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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