

How to Change Your Name Without Hurting Your Career

By Kerri Anne Renzulli

Kim K. is now Mrs. West, she says. For the not-so-famous, though, adopting your spouse's name can create confusion in your professional life. Follow these eight strategies to keep your career running smoothly under your new handle.

When you accept the proposal, do you also take the name? Kim Kardashian, or should we say Mrs. West, has. The celebrity revealed her legal name change on Tuesday when she shared a new passport photo on Instagram.

That kind of change can be a bold career move when your name is your livelihood. The same is true for any bride switching names after exchanging vows, though on a much, much smaller scale.

Altering your professional identity can pose a problem if you're established in your career and have built a reputation around your name—something that's more likely as couples marry at a later age. Last year the median age at first marriage was 29 for men, and 26.6 for women, the Census Bureau reports. Plus, those with bachelor's degrees—and therefore better career prospects—are more likely to wed than less educated Americans are, according to the Pew Research Center.

If you plan on adopting a new moniker in both your personal and professional lives, follow these simple steps to make the transition less disruptive at the office.



Money

1. Hedge Your Bets

Think about how costly it would be to cut off your connection to the body of work or marketing that's tied to your maiden name. If that worries you, opt for a more moderate approach. "The easy out is to keep your maiden name at work and in professional contexts, but use your spouse's last name socially," says Danielle Tate, founder of MissNowMrs.com, a site that helps women change their legal name.

Another compromise is to use both surnames, either by making your maiden name your middle name, using both last names, or creating a hyphenated last name. Kim took this approach initially. Shortly after exchanging vows with Kanye, she changed the name on her social media accounts to Kim Kardashian West. And just as Kim has done, you can use both surnames for a brief transition period to help people get used to your new identity before dropping your maiden name.

2. Get Help From Your Company

If you plan on making a complete switch, reach out for advice. "You don't have to figure it out all on your own. You're not the only who has gotten married or changed your name," says Michelle Friedman, a career coach who specializes in women's career advancement.

A good first move is to check in with your HR department, which may have policies in place outlining exactly what changes you need to make to your beneficiary designations, insurance benefits, company email and directory listing, and tax and Social Security forms. Aside from offering help with name-change paperwork, HR may be able to offer advice about managing contacts, as well as insights into how others in your industry have handled the change successfully (ask co-workers too).

3. Don't Make It a Surprise

Give co-workers and clients ample notice about your name change to avoid confusion, especially if contact info such as your email address will be updated. Sandra Green, a U.K.-based executive coach, recommends reaching out a week to ten days before the wedding.

Money

One easy way: Put a small note in your email signature in advance, says Julie Cohen, a Philadelphia career and personal coach. It's an unobtrusive reminder and a good way to get people familiar with the change.

Not everyone in your email contact list needs to know. Run through your list of clients and sort them into groups based on the closeness of your working relationship. Some you'll just need to include in a quick email blast, while others you should talk to directly.

"Obviously you don't want to get on the phone with everyone, but in certain important client relationships this may be good to do," says Friedman.

4. Stay on Top of the Technology

After you've made the switch, set up forwarding on your previous email account, or write an automatic reply that includes your new contact info. This way you don't miss any important messages, and people have a longer grace period to update their contact info and adjust to your new name.

5. Go Back in History

Give former employers and references a heads-up about this change as well. This way if you're applying for a new job, your background check will go smoothly, and you won't run the risk of having people mistakenly deny that you worked for their company.

6. Use This as an Excuse to Network

Send an email to everyone in your work circle. "Whenever someone changes jobs or retires, they send these emails about good news," says Cohen. "Do the same with this."

This also gives you a perfect excuse to remind your network what you're up to. "You always want to remain in contact," says Friedman. "But sometimes it's hard to think of a natural reason for reaching out. This gives you a celebratory excuse."

Money

You could even send this blast twice, says Green. First a few days before the wedding and again after you return from your honeymoon, when the change is in place.

7. Make Yourself Easy to Find

Think about how people locate you and your business. Is it through search, a review website, social media, or all of them? Update all your bios.

When you add your new name on sites like LinkedIn, keep a vestige of your old name. That can help people find you during the transition period. “Include your maiden name on social,” says Cohen. “If people are finding you by search it will serve you best to keep connected to both names.”

If you had a more common name or are making the switch to a more popular surname, adds Tate, having both names online could even help you come up higher in search results.

8. Update Your Memberships

To further help your new name show up high in search results and build up credibility for your new moniker, Friedman recommends having any professional organizations, alumni associations, company or community boards, or other groups you belong to change your name on their membership roles.

If you hold a leadership position or are listed elsewhere on an association website, perhaps for winning an award, request that the name change appear throughout. Ask to have any older content that can easily be altered, such as a post listing you as a guest speaker at a conference, updated too.

Of course, should things not end up “happily ever after,” you can follow the same steps to smoothly insert your maiden name back into your career.