

Do You Have an Effective Career Plan?

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During the spring, I had the pleasure of instructing Career Planning at Rider University. Throughout the semester, I required my students to complete various assignments that served as the building blocks of their Career Plan – the final project for the course.

The reality in today's business world is that most professionals do not have a formalized Career Plan that can be used to guide them, especially during career transition – either voluntary or involuntary. Instead, employees often follow a "trial and error" philosophy, which may be a recipe for failure and might force them to take whatever job they can get even if it is not consistent with their long-term career goals.

While the process for creating a Career Plan is not difficult, it requires time, reflection and effort to be meaningful and effective. Having a detailed Career Plan serves as a roadmap on your journey to career success. In addition, the plan should be a flexible document that represents an ongoing process. Thus, it should be amended and adjusted as personal growth and development occurs, as roadblocks are encountered, and as your interests change over time.

How do you create a Career Plan?

Many approaches exist for creating a Career Plan that guides you along your career path. I suggest the following 5-step process that yields a practical document that can be tailored to your needs and interests:

- Conduct Career Exploration – The goal of exploration is to become aware of yourself and your environment. Among other things, you should seek to gain insight into your values, interests, and abilities. Various online assessments exist to help with your exploration, including The Strong Interest Inventory (SII) and The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).

- Determine Career Goals – The advantage of establishing a career goal is that it enables you to focus your efforts on behaviors and actions that support your goal. I recommend both a conceptual goal (for example, becoming a manager) and an operational goal (for example, a specific job or title).
- Develop a Career Strategy – The strategy is an action plan that supports the attainment of your career goal. It should include a timeline for accomplishing your objectives. I recommend a written document that is comprised of specific action steps to achieve a short-term, as well as a long-term career goal. The strategy should also include the identity of people who can support your efforts along the way, including a mentor or coach.
- Implement the Strategy – In my experience, implementation is the stage of the process where most people encounter difficulty. The key is to take a proactive approach and be disciplined in following your plan. I recommend focusing on achieving specific action steps each month as you build momentum, push forward and attain your goals.
- Monitor Your Progress – As your plan unfolds, it is important to receive feedback from trusted advisors and / or your manager. This can take the form of a performance appraisal or informal constructive feedback from a colleague or peer. Based upon the feedback, adjustments can be made to your plan to ensure that you are on the right course. I also recommend a simple monthly scorecard that can be utilized to measure progress vis-a-vis your career strategy.

What are the benefits of a Career Plan?

In my experience, some of the key benefits resulting from an effective Career Plan include the following:

- Better Decision Making – An up-to-date plan enhances decision-making since you are aware of your goals and your strategy for achieving them. Thus, when career opportunities arise, you can better assess whether they support your short-term and long-term career goals.
- Sense of Direction and Control – A plan provides both a sense of direction and control as you navigate your career journey and encounter hurdles and impediments that stand in your way. It also gives you confidence that you have a “plan of attack” that has been well-crafted if the unexpected happens.
- Supports Networking – The Career Plan helps guide your networking efforts by identifying the people you need to connect with / socialize with while you are gainfully employed and advancing in your career. This is preferable to beginning to network when you have lost your job or are starting your career transition.

In conclusion, having an effective Career Plan is not just a useful tool, it is a necessity in a fluid business environment where jobs are eliminated every day, and where career transition is becoming the norm. It should also be a companion to your ongoing personal growth and development as you mature, acquire new skills, and advance in your career.

If you are having difficulty developing a Career Plan that can support the achievement of career goals, please contact us so we may partner with you to create a plan that paves the way to career success.