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Personal Career Planning: Five Steps for the Future

Technology and global competition are changing jobs and careers so fast that future career directions are impossible to predict. You need to be prepared to redirect your career multiple times in the future. Job stability is not something that can be counted on no matter where you are in your career.

Since the future is not under our control, we must learn to set goals and objectives that prepare us to be more flexible with greater focus on the short term and that will broaden your capabilities and options.

Despite all the uncertainty, there are five key steps that you can take now to be better prepared for achieving success in your future career endeavors.

Focus on Specific Skills and Competencies

Because technology has become a primary driver of the future, it is important to stay up-to-date in your knowledge in order to shorten your learning curve around technological change. No profession or job area escapes the influence of changing technology. In fact, most of us are forced to adapt not just for our careers, but simply to carry on our daily lives. You can easily become obsolete if you cannot make the adaptations to changing technology.



Join an international group to become more globally aware.

Global competition is also changing jobs and career expectations as we work in a much more diverse world of global enterprise. Developing a comfort level with the global nature of today's business and the diversity of individual cultures and languages will help you better adapt and can even give you an advantage in a job search. Gaining international work experience can be a major

plus for both your understanding as well as your job prospects. Learning a new language can be equally important. Joining international groups such as the World Affairs Council or your local international society are ways to become more globally aware. Some career skills and competencies are timeless and will always be important for career success. Critical thinking and analytical abilities, for example, are required for evaluating information, identifying what is most important, and planning for the future. Communication skills continue to be critically important. In a more diverse and global world we need to communicate across cultures and with colleagues and customers who are increasingly diverse in their backgrounds and expectations.

Collaboration, which is the ability to work effectively with others, has always been a foundation competency for success in any career. With a more diverse and global world, however, we will be dealing with individuals who come from very different cultures and have perspectives that are quite different from our own. This requires taking the time to understand differences. Your goal is to ensure that you are easy for others to work with. Good relationships will help you to better communicate your message so it is fully understood and accepted even across differing cultures.

Commit to Lifelong Learning

Since you may need to redirect your career many times in the future, continuous learning will be critical for adapting. Learning is a lifetime skill; it is not something that individuals only do in academic settings. According to Alvin Toffler, the noted futurist and

business consultant, in the future illiteracy will be defined not by those who cannot read and write but by those who cannot learn and relearn.

Lifelong learning requires that you pull yourself out of your comfort zone. It challenges you to set learning goals that will give you the capabilities for future career success. Learning, for successful individuals, is not a one-time event but a continuous effort. The most effective continuous learning comes from reading constantly. It can be online, but does include books, newspapers, magazines and reports. Learning can also come from attending seminars, conferences, lectures or in-house professional development opportunities. Other opportunities include volunteering for committees or participating in professional organizations. You should always be looking for learning opportunities in both your personal and your professional life.

Take Stock of Your Strengths and Weaknesses

People vary greatly in their ability to assess themselves objectively. Seeking objective feedback can allow for greater confidence when making career decisions. Additionally, feedback is the only method for truly knowing how effective you are in your communication and collaboration.

Business oriented psychometric testing, 360 degree surveys, and a career review by an experienced industrial psychologist can help provide a foundation for career development and planning. It can help you gain insight into how you are perceived by others and confirm your hard and soft skills.

Discussions with an industrial psychologist can also answer questions such as: What do I excel at? What areas do I need to improve? What expertise should I develop? What self-development goals should I consider?

Your success in any type of career consultation will depend on your willingness to challenge your assumptions and look objectively at yourself. This is all part of continuous learning and being prepared to successfully engage the future.

Develop a Network of Professional Contacts

People most often think of networking as a means to obtain a job, but the most useful benefit is the ability

to obtain and share information. Networking can be useful for all involved and allows you to develop relationships and learn from people in all walks of life.

Networking is also a means of learning what is going on in your field. Most people enjoy discussing what new trends are affecting their industry and what challenges they face in their jobs.

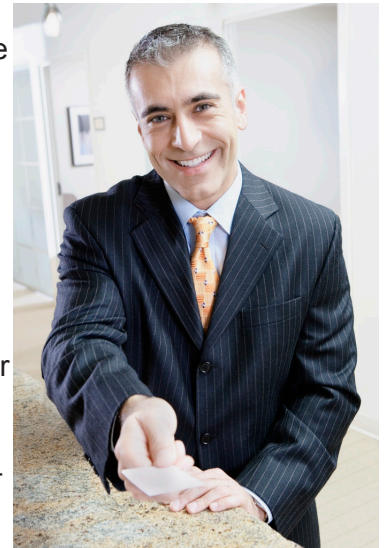
It is important to be positive, genuine, and open and to make an effort to get to know your contacts. Ask questions about how their career has developed, what their challenges are now and how they see the future. Ask what they think about a given issue. The main goal is to have an interesting and enjoyable conversation.

Networking is a continuous process and it is important for individuals in all professions no matter whether they are in the beginning, mid-point, or later part of their careers. It can open up many opportunities and provide mutually rewarding conversations.

Keep Your Mind and Career Path Open

Successful people only appear to have a linear job progression when their career is viewed in retrospect. More often than not they have taken a circuitous route with a number of dead ends and lateral moves to gain the skills and experience that enabled them to achieve their current career success.

Career planning in today's world is more of a "connect the dots" experience. You may not be able to fully imagine what your end career will look like until you are further along and have obtained experience in a number of areas. Eventually you will pick up skills and experiences that you would like to build on, as well as learn what things you do *not* want to do. As we are not aware of what we do not know, it is important, especially early in your career, to gain exposure to a broad range of jobs and career experiences.



Networking is important for more than just job hunting.

How will you know if you are on the right career path, helping to create the future that you desire? What markers should you look for?

Job titles and financial rewards are not necessarily the best or only markers. Most highly successful people will tell you that monetary rewards came later and were not their primary focus. Instead, they focused on the opportunity to learn, grow in responsibility, make a contribution, and be recognized for achievement. This is what Dr. Frederick Herzberg, the famous motivational researcher, found in his ground-breaking research studies on what motivated successful individuals.



Look for the opportunity to learn and grow in responsibility.

What you can learn from this research is the importance of looking for meaningful jobs that have learning experiences and the opportunity for greater job responsibility. When you pursue career goals that are motivational, you are more willing to put forth the extra effort to overcome obstacles and perform the learning that is required to achieve long term success.

The type of people you will be working with is another important career marker to consider. When considering a career move, it is important to carefully interview the individuals you will be working with to determine compatibility and work style. Are they working on things that you find interesting? Do you admire how they think about issues? Do they already have skills and experiences that you would like to achieve? Will the job duties provide an opportunity for increased learning from day-to-day interaction?



Do you admire the people you will be working with?

Individuals often achieve success because they go the extra mile in preparing themselves for future opportunities. They search for learning opportunities and experiences that will be building blocks for their career even if their goals are not well defined. They are open to change and new ideas, but they are not trying every new thing that comes along, just hoping to get lucky. While luck can play a role, it is no substitute for focus and hard work. Taking well thought out actions to expand your opportunities is crucial to executing a career strategy. Career planning is a continuous lifetime activity that will result in a successful and satisfying career picture when the dots are finally all connected.

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