

Manage Your Career... *on Your Own Terms*

Rita's Career Corner ...With Rita B. Allen

September 2013

When you were a child and someone asked you, “*What do you want to be when you grow up*”, did you have a ready answer to that question? Maybe you did, maybe you did not but perhaps you had many possibilities that seemed so exciting and viable. Fast forward to current day and ask yourself that question framed a little differently. *If you could be given your ideal job on a silver platter tomorrow, what would it be?* How prepared are you to answer that question without any hesitance or qualifying?

The fact is many people truly stumble on identifying their true passion and the kind of work that would fulfill and inspire them. Managing our career starts with the importance of having a vision and mission followed by specific goals and a well thought out plan for executing our goals. We achieve our desired success by owning our careers and taking charge. As I like to say, it's the difference between being in the driver's seat rather than the back seat going along for the ride. Having a plan and staying true to it is vital to be engaged, motivated and empowered.

The critical question to answer honestly however is.... ***are we following our own plan or someone else's that has either been passed down to us, expected of us and/or has just fallen into our path?*** Whose terms have defined your career? Have you allowed yourself to search within to identify your true talents and then follow through with a plan that allows you to engage those talents in your chosen work?

Take a moment to do the following ‘Vision Exercise’:

- It is the year 2023 – you are being interviewed by Robin Roberts on Good Morning America because of your accomplishments and contributions throughout your career...*what does that vision look like for you?*

- What kind of work brings you passion to share with the world – visualize the role that plays to your strengths and talents, which you would be proud and energized to discuss... *what does that vision look like for you?*

Knowing what that vision looks like is very difficult for many people. Sometimes it is because they are unclear about directions or choices and more often than not it is because they have not allowed themselves to reflect deeply enough to uncover their true aspirations that align well with their strengths and talents. In some cases, it is due to the fact that they have already travelled well down a career path that was identified for them by someone else (such as a manager, parent, professor, mentor, etc.) or by circumstances (such as the economy, market demands, finances, labor supply, etc.). Lastly, it is sometimes due to a lack of confidence and belief in their abilities or fear of taking some risk and pushing out of their comfort zone.

The worst case is when someone doesn't even entertain certain possibilities and disqualifies themselves from entering a certain path based on preconceived assumptions. Taking the safe and easy path may not always be the best one for us. There are times when we may have to make the safe choices in the short term but we can also have a plan in place for the long term. Allow yourself to dig deep, think big, and be true to yourself. The key is to *manage your career....on your own terms!*

Taking the wrong job for the right reasons or the right job for the wrong reasons can be disastrous. It may look good on our resume or offer a level of prestige but if it does not fulfill us and align with our true talents and desires, it is not on our terms.

Only you can own your career! This requires each of us to be pro-active, focused and driven to manage it effectively and manage it well. ***Take charge of it and define the terms that meet your needs.*** You will see the rewards and enjoy a fulfilling career that allows you to maximize your potential, development and success.

There are many models of work today. The face of our workforce today is very different from the past. People are making new choices and have a variety of career options now including corporate roles, non-profit and community involvement, independent consulting (see "*Building a Consulting Practice – Is it an Option For Me*" at <http://www.naylornetwork.com/neh-nwl/articles/index-v4.asp?aid=231811&issueID=32011>), entrepreneurship, as well as portfolio careers which is a combination of a few options all at the same time. The only constant today is change wherever you work and whatever your role. The key is to embrace this change which has opened the door to so many new possibilities and options over the last decade. There are several positive aspects of that change within the workforce. The newest generation will have a few different careers and all of us are now discovering new ways to reinvent ourselves. Embrace and enjoy this journey!

Manage your Career....*On Your Own Terms:*

- Explore all of the possibilities that are options for you
- Do your due diligence to identify the best one
- Ask yourself the difficult questions and be honest with your answers
- Create your plan and stay true it – both short term and long term
- Allow yourself to try new things and don't let fear get in your way
- Incorporate realities of economics, financial constraints and set realistic expectations
- Exercise positive self talk instead of rationalizing why you shouldn't be true to yourself or talk yourself out of an option
- Get comfortable being uncomfortable
- Go for it!

Keep in mind you are the driver of your career and will determine what success looks like for you. Your vision is the ideal vision for you. Identify the path that aligns with your talent and will offer you the most satisfaction and reward, personally and professionally. Establish and build long lasting relationships along the way. Be sure to reach out to others for support in addition to offering yourself as a resource to your network. ***Manage your career.....on your own terms!***

Remember the Three Commonalities of Successful Professionals:

1. Know their value add – what they have to offer
2. Know what they want – goal-oriented
3. Know how to ask for it – articulate their value/aspirations effectively

Ask Rita...

Question: I have progressed throughout my career in the field of accounting for the last 25 years and am currently a Controller within high technology. I chose this field because both my parents and teachers told me I was good in math and there were lots of jobs in accounting. Although I have excelled in my career professionally and financially, the work itself does not bring me a lot of satisfaction. As I have done a lot of reflection, I have discovered how energized I feel when I am training others and teaching new staff or students which has brought me to the realization that I would truly enjoy pursuing teaching accounting at the college level. As I have introduced this possibility to my friends and family, they tell me I would be crazy to walk away from a lucrative and successful corporate career. What do I do?

Answer: Bravo to you for realizing the untapped potential and talent in you that has not been realized up to this point! It sounds like you have made the discovery that it is time to reinvent yourself and now you need to allow yourself the freedom and enjoyment of exploring a new possibility. I am sure your friends and family have your best interest at heart and hearing their input can be valuable. If you have done your due diligence and truly investigated this option and created a plan, then follow that plan and do not allow others to identify what is right for you. One other option to consider is seeking out a part-time teaching assignment that will allow you to try it first, see if you like it, identify the challenges as well as experience the realities involved. That can help you determine if it's a new path for you or one that you want to incorporate into your existing role. In any case, do your homework and create a plan based on your terms. By the way, there is a growing demand for adjunct faculty and higher education is a very exciting place to be right now. Good luck!

Send your questions to: [Rita B. Allen](#)

Rita Balian Allen is the president of Rita B. Allen Associates, www.ritaballenassociates.com, a provider of career management/talent management consulting and executive coaching services located in Waltham, Mass., with specialty areas in leadership development, management training and career development. She is also a Lecturer at Northeastern University and Bentley University.