



American College of  
Healthcare Executives  
*for leaders who care*

## The Executive as Career Manager

*When it comes to career planning, it's easy to say, "I'll do it tomorrow," or "I'll do it next month." Don't put off this critical aspect of your career development. Just do it now. –Mike Broscio*

Successful executives must also be effective career managers. The key to fulfilling this role is in becoming more self-reliant about your career and less reliant on the vagaries of a constantly changing marketplace. To become self-reliant, one must be proactive, not reactive, about his or her career. To achieve career independence, follow these five fundamental steps:

### 1. Conduct a self-assessment.

When was the last time you asked yourself, "What kind of a person am I? What do I really enjoy doing? What am I good at?" Consider these questions in the self-assessment process that should be part of your annual career check-up. In addition, set aside some time to evaluate your personal characteristics, values, and preferences and to take inventory of your skills and accomplishments. And, don't forget to look at your failures, too.

### 2. Do your market research.

What are current and future trends in the industry or in other areas where you may have long-range career interests? What skills are needed for success, both now and in the future? This market assessment is a challenging part of maintaining career self-reliance, and it requires keeping up with the literature, attending relevant seminars and conferences, and networking.

"Career networking" is the type of networking that takes place not only to uncover job opportunities, but to stay informed and in touch. Meeting with people in key positions in the field or with those who have an overview of market trends -- such as recruiters, consultants, or association and multihospital system executives -- is an effective way to keep on top of industry activities. It's also useful to talk to people who have achieved a position that you eventually hope to reach.

### 3. Implement a professional development program.

When it comes to really doing something to ensure personal and professional development, many people grind to a halt. Attending educational seminars, participating in self-directed learning programs, or obtaining an advanced degree are all worthwhile options. Beyond these areas, are there opportunities for you to take on new responsibilities in your current job or to volunteer for

committees that would enable you to gain experience in new areas that are lacking in your current skills portfolio? For some people, changing jobs may be the only way to gain the new exposure needed for personal and professional growth.

#### **4. Be flexible and keep an open mind.**

To be self-reliant, keep your options open and expect that there will be surprises along the way. Your ability to roll with the punches and make change part of your career plan will increase your chances of reaching your goal.

Executives often overlook interesting employment opportunities because they focus on obtaining a particular job title or become entranced by the prestige associated with a particular organization. In addition, many people are afraid to stray from mainstream jobs or are influenced by friends and colleagues whom they might feel are in “ideal” positions. Keep an open mind and evaluate the job not simply for its title and level of prestige, but for the skill and experience you can gain from it. Also consider how it could position you for future opportunities that could develop.

#### **5. Be ready to tell your story.**

In a competitive marketplace, your ability to effectively sell yourself can be the key to success. Like it or not, we all need to sell ourselves every day whether it's to your boss, staff, community, or prospective employers. Those who most persuasively tell their stories will be winners.

#### **6. Just Do It!**

To reach a secure level of career independence, you must set aside time to put together an accurate assessment of yourself and your career. When it comes to career planning, it's easy to say, “I'll do it tomorrow.” Don't put off this critical aspect of your career development. Just do it now and take the first step toward effectively managing your career.

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Michael A. Broscio is Director, Healthcare Practice, for SSP-BPI Group, a career transition and executive coaching firm in Prospect Heights, Illinois.

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## Is It Time for Your Career Checkup?

*Since more hours of our life are spent at work than at any other activity, satisfaction with the job and its relationship to other aspects of your life is critically important to not only your happiness, but to your health. –Michael A. Broscio*

Since we all realize the importance of our physical and emotional wellbeing, we would never avoid our annual checkup—especially if we are getting signals that something is amiss. We are constantly urged to get a physical, detect disease early, and pursue a lifestyle of wellness and prevention. But when it comes to our careers, we often wait for something bad to happen before we act.

In our outplacement practice, we work with many clients who are not prepared for a wrinkle in their career plan. Some clients might be prepared but fail to take proactive steps to prevent an unexpected career interruption. And others who do not appreciate the need and value of networking until they absolutely need to network. Each vows to never let it happen again.

### Reducing Career-Risk Factors

There are steps you can take to reduce career-risk factors. The primary way to gain control of your career path is to be aware of potential risks. What are the signs or symptoms? How can we diagnose and anticipate problems? The following is a checklist that may help you recognize significant career risks.

#### *Diagnostic Checklist*

1. Is your organization in a high-risk situation? You can determine whether your organization is in trouble by asking a few vital questions: Is your organization performing poorly? Has new technology been embraced that may affect your function or role? Have you recently been acquired or have you just made an acquisition? Has a significant strategy changed?
2. Have key organizational high-risk events occurred? If you have a new boss or new peers with significant influence with your boss, high-risk events may have occurred.
3. Have there been noticeable changes in communication? Are you all of a sudden out of the loop on important decisions or notice that your boss hasn't spoken to you lately? Were you passed over to take on a lead role?
4. Do you find yourself at odds with the organization's mission or direction? If you find yourself disagreeing about significant organizational issues or are increasingly frustrated with decisions being made by the higher-ups, you may be facing a potential career risk.
5. Have you become dependent in your thinking or behaviors? Are you hesitating more when faced with big decisions? Have you stopped learning or developing your skills? Have career plans been delayed or stopped in their tracks?

6. Are you feeling differently about your work? You know there is a problem when your work is becoming significantly less satisfying, your stress level increases, and you are feeling overwhelmed by job demands and are making more mistakes.
7. Are your behaviors inconsistent with behaviors required for today's workplace? Are your behaviors potentially causing problems on the job? Have you failed to improve adapting, time-management, or prioritizing skills? Do you try to over-control your staff?

If you are unsure about the risks, get a second opinion. Seek out advice from appropriate colleagues or mentors. You may even think about forming a personal "Board of Advisors." This might include a mentor, a long-time work associate, a professional association colleague, or consultants you've worked with.

## **Career Management: Your Preventive Medicine**

### *Self-Diagnosis*

Conducting a broader self-assessment on a regular basis is an important part of effective career management. Start by exploring your individual needs. Ask yourself some key questions. What is important to me at this point in my life? What do I really enjoy doing? Evaluate your personal characteristics, values, and preferences.

You'll also want to explore what you have to offer to both your current employer and others in the marketplace. Take an honest look at your talents and capabilities. How well do your skills stack up? Review your accomplishments on an annual basis and even take time to update your resume. If you haven't received any performance feedback, seek it out, not only from superiors but from peers or subordinates.

### *Conduct Research*

Another key step is to be in touch with the market. Internally, this would include understanding what your employer needs and expects from you. How well does your skill set match with your organization's current needs? Have there been changes in expectations? Again, when in doubt-ask!

Externally, stay in touch with current and future trends in the industry. Establish what skills are needed for success now and in the future. Attending and networking at conferences and industry events can be the best way to stay connected.

### *Implement a Development Plan*

After looking at what you offer and evaluating your organization or marketplace needs, you can begin to ascertain where there are gaps and determine what is needed to minimize them. You can begin by pursuing additional training or certifications and attending educational events, but you can also look for opportunities at your current job. Are there additional responsibilities you can tackle or a committee/task force to join? Is there a leadership role you can assume in a professional group, such as an ACHE local chapter, to add to your experience?

### *Be Adaptable*

Be sure to re-evaluate your employer's and marketplace needs every few months. Be

prepared to adjust your plan accordingly when faced with personal changes like a new addition to your family or a financial setback. Look at organizational changes, such as a new boss, a new strategy, or a merger and acquisition as a challenge and opportunity. Your ability to roll with the punches and make change a part of your thinking will increase the chances of reaching your career goals.

### **A Healthy Career Means a Healthier Life**

Since more hours of our life are spent at work than at any other activity, satisfaction with the job and its relationship to other aspects of your life is critically important to not only your happiness, but to your health. An unhappy or unsatisfying situation often results in stress which may eventually impact your productivity and health. According to BlueCross BlueShield, five out of six workers feel job stress plays a major role in their illnesses.

Issues related to work/life balance are often a source of problems with job satisfaction and stress. The problem is particularly difficult for women, who often carry the brunt of child care concerns. What can you do to provide more balance and reduce stress? Check with your employer about flexible work hours or work-from-home options. Also find out if the organization offers a health and wellness plan, employee assistance programs, on-site day care, or a health club.

You may feel like you can do it all, but sometimes we need to seek professional help. The use of an executive or career coach can provide sound advice on many areas of your career. Because coaches come from a variety of backgrounds, finding one that can relate to you and deliver results is important. But be aware of inexperienced coaches—don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions and get references. ACHE has already done a lot of this work for affiliates; access an executive coach directory in the Affiliates Career Resource Center on [ache.org](http://ache.org). Many people have found that relying on and developing a lasting relationship with a coach is the best thing they can do for their careers.

Whether you follow a self-help plan or seek advice from others, use that checkup and begin your journey on the road to good career health!

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Michael A. Broscio is Director, Healthcare Practice, for SSP-BPI Group, a career transition and executive coaching firm in Prospect Heights, Illinois.

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## **Building a Career Action Plan**

*Having an action plan can help you recover quickly if you get “downsized.”  
–Thomas J. Foley, FACHE*

Whether we call it downsizing, rightsizing, shrinking the system, re-engineering, job elimination, or termination doesn't really matter. The bottom line is that if one of them happens to you, you are out of work. Given the rapid rate of change in the healthcare field, it is unrealistic and unwise for you to view your current position as a “sure thing”; yet still, many of our colleagues are stunned when they get the news that they are being let go, particularly if they have been with the organization for a number of years. Most of us cannot afford the effects of that surprise, but having an action plan can help you recover quickly.

I'm not trying to scare my colleagues in the healthcare field, nor am I trying to be dramatic or sensational. Let me offer an analogy: As a young child during World War II, I remember vividly the blackouts and the bomb shelters as we prepared for the possibility of an enemy attack. We knew what to do, where to go, and how to survive. Although we never actually needed to implement it, that action plan gave us the security of knowing we were ready—just in case. I am recommending that you similarly prepare yourself for the possibility of a surprise attack. That way, if your job is eliminated, you can call upon your action plan with comfort and confidence.

First, you must consider the emotional impact of learning that your position no longer exists. Expect to feel anger, fear, despair, and emptiness, and know that these reactions are normal. Being mentally prepared will help you quickly regain your footing and continue forward with your action plan.

To begin developing your plan, ask yourself how you might survive a restructuring. Are your knowledge and skills up to date? Are you keeping up with trends in healthcare? Are you helping to improve processes and/or control costs within your position or department? Being able to answer “yes” to these questions may help you survive a restructuring or, if necessary, land a new position.

In forming the job search portion of your action plan, you should consider a number of factors: What is the marketplace like today? What skills are in demand? What skills do you have that would make you an attractive candidate for a new position? What do you like and dislike about the work you do, the employer you have, and the organization you work for? What do you like to do? What are you good at? Are you willing to consider a different direction, or even a different field? Are you willing to relocate if necessary? These issues are the building blocks of your action plan.

If you have a dynamic and far reaching professional network, make sure you are maintaining it; if not, you need to develop one. Create a list of all your contacts who

might assist in networking, and communicate with them regularly. Stay involved with professional colleagues, organizations, and associations.

The period following a job loss can be overwhelming, filled with many important decisions, so getting some tasks accomplished ahead of time can be very helpful in the long run. For example, you may want to occasionally review your financial situation with your family, accountant, and financial counselor. Update the style of and information in your resume. Learn about outplacement and executive search services available to individuals at your career level. Research careers outside, or perhaps related to, healthcare as possible alternatives.

Building an action plan requires creativity, introspection, personal knowledge, reflection, honesty, and sincerity. Don't be surprised by the vagaries of change in the healthcare field today. Be prepared, visualize your future elsewhere, and customize your plan for your personality, your skills, and your potential.

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Thomas J. Foley, LFACHE, is senior partner at Foley Proctor Yoskowitz, a healthcare executive search firm, in Morristown, New Jersey.

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