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Rita's Career Corner: Career Planning – Novelty or Necessity?

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Thriving in today's marketplace is as much about continuous learning and proactive planning as it is about talent. Most people take great care in methodically planning out many aspects of their lives yet in many cases, their career decisions and/or paths happen based on circumstances vs. intentions. Creating a plan that allows for both is not only ideal in this competitive, highly specialized market but necessary!

What is the mission and vision for your career? What are your short term goals for the next 1-3 years as well as your long term goals 5 years and beyond? Are you taking the steps now to ensure success in achieving your short and long term goals? Do you have a personal and professional development plan for managing your career? When is the last time you assessed and explored your skills, abilities, competencies, interests, priorities and values to assure they are aligned appropriately with your professional and personal goals and objectives as well as the requirements for success within your field?

The economy is on the rise as is the demand for accomplished, results-driven professionals with a proven track record who can add value. Only you can manage your career so having a solid development plan for yourself with specific goals and objectives is the best way to start that process. Organizations are looking for leadership capabilities at all levels – they desire individuals with potential to grow and initiative to own their career development.

So, how do you create a personal and professional development plan?

1. Know your competencies, skills, strengths, weaknesses, interests and values; assess and evaluate regularly; be true to yourself; leverage strengths and uncover potential to be further developed.
2. Do your homework and stay current in your field; investigate sought after skills that are in demand; identify areas you may fall short; determine skills to be refined and enhanced as well as steps to execute.
3. Be goal-oriented; establish short and long term goals; keep a running list of your accomplishments; establish where the gaps are preventing you from reaching these goals.
4. Prepare an action plan that will allow you to fill these gaps – both personally and professionally; reach out to your network of peers, colleagues, managers, contacts and other resources to assist you.
5. Follow up and evaluate; be disciplined and make yourself accountable to a specific timetable; revisit regularly and stay on track; evaluate frequently and make necessary adjustments and follow through.

Career planning is a necessary part of managing a successful career. It's important to note that flexibility and constant evaluation is an important ingredient. You want to keep an open mind to unexpected possibilities and new directions that present opportunities not considered. Those wonderful surprises that come our way are gems that can be found along this journey. Keep an open mind and consider new roads that could open unexpected doors. Having a plan doesn't mean being rigid. It gives you a vision and path to build upon. As you start the process of career planning, here are some tried and true guidelines to take into consideration.

- Network, Network, Network!
- Set goals and re-evaluate regularly.
- Keep skills and competencies current.
- Be accomplishment-driven and results-oriented.
- Seek out mentors and trusted advisors.
- Confidence and positive attitude are essential!

- Always think big picture and outside the box.
- Education and on-going learning is very important.
- Establish, maintain and nurture long lasting relationships.
- Never burn any bridges.
- Practice professional etiquette.
- Remember to give back to your profession.
- Network, Network, Network!

You are the only one in charge of your career. Be pro-active, focused and driven to manage it effectively and manage it well. We can't control the economy or the market but we can empower ourselves to be prepared to handle whatever the market brings our way. I like to say it's the difference between being in the driver's seat vs. sitting in the back seat going along for the ride. The only constant we can expect today is change. Why not be proactive with a plan to take charge and experience the rewards. Most important, find and enjoy the most fulfilling career that allows you to maximize your potential. Enjoy the journey!

Ask Rita...

Question: How do I begin evaluating my skills, strengths and weaknesses?

Answer: There are many formal tools and assessments to help with this process that can be found on line, in the bookstore and/or within your own organizations but one very simple strategy is to do a personal SWOT analysis. First, identify your strengths (areas which you excel) and weaknesses (areas you would like to further develop). Then identify opportunities to be seized for development including how you would leverage your strengths in doing so and finally, determine what the potential threats and challenges are that may get in your way and how you would use your strengths to avoid them or turn them into opportunities. This is a very simple exercise to be able to identify and evaluate your strengths and weaknesses.



Question: My organization does not have a formal mentor program but I would really benefit from having one. How can I seek one out when my company doesn't offer such an option?

Answer: Having a mentor is a critical part of our careers. Mentors are not only in the workplace, but enter our lives from a variety of venues, each offering wisdom and counsel in different ways that speak to our many needs. In fact, it's important to search out multiple mentors to address multiple needs. Be your own advocate and initiate these relationships rather than waiting to be mentored. They can come in the form of role models, peers, colleagues, managers, leaders, professors, teachers, family members, friends, relatives, coaches and other contacts. First, identify what you need and then seek out the appropriate individual as a mentor or trusted advisor. Reach out personally with your request with sincerity and thoughtfulness. Most people welcome the opportunity to help. In addition, welcome opportunities to mentor others throughout their careers, which is just as rewarding!

Rita will answer questions every month. If you have career related questions, copy/paste this link into your browser:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?formkey=dGQ1cmwyTW96UDIXTFRud0xjLWZVWIE6MQ>.

Rita Allen is the President of [Rita B. Allen Associates](#), a provider of career management/talent management consulting and executive coaching services located in Waltham and the President of [ACPI – NE](#) (Association of Career Professionals International – New England).