

Do you have a 'job' or a 'career'?

Most of us like to think we have a "career" since the term implies commitment, professionalism and progressive development leading to higher positions of responsibility.



But in these days of frequent business failures, acquisitions, restructuring and diminishing loyalty, the question is – what is a career and how does one 'plan' it? When we're told we're likely to change 'careers' five times or more in our lifetime, is it still valid to think in terms of a path that progresses in a consistent direction?

The answer is yes! Still, it is wise to be flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances and adjust our career plan to take advantage of opportunities when they arise.

How to determine your career path

If you're satisfied you're in the right career you can skip forward to the next section on how to advance and get promoted. But if you have doubts about whether you're on the right road, you'll first need to invest some time to be clear about the direction that's right for you to take.

What jobs will fulfill you? To answer that question, begin by assessing what you do well, what you enjoy doing, and why. Use profiles to build self-awareness of your strengths, attributes, values and motivators. What skills have you acquired and developed? Which ones are your favourites? Which ones are transferable? Ask others who have worked with you to tell you one thing you do very well. Don't rush this step – what you will get out of the process is directly proportional to the effort you put in. Think of yourself as a product. What are the characteristics, features and benefits you bring to the table? What are your priorities?



Fit your career plan to a realistic assessment of your abilities, priorities and potential. Check out the assessments page at www.shorwood.com to see our sample career planning tools!

Work with a coach to keep you focused and positive. We would love to help you get your career on the fast track!

“Companies greatly value people who take the initiative to plan and accomplish their own learning agendas and then apply that learning to make a real difference in business results.”

– Daniel R. Tobin

If you really want to get ahead:

- Do the job you're in now exceptionally well. Be a top performer.
- Volunteer outside your own little niche to get involved in projects.
- Let people know you have the desire to move to another level.

Next define the market – where are the opportunities? What jobs are in great demand? What jobs are likely to disappear? What skills are highly prized? Who are the employers of choice? Where are the best odds for entry and success?

Now you are able to find the best “fit”. What industries, fields, functions are a good fit for the entire you? What role would require your unique set of skills, values and attributes? Pursue your job search. You may have to relinquish some lower priority items, but don't ‘settle’ on the essentials. Stay positive and believe in yourself.

Advancing your Career – getting promoted

Most companies now expect us to take responsibility for ensuring our own development. Since our employer is not likely to map out a career path for us, our challenge is to design our own learning agenda and then find learning resources to enable us to achieve our goals.

How to Design a Learning Agenda

- Understand your company's current and future business goals, and how your current work contributes to achieving those goals. Take a wider perspective than from your narrow functional area.
- Then consider what changes you need to make to improve your own, your team's and your company's results. What skills, knowledge, experience would add the most value? Pay heed to performance feedback from co-workers to help select the highest-leverage development option both for the company and the advancement of your career. Begin by adding value in your current role, but keep in mind also the skills required by the role you aspire to hold. Take steps to hone those skills as well. Build your resume by steadily progressing through professional roles.

How to FULFILL the Learning Agenda you create:

With an ever-increasing array of learning opportunities available, we must select ones that have the highest potential for return on our investment of time and resources.

Opportunities for learning have never been so plentiful! Choices include:

- Training programs offered by your company
- Training programs offered by external organizations
- E-learning
- One-on-one customized learning (coaching)
- Discussion groups/associations
- Books/videos
- Experiential learning – special assignments, projects

Each of these learning resources has advantages and disadvantages depending on your needs, constraints and learning style.

Ironically, with an increasing assortment of learning options available to us, we receive less guidance on how to use these opportunities to advance our careers. It is up to us to find the answers. Help is available from career counselors and coaches, training and development websites, and books. Selecting the right learning option at the right time in your career is worth the effort.

“Political situation” as defined in *In Transition*

1. The degree of politicization in a workplace is a function of the discrepancy between the stated rules and the way the workplace actually operates – how the game is actually played.
2. A political situation is one I am unable to handle effectively, in spite of my expertise and training. If I could handle the situation it would not strike me as political.

Additional career-building tips:

- Don't be afraid to deviate somewhat from the path you've set if it is to take advantage of opportunities that arise unexpectedly.
- Become expert at something. Maintain and expand your expertise in order to give your employers a reason to hire and retain you. Then be sure to share, not hoard, your expertise.
- Build a network, both inside and outside your company.

When you have sourced the training you need to fulfill your learning agenda, talk to your manager and explain how you will apply the new learning to your work. Ask for his or her support.

Develop your political savvy

Does it ever seem that you are overlooked for promotion unfairly? Do you expect your record to speak for itself? Do you tend to operate 'by the book' and find that the slackers get the credit for your ideas and work? It is easy to develop an 'attitude problem' when you feel marginalized, and 'an attitude' is a sure bet to stall your career. Perhaps your dedication and diligence is working against you because it is perceived as rigidity or moralistic self-justification.



While some of us may not like it, “political skills need to be respected as much as well-developed financial, marketing or management skills. People others call brown-nosers, opportunists, people who don't pull their weight, etc. have a talent for dealing with reality in the work environment. They do not set themselves up to fail in political situations by being rigidly self-righteous.”

“How skilled are you in politicized situations? Would you like to improve? To deal effectively with political situations, maintain a healthy balance between your internal standards and the realities of the workplace. Address the situation as it exists rather than as you wish it to be. If you tend to misread or misinterpret reality, remind yourself to concentrate more on facts and less on the 'oughta-be's'. Adapting to the circumstances may be the appropriate response. Are you willing to play the game by the rules that everyone else is using? Once again, a coach can help you adjust your reactions in situations where you have not set the rules.

Source: Mary Lindley Burton & Richard A. Wedemeyer. *In Transition*. 1991.

Helpful Resources:

- Barbara Moses. *Career Intelligence: The 12 New Rules for Work and Life Success*, 1998.
 - Defines today's career challenges and offers strategies to adapt. Tips to help you benefit from key future trends, self-market your skills and promote career independence and self-reliance in those you manage.
- Harry E. Chambers. *Getting Promoted: Real Strategies for Advancing Your Career*, 1999.
 - This book is written for those who want to achieve their goals, right where they are without moving to a different organization. It is packed with practical ideas for utilizing your most promotable skills and influencing the perceptions others have of your skills and potential.

Would you like to recommend a book or resource?

Please send a review and why you like it and we'll post your recommendation!