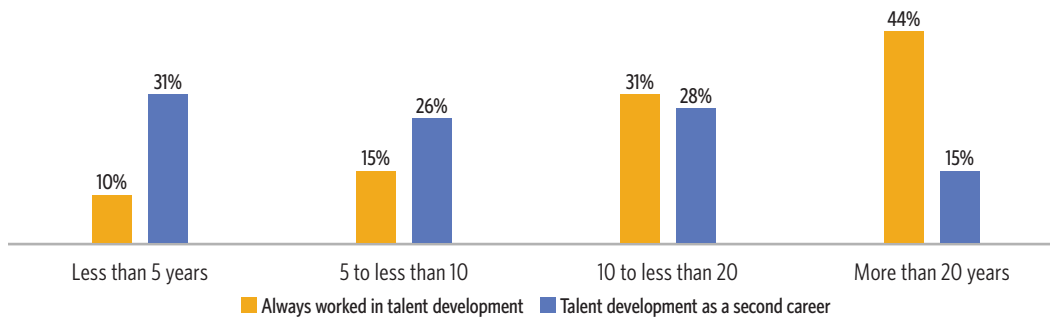


Respondents were also asked how long they had been in the talent development field, including time spent in full-time, part-time, and independent consultant roles. In this study, ATD Research found that people who had always been in talent development had more experience in the field compared with professionals who had entered talent development as their second (or third) career (Figure 2). More than 40 percent of respondents who had always been in the field had more than 20 years of experience; only 10 percent had less than five years' experience. Professionals who transitioned into talent development as a second career were newer—31 percent had been in the field for less than five years and another 26 percent had been in the field between five and less than 10 years.

FIGURE 2

The Majority of Second-Career Professionals Had Been in the Field for Less Than 20 years

How many years of experience do you have in the talent development or training profession?

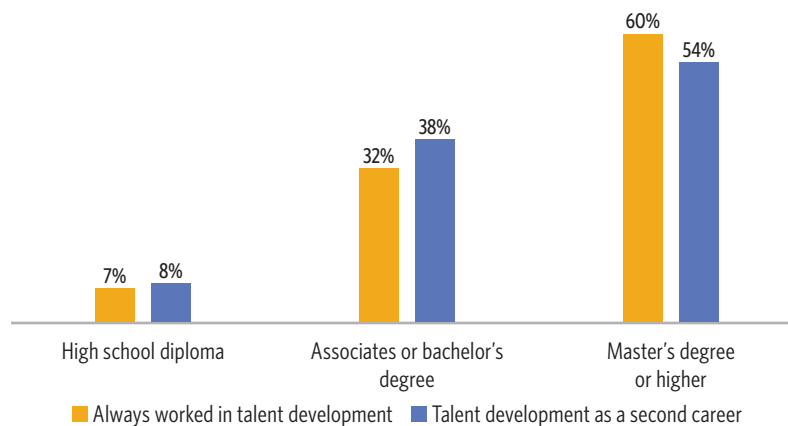


Talent development professionals are a highly educated group, with no statistically significant difference if they started in talent development or another field. Seven percent of professionals who were always in the field and 8 percent of second-career professionals had a high school diploma (Figure 3). Thirty-two percent of people who were always in the field and 38 percent of second-career professionals had an associate degree or a bachelor's degree. Sixty percent of professionals who were always in the field and 54 percent of second-career professionals had a master's degree or higher.

FIGURE 3

Professionals Who Were Always in the Field and Second-Career Professionals Had Similar Educational Backgrounds

What is the highest level of education you have attained?

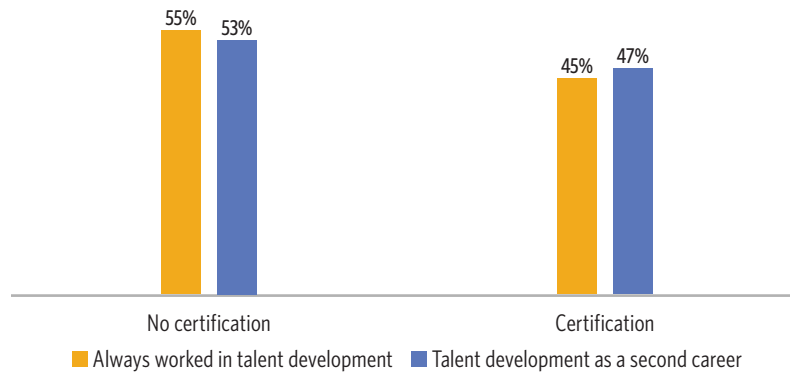


Almost half of TD professionals had a certification; however, there are no statistically significant differences between those professionals who had always been in the field and those second-career professionals (Figure 4). Forty-five percent of professionals who had always been in the field and 47 percent of second-career professionals had a certification. Two common certifications for TD professionals were the Associate Professional in Talent Development (APTD) and the Certified Professional in Talent Development (CPTD).

FIGURE 4

Professionals Who Were Always in the Field and Second-Career Professionals Had Similar Rates of Having a Certification

What professional certifications do you have? (Researcher created a new variable for people who had a certification and those who did not.)



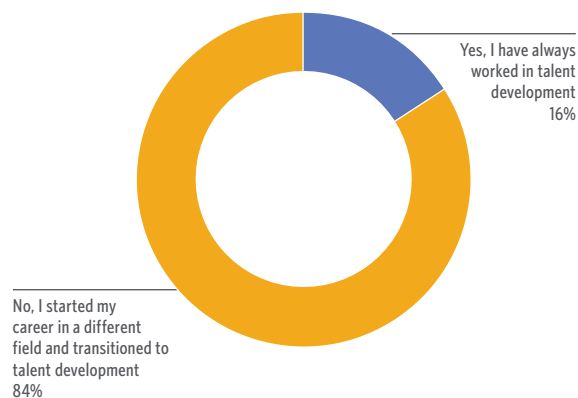
Talent Development as a Second (or Third) Career

ATD Research found that only 16 percent of respondents said they had begun their career in talent development or training (Figure 5). Eighty-four percent said they started their career in a different field before transitioning to talent development.

ATD Research was interested in knowing what fields second-career TD professionals had come from. While respondents noted having a variety of other careers, some were more popular than others. The most common profession was education—more than 80 respondents came from early childhood education, K-12 education, higher-education teaching, and higher-education administration. Sales and sales management was another popular field, with more than 20 respondents saying that was their career prior to entering talent development. Other common careers included call centers and customer care, healthcare, financial services (including accounting and banking), and human resources.

FIGURE 5
84% of Professionals Started in a Field Other Than Talent Development or Training

Since the start of your career, have you always worked in the talent development or training field?



Respondents who indicated that talent development was not their first career were asked to share what prompted the change. The most common answer was that they wanted to make a difference in the lives of others (Figure 6). Another common response was that they didn't know they could work in talent development when they were starting their careers. Some respondents said the field had always interested them. More than 30 percent of respondents said that while they didn't plan to move into talent development, it's where they ended up.

FIGURE 6

Professionals Made the Move Into TD Because They Wanted to Make a Difference in the Lives of Others

Why did you move into the talent development or training field? (Select all that apply.)



Conclusion

With so many professionals entering the talent development profession as a second career, the field is enriched by this group of people with unique backgrounds and the wisdom that comes from working in a different area. Some started off teaching children before shifting their focus to training adults; others moved from being a sales representative to training other sales reps. Those prior experiences are what makes these professionals good at their jobs.

So, now what? What does the talent development field do with this information? We can help recruit new professionals to the field by coaching and mentoring anyone with the potential for talent development.

This data may also provide comfort to those professionals who are thinking about making the switch but are questioning if it's a good idea. Knowing that so many other professionals didn't start in talent development, but have successfully landed here, may make the transition easier.

Finally, as a field, we can continue providing opportunities for professionals to learn more about the industry. We can create training programs that educate professionals on how to transition their skills into a role in the growing talent development field.

About the Author and Contributors

atd The Association for Talent Development (ATD) champions the importance of learning and training by setting standards for the talent development profession. ATD is the largest, most-trusted organization for the professional development of practitioners in training and talent development, serving a worldwide community with members in more than 100 countries. Since ATD was founded in 1943, the talent development field has expanded significantly to meet the needs of global businesses and emerging industries. ATD's mission is to empower professionals to develop talent in the workplace. Learn more at TD.org.

The resources we provide to help talent development professionals increase their impact and effectiveness include our research. ATD's researchers track trends, inform decisions, and connect research to practice and performance. By providing comprehensive data and insightful analyses, ATD's research products, which include research reports, briefs, infographics, and webinars, help business leaders and talent development professionals understand and more effectively respond to today's fast-paced industry.



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