

Karen Carney Top Tips

We asked Karen Carney to share her 'top tips', for how to best transition from professional athlete to retirement and into a second career, including her advice for moving into a role in the corporate world.

1

"Say no to nothing"

I really remember this chat quite vividly, I was still playing at the time in 2017 and I was starting to mix some media work into my off time from playing. I was in the green room before a show and one of the co presenters came to say hello. He was a former professional athlete and we got chatting and he gave me some really good advice.

He said, in your current role as a footballer you may be given opportunities, the key is to "say no to nothing", because all your life you have done one thing. If you say no you may miss out on the opportunity of doing something that you may really enjoy. It is better to try and say actually I don't enjoy it or it isn't for me, rather than being scared and not stepping out of your comfort zone.

I thought this was really good advice so I tried, and still try, to use this now. There are lots of things that didn't work out and they were not right for me. However there have been opportunities where I thought, "oh gosh I am going to hate this" and it actually turned out to be something I loved.

So really try and take up every opportunity that may come into your path, it shows a growth mindset and yes it may be risky but who knows where that path may lead.

2

Get a mentor/support team

You may not have a specific mentor but there could be that someone in your life that takes on that role. It may be difficult to go to friends or family for advice and unbiased advice. Getting a mentor is 100% something I would encourage. They empower your personal development, identify career goals, highlight gaps in generic skills and knowledge that you have. They can increase your confidence. Additionally by having someone to talk to they may see something in you that you or others close to you don't see.

I quite liked having a mentor because they got to know me with a fresh set of eyes so had no pre judgement of what I could or couldn't do. This helped me grow and challenged me because they pushed me and believed I could accomplish things perhaps I didn't know I could.

3

Use down time to rest but still upskill

When you are a professional athlete, training is vital but so is rest and recovery. The key is to be smart with your down time. With the current climate now, and available technology, it is a lot easier and more convenient to do online courses, distant learning, reading, blogging etc. So perhaps when you get in from training and you just want to sit and chill on the sofa, instead can you find ways of using this down time more productively. It doesn't mean you can't be 'off your feet' - the body can still be resting, but keep finding ways to upskill and better yourself.

4

Be confident in your transferable skills

I think this has been the biggest eye opener for me in the corporate world. I often went into meetings thinking, I am not sure where I can add value; or will I have no idea what is going on? However the more I would sit and listen in meetings I realised yes I may still be learning about the business but the basic fundamentals of what I have learned in sport, and particularly football, are transferable. The ability to work in teams, to be adaptable, resilient, hard-working, the list could go on! But they are all skills you require to have made it as a professional athlete.

It's important to know those skills matter in the corporate world, and they are highly desirable. So the areas I felt I was behind in, meant I had the confidence to know I could pick them up to be on the same page as everyone else. I would just think "ok what does the inner athlete tell me I need to do to be successful in this situation" or use past experiences from sport to help me. Of course there is always room for improvement and I know I need to be better, but again I think that is also the inner athlete in me.

5

Listen to other retired athletes

I was really lucky to work in the media whilst I was still playing because it meant I was able to chat to retired athletes on a regular basis. I always listened to what they had done, where they had failed and triumphed with regards to their own transition out of sport. But more importantly, I would ask "if you knew then what you know now, what would you have done differently?" Which for me was the greatest lesson.

I think it is important to speak to other retired athletes because they give the best advice and if you are open enough to listen it is really helpful. It can help shape your own retirement or prepare you for it before it happens. Personally this was the biggest learning for me and probably the main piece of advice I would give any athlete. Learn from others and take on their advice, after all they have been there and done it.