

YOUR ALL-IN-ONE CAREER GUIDE

**Everything You Wanted To
Know About Careers ...**

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INTRODUCTION: LEARNING TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR CAREER PATH

"How did I get here?" You ask yourself after a layoff, career relocation to a different city or after being passed over. Are you one of the millions of people who go to work never understanding how you can take control of your own career path? Do you want to know how to manage your career and increase the chances that you will find yourself exactly where you envisioned when you were younger? Then, you have to learn how to take control of the path. As the saying goes ... "There are many paths up the mountain". The one you choose should be the right one for you, even if the goal is the same as millions of other people. This will lead to more career success and better life satisfaction. Isn't that what all the struggle is about anyway?

This may take a different mindset than how you've been programmed by today's culture to believe works. If what society said worked for everyone, then you would see many more happy and successful people. The problem is not in the paths set forward by society as safe routes; it is in not understanding who you are and what makes you, in particular, happy.

Instead, you are led to believe, in some cases, that achieving a profession that your neighbors, your parents or even your clergy deems successful is what you want. It may not be.

In this one thing all successful people agree ... If you are passionate about what you do, the money will follow. If you are not passionate, you will continually self-sabotage and create obstacles to your own happiness. The key is understanding what excites you, what motivates you and then choosing paths that enhance these factors while taking you to a specific destination, whether that destination is a job promotion, freelancing or your own business venture. **Your career path is as unique as you are.**

This doesn't mean that you must insulate yourself in a bubble or that you have to be a career trailblazer. It means that after you understand your personal strengths and what you have to offer the world, then you can look around and start planning how to use these features to your benefit and the benefit of others.

While our parents may have tried to convince us that we can be “anything we want” the real truth is that we each have unique talents that make us ideally suited for particular career paths. Not everyone can be an opera star, but that doesn't mean that this path should be more respected or less valued than being a police person or a reporter.

In order to succeed in today's global economy, you will also have to remember that your competition can come from India or China. This is an additional complication that many people have trouble understanding. They've followed the safe routes, they used their skills to get into the careers that matched their personalities and they are still left without a job. This is a fact of today's global economy. You may be the world's brightest programmer, but if you are living in the United States, Australia, United Kingdom or Europe and your skills are easily bought from India for a fraction of what employers could pay you in these countries, you could see that career path shut down in your regional area and outsourced.

In the past, career paths were more stagnant, more dependable. If you were employed in a good company, you could pretty much be assured of a well-defined career path in that company, job security and a pension. These are all vestiges of a past economy. Today's economy is constantly shifting with new technologies, new markets and the entire transformation of our culture.

This means that career paths that were non-existent can suddenly appear as the need for them arises. Other career paths that appeared solid can be outsourced or replaced through technology. Employers are faced with having to juggle massive amounts of information, technologies, marketplaces and sadly, people may be their last priority.

In this type of dynamic environment, you have to learn how to not only be flexible but also be acutely aware of the changes within your surroundings. You have to adapt your set of skills to something the market demands while attempting to stay grounded in an area that can continue to contribute to your happiness. Not a small feat, is it?

This is probably why the average worker feels they are walking a career tightrope instead of doing somersaults on a high trapeze. The business environment has become a circus and the ringmaster has lost control. You need to step into your own life and be the ringmaster that makes deliberate and conscious choices about what will be a part of your show. The markets and the employers may be in frenzy, but you can still take control of your own future. You are the creator of your career success or failure ... no one else does this for you.

If you learn how to begin to take control of your own career path, you can then bring in others to help you achieve your goals. As long as they are working with you and not you working for them, then you can continue to consciously walk the path to career happiness.

Release the mentality that you are an employee (even if you work for a corporation) and begin to learn how successful people become who they are. They believe in themselves. They gauge the business environment. They position themselves to take advantage of opportunities. They do not make excuses for their failures. And lastly, they are not afraid to succeed. To that end, the career path is nothing more than a tool. What does the actual work is the person. If you can begin to read the markets and know your self well enough to adapt to changing situations, you can also learn to stay ahead of the pack.

1

CHOOSING A CAREER

When you were in high school, you might not remember, but you were most likely given a skill assessment test by a guidance counselor. As young adults begin to make their transition from dependants to either working adults or college students, the emphasis on learning turns to the following question ... How are these people going to support themselves? If money were the sole determinant for the occupations that young people were guided to, then people would just all be told to go into lucrative careers.

The thing is that it is known that not everyone is ideally suited, psychologically or intellectually, to be a scientist, an engineer or a doctor. Many of those that do, might also have no interest in these occupations. The key is to match the person with the occupation that motivates and inspires them to succeed. Without that internal drive, the career path becomes a source of drudgery and disappointment instead of exploration and self-discovery.

To get it right, guidance counselors assess not just a student's skills but also their interests and personal temperament. Just because you are now out of school, doesn't mean that formula has changed. The same factors are still important, whether you are a graduating senior or a veteran worker who is contemplating a career change.

WHAT ARE YOUR INTERESTS?

This may take a bit of self-reflection, but it is worth it. You will find that your interests probably remained somewhat constant throughout your life, even if you steered away from them for one reason or another.

If you grew up collecting bugs, maybe you have an interest in classifying things of the natural world. If you are a creative type, you may have heard that your artistic ability is not going to pay the bills so you shied away from exploring that part of yourself without considering that it could be part of a lucrative career as a graphic artist.

There are many ways to pay the bills, and not all of the careers will fall into typical 9 to 5 corporate jobs. So, don't limit your vision to only include careers that appear lucrative or that fall in line with an established profession. It is easier, in some cases, to have an established profession, but even white-collar workers are finding themselves unbalanced in today's competitive business environment.

You are the only one who really knows what your interests are and how well you did in certain school subjects. If you want to take a skills assessment test, there are plenty of them online that can help you narrow down some suitable choices for professions.

If you already have a background in a specific industry, taking a skill assessment can help you widen your choices to use those skills in other areas.

www.careeronestop.org has a comprehensive skills assessment test area that can help you define your strengths better. This website is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor and is a good source for career information. They offer information on employment trends, salaries, industries, and specific occupations too.

YOUR ABILITY

The skills assessment should pinpoint your abilities and where those abilities might best suit the marketplace. Take into account any abilities you've received through training, education or on-the-job experience. This represents a starting point for your skill set. The skill set will ask about your exposure to various business skills ... technical, people and managing skills.

YOUR KNOWLEDGEBASE

Next, you want to know how your skill set compares to others in your field. Does your experience with a particular skill set qualify you as a beginner, an intermediate or an expert? They will ask you to assess how well you know a particular skill. This will help to steer you towards careers that best suit your skill level.

Don't try to fake the answers to get the career you want. Start where you are and follow that lead from there.

YOUR PERSONAL GOALS

Maybe you feel you would be happiest helping people than sitting behind a computer all day. This is an important element in how you choose your career. Some people will never be happy in a corporate environment. They may prefer to work for park services or some other occupation that allows them to be outdoors. Others may want a job that contributes to their community and are not as worried about being paid well. These are all elements of your personal goals that need to fit into your career choices.

YOUR CAREER OPTIONS

After the skills assessment, you will get a list of potential careers that might be worth investigating. You can do that by investigating them individually online. You can use www.careeronestop.org or go to the Bureau of Labor home page to find information on specific careers there. There are advantages to each and looking at both would be a great way to do in depth research.

- **www.careeronestop.org** – Using this website, you can find out what the average salary is like in a specific career. The advantage is that you can also search by state to get some earning and trend comparisons between your regional area and the overall forecast.
- **Bureau of Labor Statistics** – By going to www.bls.gov, you can search the latest Occupational Outlook Handbook to find even more information on particular careers. Maybe you want to go into a career that has not been suggested through your skills assessment. This website will offer you information on how to get on track for a career by listing the training and educational requirements needed. It also gives you a bird's eye view of some of the daily activities performed by workers in a specific job.

Both these websites offer information on income and expected trends in a particular field. www.careeronestop.org offers a more regional search than the Bureau of Labor Statistics, although both sites have regional information. It's a bit harder to search on www.bls.gov. If you are interested in the potential earnings in your area, then www.careeronestop.org presents that information in a more accessible format.

The Bureau of Labor's Occupational Handbook is based for the entire country and gives averages for the country.

If you are looking for a particular job that is more freelance, it may not show up immediately on www.careeronestop.org's list of hot jobs. It may need to be searched for through their search box.

The Bureau of Labor does seem to view the trends towards more freelancing as a definite career move, whereas other websites might not qualify these jobs as true career paths.

As our culture becomes more electronic, there are careers that are appearing less structured and more open, leaving the corporate cubicle for an online telecommuting presence. If you thought about being a secretary in the past, you can now become a virtual office assistant – something unheard of only a few years back. These types of jobs can be ideal for single mothers, the elderly wanting to make a partial income or even stay-at-home moms who want to maintain some work experience on their résumés. They can be harder to locate, but they are available and can be profitable.

Use both of these sites to find related occupations that can steer you towards a career that excites you and pays the bills. They both mention potential related occupations that people can transition to from a particular job.

This is also excellent information for people who are being laid off in one sector of an industry but have sufficient skills to make a seamless transition to another area using the same skill set. There may be a difference in salary, but at least it will give you a starting point on your career options.

Make good use of both these sites by reviewing all the related links to resources that provide more information on career choices that you are investigating. This can all be done in the privacy of your home and in your spare time.

Make sure to print the pages of careers that appear viable and exciting to you. Create a folder and soon you will have a whole set of potential areas to target and a good idea of how to get from square one to the rest of your journey.

2

TRACKING CAREER ADVANCEMENT

The typical way to track your career advancement is through the use of the five-year plan. This may seem intricate, but it's not. Now that you've done all the research for your career choices, you should have isolated one, two or three possibilities. You can write up a five-year plan for each and see which one appeals to you most.

Your five-year plan should include a section for each of the following ... for each career choice you are considering ...

- **Your Long Term Goal**

If you've chosen to be an engineer, for instance, this would be your long-term goal. To get to that goal you will have to complete a series of steps to get you where you want to be. The steps you have to take will be dependent on what your current skills are that can transfer into this career.

- **Your Personal Development Goals**

These should include all of the steps you need to take to develop yourself to be able to obtain employment in your chosen area or achieve the career that you would like to have. They can include private goals like becoming a more effective speaker or learning how to teach small groups.

- **Your Educational Goals**

These are very simple to figure out because they are usually specified in the career outlooks. Most careers require a specific educational program or at least a set of skills that might require some continuing education. Once you know how you meet or fall short of these requirements, you will know what those goals will need to be.

- **Your Financial Goals**

Most five-year plans are done within a company and do not contain this section. The reasoning is that if you meet your long-term goal, the company will recompense you appropriately. What about when your career choice is to freelance or to shift careers? In that case, you also need to track your finances and make sure you can meet your financial goals while you are meeting your career objectives.

A WORD ABOUT GOALS

Goals can be further subdivided by years and by tasks within those years. You want to be as **specific** about the tasks you wish to complete each year that will lead you closer to your overall goals. Give yourself a reasonable timeframe.

If you know that education is required, you can look up the type of education needed. If it is a master's degree and you don't even have a bachelor's, you will obviously need to get a bachelor's first. Or, if you need a bachelor's degree, you can subdivide each of those years into attainable goals like maintaining at least a 2.0 average in all your classes to indicate not only completion, but also successful completion. It doesn't do anyone any good to graduate at the bottom of their class. The goal may have been completed, but the experience itself may not be enough to motivate an employer to hire you with poor grades.

No one's life works out like a well thought out five-year plan. The five-year plan contains your goals and aspirations, but life often can derail the best of plans. The five-year plan should not be a source of condemnation; it should be the light shining forth from your lighthouse to guide you home. Take for granted that some goals may be met more easily than others. There will be obstacles along the way, but as long as you are making progress on some of the goals, you will eventually make it all the way home. It may take less than five years or more than five years, but at least you had a plan before you headed out into new waters.

Remember to make your goals as **specific** as possible so that you can measure whether the goal was completed successfully or not. Try to set goals that are attainable. If you set goals that are too hard to achieve, you will quickly lose the motivation to continue with your plan or your career change.

If you fail to produce results in the timeframe that you set, consider getting help if the goal is absolutely necessary to get your career off the ground. If it is a personal goal that is not necessary but will increase your chances, consider reviewing the goal and evaluating whether there needs to be a change in your expectations about the career choice or your own abilities. This will help you to fine tune the area you can be involved in, in a specific career without throwing out the entire plan.

For instance, if you want to be an engineer but find that you don't like being indoors all the time, you may look to occupations that use engineers outside.

Maybe it will lead you to becoming a land surveyor, which is similar to an engineer but allows you more time to be outdoors. As you continue this journey notice your preferences ... where you excel and guide yourself to maximize your strengths and minimize your weaknesses. This will produce a great deal of work satisfaction as you not only feel capable of doing the work, but also can find a greater ability to contribute and make an impact in your profession.

WHEN OTHERS TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

It is possible that you want to change or expand your career options and it can also be a boon to your company too. There's no reason to change a company unless you are clearly not happy there. If there is a way to stay within your company, then you can continue to build a career path there, whether it is what you currently do or not. This requires that you remain open and receptive to any criticism or changes within the organization.

The nice part of this is that you can initiate a dialogue with your supervisor on where you see yourself in five years and that might help you to move within the company. This is usually done during your year-end reviews, the only difference is that if you know that your company has a need for a particular career you are interested in, you can voice your own objectives and show them how you intend to meet your goals. Many companies will help their employees to meet their career objectives if they fall in line with the company's needs.

A typical example of this can be if you work for a company that does clinical research. Maybe you are doing technical support but would like to become more involved in research. This can be a very good career move since most technical support areas are being outsourced to other areas. If you know that the company is beginning to downsize in one area, look to the areas it is expanding to see if your personal objectives can fit the company's latest needs. This not only shows flexibility on your part, but a desire to contribute to the well being of the company. You can then begin a dialogue with your supervisor and they may be able to guide you in getting the necessary experience to move into that area.

The only time when you would not want to alert a supervisor to your career aspirations is when they don't meet the company's needs or your own department's objectives. Once an employer realizes that you may be planning an exit, they will become less willing to help you achieve your personal goals. This is why many companies limit their tuition reimbursement programs to the field in which you currently are of service to the company.

They don't want to spend money on you, only for you to leave. If they find out you are thinking of jumping ship, they may even start looking for your replacement early. This can be a bit of a balancing act ... to keep your career change goals in front of you while not letting on what you are doing.

An example of this is if you find yourself in a career field that you find intolerable or unsuited to your personality. You will be asked to define some objectives and goals to help your continued advancement within the company. If that isn't your preference, you should keep that information to yourself and find outside avenues to help you in your career transition. Don't turn down promotions or make off-handed comments about being a short-timer. Take every opportunity for training that the company offers you that might help you to achieve your personal goals, as well as make you more marketable.

Use the job you currently have to meet some of the financial goals within your five-year plan and then exit gracefully when you can. This will help to establish good references and you might even find after you've achieved your personal goals that the company can find a place for you after all.

3

PLANNING CAREER CHANGES

So, you've smelled the breeze and changes are coming. Whether they are changes that are happening by your internal desires or the marketplace mayhem, you will be way ahead of the pack if you start to plan now. Don't assume because you've been in the company for a long time that you are suddenly immune from market forces. Many people who assumed that, are now unemployed or working dead-end jobs they took to feed their families. Even if you are deliriously happy with your current job, you may still end up facing a career change in your future.

The average person has two or three career changes in their lifetime. If you know ahead of time that the career you started in may not be forever, it is a good idea to be proactive about your career changes.

Start to think like you own the company. If you see sales falling and the marketplace competition taking a chunk out of profits, you can be certain that the company will start to consider cutting employees. If you are prepared for the eventual possibility of a layoff, an extended illness, a corporate takeover, a company bankruptcy or any other number of potential disruptions of your present career, you can make the transition smoother for yourself.

Take a yearly checkup and figure out if your skills are still in demand in the marketplace or whether you need to supplement them somehow. It's easier to do these things when you are employed and making money than when you are unemployed. Then, the financial pressures can derail any plans you might want to undertake at that point.

YOUR CAREER SURVIVAL KIT

Always keep the following items handy in the event of a job crash ...

- **The Five-Year Plan**
By doing the research ahead of time on potential career choices that can work with your skills, you have the choice to seek employment in your field or try to move into another field using the same skills or those that you acquired while you were in your job.

- **Updated Résumés**

You should have several copies of your résumé. One should be in Word format and have all the details most résumés contain. One should be electronic and be used for online submissions. You should have some idea of the most searched keywords within a field, so try to add as many relevant ones as you can to your résumé. Finally, you may also want a functional résumé instead of a traditional one, for example, if you have many years of experience that may make you seem dated instead of fresh, then group your skills by job experience rather than dates, making you appear younger, at least on paper.

- **Cover Letters**

You should review successful cover letters and create a few of your own. Try to keep track of which cover letters and résumés get you a better response from employers. This will help you to present a professional image through your tool kit, which can lead to an interview with a prospective company.

- **Business Cards**

Your current company will often provide business cards. Use them to network at company functions and **also** at outside business functions. Your business cards give you an air of credibility that you are in a viable business. The same is true if you are trying to develop a freelance clientele. Go out and make yourself some business cards. This is the most appropriate and professional way to leave your contact information.

If you can't produce business cards, your clients will think that you are engaged in a hobby, not a professional endeavor.

- **Your Network**

This part of your survival kit cannot be understated. Your professional network may end up being the people left on the docks holding the lifesavers while you're drowning. Cultivate a network of professional contacts **outside** the company as well as within. This can be done through professional organizations, clubs and also charitable activities. You can even do this within your school, by getting to know your professors or teachers, who may be working in an industry on the side. You never know where your next job lead will come from, but it will most likely be through an individual who knows someone who needs to fill a position.

- **Emergency Fund**

It used to be that a good emergency fund consisted of three months' wages. Now, the financial experts ask that you keep six months' wages in an emergency fund in the event of a job loss. This is very sound advice, particularly in today's market. You will want to be able to pay your bills while you move across from one job to another. You will need to cover transport costs to interviews and continue to present a professional image, while having no income in many cases.

Building Your Emergency Fund

You need to plan properly for success ... that's why (starting TODAY) you need to start an "I Quit" account.

Here's how it works ...

Go to your local bank and open a new bank account. Sure, it might cost you an extra \$10 per month in service charges, but just go and do it.

Starting this week, put a few dollars aside every week and deposit the funds into this account. If you can afford to take \$50, \$100, \$300 or more from every paycheck, go and put that money directly into your new bank account.

What you are doing here is building up a cash reserve or your emergency fund.

Your goal? ... to stockpile enough funds that equals three to six months of your current salary.

If you are clearing \$3K per month right now, you want to aim for \$9K. You get the idea...

It might take you several months to get there, but that's the whole idea.

YOU NEED TO START DOING THIS NOW.

Why? ... The reason is simple.

If you have a nice "safety" reserve of \$9K, doesn't this give you a bit more confidence to jump change your career path?

And that's why it's called an "I Quit" account.

This is your way to plan ahead, so that someday you can say "I Quit" to your boss and "I Quit" to that crappy job that you loathe, zaps your energy and robs you of the majority of your waking hours (including precious time spent away from your family).

When you want to change careers, be ready. Be financially prepared, so that you can devote 100% of your efforts to progress in the direction you want to go without stress.

What is the next step?

Once you are on your new career path and your cashflow is steady, then...

Say 'I Quit' to your bank ...

- Pay those damn loans off
- Say 'I Quit' to Visa, MC, Amex. Pay those cards off – you don't need to be paying them 18% interest per month.
- Say 'I Quit' to your mortgage. Get that thing paid down as fast as you can.

You see, the '*I Quit*' attitude is helpful throughout your lifecycle. It is all about freedom (lifestyle freedom, employment freedom, financial freedom...). Having the freedom to do what you want, whenever you want ...whilst also having the control to determine your own destiny.

So go ahead and put a big note on your desk right now that says, "Start my I Quit account".

Your colleagues will have no idea what this means.

And, all the while, you'll be the one laughing each new day as you prepare for that glorious moment when you walk into the boss's office and say those magic two words ...

"I QUIT!"

THE BACKUP CAREER

What do all the techies tell you to do in the event of a hard drive crash? Back up your files. Well, the same is true with your career. In this dynamic and fast-moving economy, it's anyone's guess which careers will survive and flourish and which will crash and burn.

No one could have predicted that white-collar programmers would soon face massive unemployment in the United States after 9/11. We still haven't seen all of the ramifications of the housing meltdown on jobs. Will mortgage brokers and people in this industry face massive layoffs? How will they move their skill set into areas that can be sustainable if the entire industry is affected? These are the types of questions today's workers have to face and plan for ahead of time. That's where the backup career comes in.

The backup career is not your optimum career, it is the career that is pretty much recession-proof and not affected by global competition. It is the career that can provide a paycheck while you continue to pursue your five-year plan. Hopefully, if you've planned for the eventuality of a poor market, you won't be one of the people facing dead-end jobs at retail stores. It should be a career that requires a small degree of training and that you find agreeable, which can keep you floating when everything else fails.

Your backup career can help contribute to your five-year plan, if you've thought about it carefully enough. For instance, if your career choice is to be a medical doctor, then you will want a backup career in the health service field. You can become a home health aide, take a few CPR and general care courses and always have a way to make a living. The job cannot be outsourced and it will pay the bills. It can also be put on your résumé as experience in a health care field with patients.

The backup career can also be a second part-time job while you are working full-time. It can be a source of secondary income when times are tough. If you pick the right field and get only the training necessary to maintain that position, it will be a small blip in your career aspirations that might eventually help you network into the job of your dreams. They are careers that don't require tremendous training or educational commitments, but can provide a means of support.

If you find yourself lost and not moving, then you will automatically be moving backwards. Life has a tendency to take you backwards, if you don't make a concerted effort to stay focused and persist in your ambitions. That means planning for the worst and expecting the best. Always keep your feet moving and you will eventually show up where you want to be.

Some examples of great backup careers that can help in a tight spot are:

- Emergency Personnel
- Bartenders
- Assistants
- Substitute Teachers
- Daycare workers
- Home health aide
- Painter
- Home Remodeler

Some people start in these fields and find that they absolutely love them. If the job is a match, you can keep it and stop there. Or you can use these jobs as stepping-stones to other more permanent and lucrative careers.

4

DO YOU NEED CAREER COACHING?

When people used to count on being in one company for a lengthy period of time, it wasn't unusual to have someone within the company who would mentor an up and coming employee. This person would help to advise the employee on the best way to achieve some career success while continuing to fit into the company culture. Sometimes this person was a supervisor. Other times it was someone within another department. The key was that whoever was doing the mentoring, was more knowledgeable about the company and could help to steer their charges through the myriad of office politics. They could also help the employee to find ways to enhance their value to the company in strategic areas that would pay off later in the form of being just the right person to fill a new position.

Although you might be one of the lucky few to find a mentor within your company, with the dynamic nature of the workplace it wouldn't be wise to assume they will be there long term. You want someone now who understands the marketplace and can guide you to be an employee that not only can further their career in the company they are in, but also in the marketplace should the business suddenly sour. For that, you may want to hire a career coach who has a good view of the overall picture. They will take your goals into account, your present achievements and help you to make decisions in your life to get to where you want to be.

Mentorship is only one reason to get a career coach. There are many others. Career coaches can help to motivate you, when you feel that you are taking too long to achieve a particular goal. They can help sort through any psychological obstacles you've created and get to the root of your problem with advancement. If you find that you are hitting the same roadblocks over and over in your quest for career advancement, then this is the perfect time to hire a career coach. They can begin to help you find the source of the obstacles and give you the motivation to bulldoze through them, if necessary.

Maybe, you are floundering in your career. The truth is most people get into the jobs they are in to make a living. They don't give a whole lot of thought to having a career that fascinates and excites them. They may not even think it is possible.

If you are in a dead-end job and want to make a career move, but are not sure how, this is a good time to look for a career coach. They can help people start to take control of their own lives. It is a learning process since most people are taught from the day they are born to let others control their lives for them.

A career coach can even help with specific goals like getting a raise or deciding on whether to get more education. They can help you fine-tune a job that you have and like, into one that you love. So, career coaches aren't just for people who are having difficulties in their professional lives. It can be for someone who has a good job who wants to excel at what they do and bring out their best potential.

An example of this would be a person who has worked as an engineer for many years who is suddenly promoted to a management position. They may have fears about supervising people or feel unqualified. Or, they may be asked to give more oral presentations and feel uncomfortable with a greater degree of communication skills required in their new position. By hiring a career coach, they can partner with someone outside the company who can guide them in ways to get the necessary comfort level and skills required in their new position.

You also do not have to be employed by a company to seek out career coaching. You can be self-employed to seek out career coaching. Here the issues may be a lack of motivation or discipline to grow a business or achieve some business goals. Career coaches can find the roadblocks that might be undermining a business owners efforts and help them to get motivated to grow and be successful.

ADDRESSING THE OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS

What all these functions have in common is that the career coach is someone who can partner with you to address all the obstacles to success that you encounter. These obstacles can be internal, psychological mindsets that the person is not even aware of or they can be external, environmental factors that require some strategizing. Whichever career coach you get, it should be someone who is not only good at understanding the psychological issues you might be facing but also someone who understands your particular career path.

There are several types of obstacles that a career coach can help to address. They can help you get started, if you've not even given thought to what it is you want or why you are unhappy in your present position. They will partner with you and give you exercises to do to help define what might be an optimum career path for you.

They can help give you communication skills pointers to help you negotiate your salary or duties. No matter what they decide to do to help you, the coach will make it clear to you that the work must be done by you. They will only guide you, but you have to do the work and follow the recommendations to get benefit from coaching. Do not think the coach will do the work for you. They won't. It would be counterproductive to do that since they aren't there to make you do anything. They are there to get you started in taking responsibility for your own career path. It will require a lot of effort and commitment. Anything worthwhile usually does require some hard work.

THE INTAKE

The first part of the coaching session will deal with your aspirations and goals. The coach will want to find out what your main objectives are and decide whether they can help you achieve them. Some coaches will offer this intake for free, just to give you an idea of what a coaching session might be like. They may want you to fill out some assessment information, but typically coaches are not test givers. They play more of an advisor role than a human resource free agent.

BRAINSTORMING

After the intake, you and your coach will brainstorm ideas and an action plan to help you achieve the goals you set for yourself. To expand your abilities and your potential, your coach may suggest some activities that you are not comfortable with presently. You have to be open to taking on actions that can help you meet your goals, so don't dismiss them out of hand. Instead, listen carefully. Voice your concerns but also keep an open mind. Realize that your coach may be challenging you to excel and that it is up to you to meet the challenges if you want to succeed. Also realize that you will have your coach with you every step of the way, so you won't be doing it alone.

ACTION PLANS

Your coach might then set up an action plan for you that can be detailed and consist of tasks and deadlines for those tasks. The action plan should provide you with measurable goals that you can work towards in small steps to reach the larger goal you are working towards. The key here is to build your confidence while expanding your abilities and credentials. Some of the tasks may be more long term than others. Some may be weekly tasks. It's up to you to complete the tasks set before you in your action plans, preferably by the deadlines.

This is just one way a coaching partnership might progress. Coaching can be as varied as the personalities that do coaching. You can ask in the intake what kind of support you expect to receive from coaching and see if it matches your needs. Some coaches will be more flexible than others. Some will follow a rigid plan. Ask ahead of time to understand how the program works.

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CAREER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EDUCATION

One of the easiest ways to develop in your career is through education. The Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that in 2006 for every \$595/week a high school graduate earns, a college graduate makes \$962/week. That's 38% more income per week for having completed four years of college. When you look at lifetime earnings, even after paying for four years of tuition, the difference between having a college degree and not having one can severely impact your financial outlook in life.

The statistics are hard to argue with. Even the name of a college in your résumé could increase your earnings from \$595/week to \$674/week. The income steadily increases as you achieve higher levels of education.

What's also interesting is that the rate of unemployment decreases too with higher education, until it takes a slight jump for Doctoral programs. However, the rate of unemployment stated in their analysis shows a 4.3% unemployment rate for high school graduates while those with Bachelor's degrees only have a 2.3% unemployment rate.

Almost every job in the modern economy comes with educational requirements. These vary depending on the knowledgebase and level of skill required for a profession. Some career paths also require certifications and yearly reviews of those skills to remain current in the profession. If you have done your research on different career paths, you will know what those requirements are for a particular job.

If a position requires an advanced degree, you will need to determine if you have the commitment and the financial resources it takes to go to school long term. If you are looking for a lucrative career, usually it requires either specific skills or particular education requirements. The result, however, is that you will be employable after you are done going to school.

This may give you the impression that any schooling is better than none. This is somewhat true, although there are other factors that are important to consider when you are trying to use education as a stepping-stone in your career advancement.

You will want to consider the financial aspect of returning to school as well as the time factor. Education may be a somewhat safe bet, although it comes at a hefty price tag. There are no guarantees you can find financial aide or that your situation will remain constant enough to get your degree in the time that you have allotted, so consider studying through correspondence or part-time.

KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL PLAN

Any educational plan you seek to undertake should be thoroughly researched to make sure it fits your goals and objectives. You can't expect to take a course in liberal arts and get a job as a nurse afterwards. One thing you want to be very careful about, is the emergence of schools that are labeled "diploma mills." They can be online courses that offer a certification or degree, but do not require a great deal of work. They can cost thousands of dollars and are used by people who want to pad their credentials by paying someone to give them a degree. Often, this tactic backfires. It can backfire very suddenly and cause you the loss of a job and your references. So, avoid any program that is not accredited or appears too good to be true. It often is.

ACCREDITATION

All schools are reviewed by an accreditation board to be sure that the programs they offer are meeting some basic guidelines. If a school is not accredited, you can be sure that the diploma is not worth much. Usually entrance requirements are lax and the coursework is not applicable to the job market. This doesn't mean that accredited schools will automatically provide you with an employable diploma either.

BEING PREPARED TO APPLY

You may have narrowed down the schools you want to attend, but you will have to go through a rigorous application process in most cases. Each application may have an application fee to pay.

Put together a portfolio of your achievements, particularly if you've been out of school for quite some time. The application will require several reference letters, your previous school transcripts and essays. You will want to highlight any experience that might be relevant to your application.

If you have been out of school for a while, it can be a very difficult thing to get all the paperwork together in time for deadlines because you will have to get your colleagues to write reference letters for you. Which may not be wise if you are pursuing a degree in an area unrelated to your present career. You will also have to locate people who you volunteered for or friends of your family who can help you get the needed references.

FINANCES

Once you understand your educational goals, you will need to make a financial plan for meeting them. You want to understand how to apply for financial aid, the deadlines to meet and where to go to look for scholarships, if possible.

Fill out a Free Application For Federal Student Aide (FAFSA) form as soon as possible. This is a first-come/first-served program. The earlier you can file your taxes and use that information in your FAFSA, the more likelihood you can get financial aid. Send the FAFSA to all the schools that you are applying to.

Review the financial program offers that the schools make to you before deciding on which school to attend. While it's great to attend a prestigious school, it's not so nice to graduate with thousands of dollars in loans. So, keep your options open.

JOB NETWORKING

If you want to know how previous graduates used their degree, this is a valid question to any admissions officer. This will also give you an idea as to whether the degree program you are seeking will enhance your ability to obtain employment in your chosen field.

Some universities and colleges can offer some employment assistance or cooperative opportunities that can help you in getting employed, either during your studies or soon afterwards. Stay networked and in close communication with your advisor. Don't forget to look at the extracurricular activities offered by the colleges to get potential on-the-job training. For instance, if your desire is to be a journalist, you might want to seek out experience with the school newspaper.

The summer can be a perfect time to take advantage of the university's ties to other organizations. You can look for summer internships in your field to help you get the needed experience to back up the degree and make you employable once you graduate. You can even combine that with some fun overseas travel and broaden your horizons by studying abroad or teaching abroad during the summer months.

MANAGING YOUR TIME

Let's face it, all of this "going back to school" stuff is far easier when you are single and not involved in a full-time job already. If you are making a career shift, you may have a family, children and a full-time job. This doesn't make the endeavor impossible, it just makes it harder to manage.

You have to become efficient at managing your time and garnering the support of your family to help you make the shift into a new position. If the job change is to help continue supporting the family, there is no question that it can eventually pay off. However, the sacrifices made won't be just your own. You will lose time with your family and there might be resentment built up within the family over your absence. These can be more effectively dealt with if everyone is on the same page.

Don't assume that because you are in school that the other person in the relationship is going to manage your other responsibilities for you. Sit down and try to draw up schedules that meet as many needs as possible, while respecting everyone involved.

6

CAREER MANAGEMENT

As discussed earlier, today's workers are caught in a frenzy of escalating global competition, technological displacement and market forces. In order to stay on top in your field, you have to become proactive and learn to manage your career as if you are the quarterback of the game, setting up the play for the final touchdown. You can't afford to just sit back after you get a job and assume you will keep it forever or that it will never change. And ... most people would not want that anyway. It would be dull and boring and eventually lose its charm.

So, how do you work in an unstable work environment while remaining positive and in control? You don't want to get so paranoid that every little rumor from the corporate mill has you fearful of a layoff. You want to be prepared in the event of a layoff, but you also want to be certain that you are a valuable asset to your company. Don't assume you are irreplaceable, but don't assume the company is going under either.

PEOPLE AS COMMODITIES

In the corporate workplace, people have become commodities. Think of yourself as a product that you are selling to your company, day in and day out. If the product you are selling produces a benefit to your company, it will continue to buy your brand. If, however, your product isn't maintained, becomes easily replaced for less money or becomes more trouble than it is worth, then the company stops buying the product.

One of the most important functions of a company is to produce a profit. If the commodity they hold, you, is not creating some value in terms of the bottom line, then they may decide in tough times to release you and find some other way to meet your function. That's the cold, hard view of business.

PEOPLE AS HUMAN BEINGS

The previous view was what generated much of the stampede towards outsourcing in the previous years. Many positions were not only easily replaced for less in other countries, but the business owners making the switch, saw no additional benefit to keeping an American employed versus employing someone in another country. One of the biggest areas that this trend impacted was the outsourcing of technical support and customer service call centers.

Now, we are beginning to see the problem with the view of a person being just a cog in a giant machine. The end result is that workers leave those positions and seek out employment elsewhere in another sector of industry. Meanwhile, the people in another country may not understand the cultural environment of the customers they are dealing with in the United States. What results is buyers get frustrated with their purchasing experience and sometimes refuse to do business anymore.

Now, we have a trend called in-sourcing, where Americans are being hired by companies in India to do call centers so that the customers are met with someone who is culturally similar and can speak their language.

This is how many people have managed to make themselves valuable to their company as human beings again. Don't underestimate the power of your cultural upbringing and soft skills when trying to either change a career or move into another area.

KEEPING AHEAD OF THE MARKETPLACE

There are many different strategies to optimize your chances of career survival and also of getting your career to flourish. Here are several different strategies you can use ...

- **Think Globally**
When you are choosing a new career, think globally. This is not only to avert a possible outsourcing, but also to take advantage of the expanding markets. Don't pick professions that are easily outsourced. Highlight any additional languages or skills your company may need in the new global economy.
- **Have A Plan**
This has been discussed in depth already. You must have a plan, with action tasks, which encompasses not only your educational needs, but also your finances and your networking opportunities. Keep your career toolkit in good shape.
- **Know Your Worth**
A classic mistake in trading careers is to take a low-paying entry job to get a foot in the door. Don't undersell yourself. Instead, look up the average salaries for people in those jobs and when asked about salary requirements, don't highlight your lack of skills, instead indicate what the research estimates is a good salary.

- **Communicate Your Brand**
As you achieve your tasks to get to your big goal, make sure to communicate that to the people who can help you further. If you wanted a supervisory position, you can take a business program and communicate your progress to your company so that they know the value of their asset is increasing.
- **Seize All Opportunities**
Realize that opportunities don't necessarily arrive when you are ready or in the form you had envisioned. Sometimes they arrive ahead of time. Don't let that keep you from trying to seize them and make them work for you. You never know when the next opportunity for advancement will arise. If an opening arises that is similar to your goal, then by all means bid on it. It can be used as a stepping-stone to eventually get you where you want to be.
- **Network, Network, Network**
The importance of networking can't be understated. Like location, networking is the heart of a successful career plan. You need to make the effort to network within your company as well as outside your company. This will open up opportunities just waiting for the right person to show up.
- **Remodel Yourself**
Always keep an eye on the image you are presenting to your company. Make sure they understand your objectives, but also that you are a team player. You want to shine, but not appear that you are only out to make a name for yourself. Show that you will make the extra effort to remain competitive and be of value to the company.
- **Remain Flexible**
If an opportunity arises that isn't 100% palatable, don't automatically reject it. Some of the best opportunities for career advancement come through the willingness to be flexible. Companies may want to relocate you or ask that you begin to travel more. These may be sacrifices on your part, but they can help cement you as someone who is intent on hanging around and contributing to your company.

WHEN YOU DREAM OF YOUR OWN BUSINESS

All of the above strategies work for starting your own business, however, the difference being that now you are the employer! There will be no one else to provide valuable feedback on how you are doing and whether you are being successful or not.

Business owners don't work less than employees, they generally work more. They have to take on multiple roles that they can't at first hire out. Only when the business begins to make a profit can they start to consider expanding their human resources.

For potential career moves into a sole proprietorship, add the following to the list above ...

- **Organize Everything**
A good business requires excellent records. If you are not a natural organizer, you need to hire someone who is. You will have tax records, inventory records, accounts receivables and much more documentation necessary to run a successful business.
- **Review Market Trends**
You will constantly have to review the competition to make sure your offering remains competitive. You will need to be innovative with your offerings and not price yourself out of the market. Know your niche and constantly seek to expand your market share.
- **Establish Credit Lines**
Your finances alone may not be sufficient to keep the business open during a rough patch. Establish good lines of credit to help you weather a storm.
- **Have A Warm Touch**
Your business is your lifblood. Offer a personal touch to successfully compete against larger, more impersonal organizations. Leaning towards customized, personal service is something that can make you stand out in a crowd.

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TIMELY CAREER PLANNING

Have you ever had that sinking feeling when you missed a big bargain because you were a day too late? Career planning can often feel the same way. If you aren't poised to take advantage of the marketplace when the opportunities arise, you will constantly be wondering why the breaks never come your way. There are innumerable opportunities constantly being developed in the marketplace. The problem is not in the level of opportunity, it is in recognizing them and learning to take advantage of them when they appear.

KEEP YOUR SKILLS MARKETABLE

You alone know what personal skills can contribute to your company's niche. If you are a technical support person working in a pharmaceutical company, you can continue to educate yourself further to go for career advancement.

It can do a lot of good to take a look at the big picture and expand your knowledgebase into areas that can benefit the company which might not even be related to technical support.

If you pigeonhole yourself, your company won't be able to promote you. So, develop a good plan and follow it, but also always seek to widen your skill set.

- **Tier Your Experience**
Assess your present skills levels in your tasks. Maybe you are a beginning programmer, but an expert graphics designer. Make a list of your skills and assign them a level. Those that aren't expert can always be advanced through learning.
- **Evaluate Your Soft Skills**
You can really shine by adding some valuable soft skills to your résumé. Can you facilitate large groups? Have you spoken in front of large groups? How do you rate these? Can they be improved?
- **Evaluate Your Technical Skills**
What technical skills are becoming more of a requirement in your field? Do you have these skills? Can you get them through on-the-job training or will you need additional education?

- **Identify Transferable Skills**

Which of your skills do you think can be transferred to other industries? How about to other jobs? Are these other jobs more in line with your goals? If so, then concentrate on those skills more.

- **Unique Personal Skills**

These types of skills are becoming more in demand. They can set you apart from other workers and give you a brand. Some people use their heritage to highlight their personal skills. This can work in some cases, and not in others.

If you know a company needs Spanish-speaking employees to handle Latino customers, then being Hispanic can help define your brand. The best way to highlight this skill would be to add it to your résumé as ... Fluent in Spanish. This keeps your heritage out of the picture until your interview. By then, you can assess if this will be a good asset for the company or not.

Other types of personal skills can be your ability to self-motivate or a natural interest in the company's field of interest.

KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE MARKET

If you are only focused on keeping your skills marketable, you run the risk of becoming obsolete through marketplace forces.

You can do everything right ... get the right education, take on the challenging work and network among your peers, only to find that the market has completely turned around and you've been left out in the cold. The reason for this variability is that the job market is much more dynamic than before. Take a look at some common jobs that faced this dilemma.

People in manufacturing had a designated career path in blue-collar union jobs. They kept advancing their skill set, took on more job responsibility or education and thus obtained advancement. When manufacturing left the United States, these people realized they had specialized too heavily to be of any value in another market. They had to be completely retrained.

Programmers are another profession that suffered a similar fate as blue-collar workers in the past, except they were white-collar. Many programmers spent thousands of dollars of their own money becoming Microsoft certified or taking continuing education courses in languages that they programmed. The first set of layoffs came in technical support, for people who had some aspirations in computers but were working phones.

The next set of layoffs came in technologies that were collapsing ... telecom and Internet startups. While employed, these workers were highly successful. Once laid off, they could not easily shift their skills to another area.

Right now, mortgage lenders may be the next industry to hit a rough patch. These people will have to find ways to innovate their careers or to transfer their skills to other industries. If you see the writing on the wall, don't delay on making proactive choices to beat the rest of the herd stampeding out of a market segment. With a plan in hand, you can snap-up the jobs that are open in a new field before anyone else is noticing something is not right.

It's important to maintain a high degree of competency in your chosen field, but don't paint yourself into a corner either. Always have some idea of potential careers in different industries that you can transition to. Keep your interests active and seek to establish some security through a diverse knowledgebase.

TOOT YOUR OWN HORN

This may seem unseemly, but how else will people in your company recognize your skill and achievements? If you have an annual review, you can try to quantify the progress you have made on your skill set and how this benefits the company. This will continue to make a good case for keeping you employed and for promoting you when the opportunity comes forward.

The skills that you want to highlight are those that may be invaluable in your next career move. They should show a measurable effect on the company's well-being.

There are three different ways a skill can help a company ...

- **It Increases Profit**
If you can show that through your interaction with clients, you acquired a big account, this automatically contributes to the bottom line.
- **It Improves Productivity**
This is a tricky type of skill to have. You want to implement procedures and systems that can benefit the company and improve productivity, but you shouldn't make yourself the expert on them. Assign the actual management of that area to someone else. Once an increase in productivity is established, the company might fear losing the gain, if you get a different job and you are the expert.

- **It Decreases Turnover**

If morale was ebbing and turnover was increasing, you might find a way to stem the tide. This can have an effect on productivity and the bottom line. You may also end up with influence within the company from the people who are loyal to you.

No matter what skills you use, when it comes time for a review, make sure that you communicate them in **measurable** achievements. For instance, maybe through identifying a new market segment of customers you added \$100,000 to the bottom line. You can also mention that through a change in office procedures, you have cut the time of order fulfillment to less than a day. Make sure that whatever you intend to take credit for, is your accomplishment and is readily quantifiable. This will give you a good basis to negotiate your value with the company.

If after you've contributed to a company effectively for several years and you don't progress, then you need to start making that job a short-term venture. There are some companies that just don't have enough losses in their workforce to move people up the career ladder soon enough. If your goals are to be a supervisor within five years and you've taken an MBA and shown you are up to the task and still nothing opens up, then your only other option is to look outside the company. Keep your performance at a par to your normal performance, but start to align all of your options with outside employment. It may be that after you locate to another position outside the company, that your own company will begin to understand your value.

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METHODS OF CAREER TRAINING

Career training is basically anything you can put on your résumé that will help you to obtain the job you want. It can encompass all the skills we previously talked about ... technical, soft, transferable and personal skills.

If you have a good idea of what education you need to achieve your goal, then finding career training can be as easy as just looking around.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

One fruitful area of research is your own place of employment. Companies that are intent on keeping qualified employees can offer tuition reimbursement programs to their employees. You can check with your supervisor or with human resources to see which kinds of skills might advance you further within your present career path. Keep an eye open for in-house seminars, classes or training sessions that might help you become more valuable and marketable.

Often on-the-job training is not given out to just anyone. You have to show that you need the training and that it will enhance your effectiveness as an employee. If you are working on a project where you feel you need to update your skills, this can be a good reason to seek out resources from the company and your supervisor to take on-the-job training. Your supervisor is there to make sure you have all the resources you need to get your job done effectively.

PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

If you can't get the type of training at your present job, consider getting training by taking a part-time, entry-level job in your field of interest. This is a very useful way of testing out a career path to see if you will be able to keep your enthusiasm long term. Many times a career appears to be a good fit in theory, but in practice the working conditions or some other factor might turn out to be intolerable. This can be particularly true if your chosen career path might be in the entertainment field. By having a few part-time gigs alongside your full-time job, you maintain some income and security while testing the waters for career satisfaction.

VOLUNTEERING

Another way to get some career training is to volunteer with organizations within your field of interest. A good volunteer position may be a little harder to get, since they may want you to do something that is nowhere near what you envision for your final goal. If you find yourself doing menial tasks too often, seek a different opportunity. It's nice to volunteer but if it doesn't meet your occupational goals than the volunteer position is not a good match for you.

Keep in mind that any move into an industry that is not your current industry, may require some creative side-stepping. If you can locate a volunteer position that provides some exposure to the industry you are interested in and will train you in something other than menial tasks, then this is a good fit. Volunteering can still be put on your résumé and that might end up being the first stepping stone to shift from one industry into another.

INTERNSHIPS

If you are going to school, be sure to look through the organization's listings to find potential internships or part-time opportunities to get you into your area of interest. If you are working full-time this can be very difficult to do. If you are laid off, though, this can be a quick way to transfer out of one skill set into another – with a paying internship too.

Just make sure you identify the career resources within your school in the event of a layoff. If the switch you are planning to make is from say engineering to psychology, you will need to start an entire new path. This is where the school can help you get started. Realize though that these types of positions are highly competitive.

MENTORSHIP

If you are lucky enough to know someone who is willing to mentor you, then they can help you locate training resources and guide you on the best way to choose your training. They can steer you to profitable areas within a particular industry and give you a good idea on the types of skills current employers are looking for in your area.

A good mentor is someone within the company who can find you the training you want by pulling a few strings. These types of people are invaluable for helping you advance in your career. Unfortunately, people are quite busy nowadays and mentoring on the job is not as common as it once was.

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

If you are deficient in computer skills or interviewing skills, there are a number of non-profit organizations who offer training to people seeking employment. They offer low-cost courses and seminars for people who are unemployed or trying to make a career change.

THE UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE

If you find yourself suddenly laid off, you will probably receive unemployment benefits. When you visit the unemployment office, don't just use them just to lay your claim, also check out their training resources. Speak with someone there about any references they might have to state-sponsored training programs. You may find that you qualify, if your previous job is being affected greatly by economic forces.

PAID OUTSIDE TRAINING

When a field becomes lucrative, it tends to attract more people to it. This usually gives rise to paid training centers where you can get a certificate to help you appeal more to employers. But be careful, you can spend thousands of dollars and never get a full degree there. In some cases, the students do go on to get good paying jobs in their field, but that isn't always the case. Investigate these resources carefully and ask about potential job placement too.

WHERE TO TURN?

Now that you know that there are a number of different avenues to get trained in a new career, you might wonder which is the best. There is no one answer because everyone is different. Resources also vary by geographical location. You may end up having to move just to get the training you need.

The thing to do is to start making a list of people, places and opportunities that can provide you with the training that you desire. After you've narrowed the list to two or three, start contacting people in those organizations. Talk to them about your goals or how you might be able to contribute to their organization.

Once you start to contact different places, you will get a feel for what will work with your schedule, your finances and your objectives. If they can't help you, ask them to refer you to someone who can. By networking this way, they may even guide you to training resources you did not discover when you did your research. Be polite and be appreciative of the time spent with you. These people have their own goals too.

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FORESEEING CAREER TRANSITIONS

When you suffer a layoff or your company goes through bad times, you may feel shocked and angered. You may think there were no warning signs and that the world is just a spurious place. The truth is that most changes in business are not that swift. They take time and there are any number of signals as to the health of the business and the potential for layoffs. There are even personal signals that you may be feeling that you simply ignore because you are used to being defined by the current job you hold. You don't want to change and you convince yourself that there is no reason to change. Your job pays the bills and you don't want to have to exert yourself to pursue a dream that may not work out. You are risk-adverse.

The problem with the ostrich-head-in-the-sand approach to life is that ignoring things doesn't make them go away. To be utterly realistic, experts agree that people today will follow between three or four career paths as they grow and mature or the business environment changes. The days of sitting in one cubicle for a lifetime are gone. So, if this is the reality of the situation, one has to be proactive and face the music. One can't ignore the probabilities of a job displacement by being either too optimistic or feigning ignorance. It will happen to you, it's just a question of when. If you are well prepared for the eventuality of a career shift, the process can be very smooth and even personally rewarding.

If you choose to ignore the signs, then the process can be the most traumatic thing to come your way in years. The choice is basically your own as to whether you want to pick up the reins of your career and manage it to produce happiness or continue to float down some wayward stream that has no apparent direction or security.

BEWARE - BUSINESS WARNING SIGNS

Here are some things to look for to give you a good idea of what the business signs are for potential changes in your duties or your job.

- **Sales Are Off**
When a company starts to lose money, you can be sure that it will be proactive in making changes to stem the tide.

- **Less Work**
You have to go hunt your supervisor down to get new assignments. Any time an employee is being less than 100% utilized that is a bad sign. They may no longer be requiring your skills.
- **Compensation Changes**
Bonuses don't show up. Paychecks are late. Benefits are being reduced.
- **Reorganizations**
Workers are being changed from one position to another. This is like a business version of musical chairs. Whoever gets left without a chair is out. Technically, a reorganization can be a euphemism for an undercover layoff.
- **Customers Are Bolting**
If long term clients are leaving, it is possible they fear to start projects with a company they feel won't have the resources or stability to meet their commitments.
- **Closed Door Meetings**
If your supervisor is having more closed door meetings than usual, this is a sign that there are changes happening. They could be good changes, but they could also be bad ones too. Either way, change is around the corner.
- **Industry Shaken**
The marketplace has become considerably volatile. Even if your company isn't directly involved, the demise or sudden rise of other companies can influence the health of your company. An example of this is the mortgage industry putting the reigns on credit. Real estate agents, home buyers and mortgage lenders are all affected.
- **A Bad Review**
You may have done a stellar job, in your estimation, but if your yearly review is negative it could be because they want to inch you out the door. Don't ignore a bad review. It is a clear signal from your employer that they don't want you to stay.

BEWARE - PERSONAL WARNING SIGNS

Business signs can be very clear, but your own personal signals of dissatisfaction may be more nebulous. You may think that you are hiding your job dissatisfaction quite well, but it will surely impact your performance.

Here are some personal warning signs that may clue you into the fact that you need to start considering a career change.

- **Lost Enthusiasm**
If you feel you are only going through the motions, it's time to look to invigorating your career outlook. This type of attitude can show up and affect how others perceive you. The more you ignore it, the more likely you will continue to become apathetic until it shows.
- **Lost Income**
If people within your career path are making more than you are, then you need to figure out why your company hasn't remunerated you appropriately. It's possible you are not being valued as to your true worth.
- **Little Or No Progress**
If you've been clear about your objectives to your supervisor or followed a plan and are still not making headway after several years, you need to look at the reasons for this. Is it a lack of skills, opportunities or connections? Look around for a better environment, if you must. Some companies will never be able to produce the type of position you desire because someone else is already in it.
- **Discrimination**
Sadly, if you feel you've been discriminated against, fighting the company will just take up lots of time and energy. Find an environment that is less discriminatory.
- **Workplace Conflict**
If you are experiencing conflict with your supervisor or your colleagues, you may be endangering your career path. Try to find a different department or area where you are in harmony with the people around you.
- **Dislike Your Work**
When your dissatisfaction turns into something more, then you must be proactive to find a means to relieve your unhappiness. You spend the majority of your life at work, it should be personally meaningful and pleasant as well as creating a paycheck.

- **Gossiping**

If you find yourself engaging in more office gossip or chatting, it's possible you are trying to distract yourself from a job you dislike. Some people are very good hiding the truth from themselves until the axe falls.

INSPIRE YOURSELF

If you've been following the advice in this book, you know that the solution is not to wait around for things to get better. You must learn to inspire and motivate yourself to not only like your job, but love your job too! If the present situation isn't speaking to your personal passions, you can change your life to start out on a new avenue of exploration. All it takes to begin with, is to pay attention to yourself and find out what inspires you.

You can never be a victim of market forces if you have played your cards right. You can always be looking towards the future and creating your own opportunities in a manner that appears almost magical to others. That's because you took the time to understand what motivated you and you took the time to set up some contingency plans.

FREE YOURSELF

In order to be able to follow your dreams, you have to learn to free yourself from your own fears and the tendency to float through life. This requires a basic foundation of learning how to be financially responsible and practical. The two things that keep most people at jobs they hate are fear and debt. By having a plan and being proactive, you can learn to feel confidence instead of fear.

By managing your finances to eliminate extreme credit card debt or potentially risky investments, you can feel more secure knowing you can pay your debts. Save at least six months' living expenses in the bank as an emergency fund to help you get through the first initial months of a career switch, particularly if it is one that you may have planned for but came sooner than you expected.

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EXECUTIVE RECRUITMENT

There are times when you don't want to take on a career switch on your own. There a number of reasons this might apply to you ...

- You need top confidentiality
- You are in an executive position
- Positions you seek are usually not advertised
- Your industry is highly specialized

Any of these considerations might require you to find an executive recruiter. An executive recruiter will work with people who are either employed or not and they have access to companies that may be looking but aren't willing to advertise on the open market.

The advantages you get by using an executive recruiter are as follows ...

- They seek out opportunities for you
- They can give you help in the interview process
- They can provide a realistic view of the salary requirements
- Confidentiality, both for the company and for the job applicant

The best part about using an executive recruiter is that you don't pay the fee that they charge, the employer who is seeking an applicant pays it.

A recruiter can be paid for creating a short list of clients and for the acceptance of an individual who has received a job offer. Recruiters who place an individual in a job seek to maximize the potential for a good match because they can often return and recruit them again for more income later down the line.

The amount of success you have in the career path they open to you is relevant to how much influence and leverage they have in finding new applicants they can recruit.

HEADHUNTERS

The executive recruiter is also known as a headhunter. You don't have to be an executive to use headhunters. You just have to have a specialized market with recognizable achievements to your credit. If you are in a hot market, often headhunters might seek you out even when you are not looking to move from your job. Headhunters are used to source or 'scalp' talent from one company to another, especially if the talent pool is limited.

If you've never worked with a recruiter, ie a headhunter, then your best bet would be to look for recruitment agencies that specialize in placing people for specific positions or specific industries.

You want to work with one individual only. If you are contacted by several people from the same agency, let them know that you are already working with someone in their agency. Since headhunters work on commission (sometimes up to 50% of the value of your first year's salary), they won't be happy if two people in the same office are presenting you to the same client for the same job.

There will be a massive argument over who got you first and who gets the commission, should an offer be extended.

Almost anyone can get into recruitment and it is a highly profitable business when employers are hiring. When the market switches and labor is abundant, recruiters may start falling by the wayside. For this reason the industry is very vulnerable to economic fluctuations in the marketplace. People used to make generous salaries from recruiting information technology professionals. Since outsourcing began, that is not as common anymore. In order to make a living, the recruiter may begin to specialize in a niche industry.

The reputation of a recruiter is gained by the placement of highly qualified people into a company. If the recruiter has worked well with a company, they may be asked to find more applicants for a different job. While some recruiters are intimately familiar with the industry that they serve, many others are not. The quality of recruiters varies considerably. If you are working with a recruiter that understands the employer, but not your profession, you may actually need to educate them somewhat so that a perfect match can be made. It's in their interest to have the match be as close to perfect as possible, as much it's in your interest too.

HOW TO CONTACT A RECRUITER

The process of working with a recruiter is about the same as you would follow for seeking a job. You want to be as professional and as courteous as you can be. Realize that the recruiter is dealing with many more people than just you alone. Their goal is to make a good placement, not to necessarily find you a job. The jobs they can match you with are dependent on the listings they obtain from employers. While some recruiters can help you through the job seeking process, don't assume they will do all the work for you. Often, they will merely forward your résumé to a prospective employer and see if they have a bite. So, it's up to you to take control of the image you are presenting to an employer by creating a portfolio for your recruiter that interests their prospective employers.

GET A REFERENCE

If you know of someone who was recruited successfully that is in your field, then you want to get the name of that recruiter and a reference from your old colleague. Having placed one of your friends successfully, they will understand more about the industry and may have already mined leads from the previous placement to make yours a snap. Don't be afraid to ask people around you if they know of a good recruiter. If you can contact them through your network of friends, offering a good reference at the same time, it can get you in the door much more quickly.

WRITE A BRIEF COVER LETTER

You should contact the recruiter either by phone, email or snail mail. If you have a personal reference, you can call and tell them that a friend you have in common recommended them. This way they will be on the lookout for your résumé and cover letter. The cover letter for the recruiter should be brief and consist of a bulleted list of your skills. This is different to a cover letter that you send an employer. Instead of selling yourself for a particular job, you are going to be selling your skills and your level of expertise in the industry you are in. Don't forget to add some soft skills to the bulleted items too, even if your field is technical by nature. Make sure that you give some contact information and a good time of day to reach you. If you are currently employed, be sure to mention that and to make them understand that your search is confidential.

JOB MATCHES

As soon as a job match comes along, the recruiter will contact you and tell you about the position. If you are interested, you might be asked to be interviewed or take some skills assessment tests. Sometimes the skills test comes after the interview, instead of before, if the employer requires it. Sometimes the tests are from the recruiter who is trying to ascertain viable candidates and sorting the wheat from the chaff. Sometimes, there are not skills assessment tests and the company interview takes full control of the process.

After your interview, the company will provide feedback to the recruiter on whether you were a good match or not. This will give you great feedback on your job interviewing skills and how to modify them in the future. Recruiters are great go-betweens and can even handle problems like a bad reference that you listed and were unaware was hampering your progress. Since the employer gives direct feedback, the recruiter can relay that to you which you might not have ever found out otherwise.

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WORKING WITH HUMAN RESOURCES

When you are first hired, you work with the human resources department to make sure your transition is smooth. They give you all your benefits information and get you settled in. That's about the extent of most people's involvement with human resources, unless they have a difficult employment policy issue they are trying to resolve. Many people don't realize that getting to know people in human resources can be an effective way to scout out new opportunities in the company. Even if you don't know anyone personally there, the human resources department is the place that finds out about new openings faster than anyone, other than the hiring manager.

DEPARTMENTAL REORGANIZATIONS

An organization that is facing tough times may choose to reorganize specific departments and employees. In that event, sometimes supervisors warn workers that a potential reorganization is intended for that department. You may not get the specifics, but the fact that your department has been targeted is a good indication to start looking at safer havens.

You can start to look at other areas within the company and then visit human resources to see if your skills are transferable. This is being proactive in the event of a potential layoff. They may not discuss with you the actual status of your present job, but they can give you an idea of which jobs in other departments you might qualify for, if they open up.

Some companies even use human resources for outplacement programs when they do have a big layoff. The human resources department might offer some guidance on how to get your health insurance continued or what areas within the company are hiring that you can transfer to. They can provide you feedback, if you do interview with a hiring manager on how your qualifications stood up against other candidates. This will give you an idea on how to fine tune your career path.

ISSUES TO TAKE TO HUMAN RESOURCES

Your career advancement can be hampered by supervisors or individuals who have an axe to grind. Human resources is set up to make sure all the company's policies are followed to provide equal opportunity and fair employment to all employees. If you have a question on whether you are being fairly treated, you can take the matter up with human resources. They will be able to clarify the matter in a way that protects your rights as an employee.

These issues can run a wide range of topics. Some are as follows ...

- **Compensation**
If you are not being compensated in your job at the same level of your colleagues, then there may be an issue of discrimination going on. Most companies have the stated salary and compensation packages clearly listed by title and department. Check with them, if you are trying to advance your pay scale and instead, you are losing money over misunderstandings on overtime pay or the like.
- **Discrimination**
This can happen in many categories. Maybe you feel that some opportunities are being withheld from you because of your age, your gender or your race/ethnicity. If you are being discriminated, human resources needs to be aware as quickly as possible. It should be discussed confidentially and the situation resolved so that the company is in compliance with Federal laws.
- **Inquiries on Job Modifications**
Some people have an interest in job sharing or telecommuting. You can ask your supervisor to see if they are amenable to that. If they are, then you can ask human resources if there are any policies on how to go about setting up a telecommuting position or job sharing for your present position. You need to keep everyone in the loop, if you genuinely intend to take this course of action.
- **Applications**
If you see another job posted in the company that you are interested in, then usually you apply through human resources. Make sure your supervisor is aware of your application. They don't want to be surprised later.

INTERNAL HUMAN RESOURCES BULLETIN BOARDS

This brings us to the issue of the internal human resources bulletin boards. These electronic boards list openings as they become available. If the company is large, it will post all openings and their locations giving you a bird's eye view of what needs are arising and what departments are hiring. Make sure you know how to access the board and keep an eye on it.

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ONLINE RECRUITMENT

The world of the Internet has made job searching easier in some ways and riskier in others. It is easier because there are many job market portals that link employers to candidates. They allow you to search jobs in your field whether they are in your geographical area or not. They can provide a great deal of information on the current job market and how to make you stand out as a candidate.

However easily you search for your jobs, employers can search for online résumés. This makes it easy for recruiters and company representatives to find qualified candidates for their open positions. It can also make it easy for your manager to find your résumé posted online too! So, the same open and targeted structure of employment portals can be a boon as well as a risk. If you are unemployed, the risks are minimized and you want everyone to know that you are seeking a job. If you are employed, this information can be detrimental to your advancement at work. So, the case for using online recruitment centers needs to be evaluated by the individual for confidentiality and potential exposure of a job search that should remain confidential.

WHO IS ONLINE WITH YOU?

This is the hardest thing to evaluate about online job posting centers like www.monster.com. You may see an abundance of jobs in your field and at salaries that make them appear quite profitable. When you take the trouble to apply, instead of reaching an employer you may end up with a recruiter who tells you the job is filled or a scammer who is trying to make money by switching you to an illegal job opportunity. You want to take advantage of reputable online recruitment portals and job boards like www.monster.com and www.hotjobs.com, but you don't want to narrow your search to these boards anymore.

Most people get employed through a personal reference and even though the boards are useful, without a face-to-face interview, the time spent applying can be wasted time and energy.

There is a little secret going on in most companies these days. They realize the baby boomers are set to retire and that the labor pool will begin to shrink. The pain of hiring qualified workers will increase. If the economy is sour and they've had layoffs, they may still post job opportunities that they intend to fill if they get a contract or the market turns around. You can end up qualifying yourself very well with these companies only to land in their files of prospective employees for a later time.

If you are currently employed, that might be okay for you. If you are unemployed, that can be a huge waste of time for you. Remember that you are in control of your own job opportunities. Do your research on any company that wants to interview you. If you find that they are having troubles in the marketplace, it's best to avoid them *even* if they offer you an interview.

If you don't think a company is being honest or it's wasting your time, you can say that you've changed your mind and don't feel you are a good match for their opening. This way you don't spend time with a company that clearly shows they are hemorrhaging workers while continuing to interview other potential new hires. It'll cost you time and energy that could be spent interviewing with companies that have a stable financial background and it'll cost you money in transport costs too.

WHAT JOBS ARE POSTED ONLINE?

If you are an executive, you can pretty much bet those jobs won't be found online. You will find entry level jobs or jobs that are in high demand, but not executive positions.

The more desirable a job is, the more likelihood it's not advertised widely. The reason is that human resources want to target their openings to qualified applicants. If they post a job with a high salary on an online board, they will be swamped with people applying, whether they're qualified or not. So, human resources typically don't post these types of jobs online.

You can find a number of mid-level career entries there, but they may not be truly open positions or may be recruiters looking to fill their files with good candidates. This doesn't mean people don't get jobs this way, it is just that online posting on big boards have had their hay day and may be in decline now.

If you want to find jobs online, you should check out the individual websites of every company that you are interested in. They post their jobs on their website and are thrilled when someone is interested in their company as well as the job. If you are looking for government or university jobs, also check the current state or local bulletin boards that post state openings. Universities have their own internal boards and if you know someone on that list, they can send you information on what comes up. They also have other boards that are open to the public too for university jobs.

If you are an executive, you can still find websites that cater specifically to online recruitment of executives. You will probably have to pay a fee to be listed with them. They will offer the confidentiality that the open boards lack. They will have recruiters who make sure that the openings listed are real and not a waste of time.

They will seek to get the most information about the company, particularly the name of the company which is sometimes omitted in public listings. This is vital information for executives who are intent on advancing their career in their chosen field and have little time to waste on electronic goose chases.

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DO YOU WANT A RECRUITER INSTEAD?

By now you have a good idea when a recruiter is essential to your job search and when you can do without one. If you are in high demand, you may be able to find a job through the want ads or electronic bulletin boards. If this route constantly appears blocked you may want to go with a recruiter who can provide feedback on why your search is failing.

It may be a bad reference, a poor résumé or a particular skill that you lack that is holding you back. If you don't know why you aren't getting any responses to your job search, having a recruiter can help to widen your search and provide good feedback.

If you decide you want a recruiter, you can find them in professional organizations too. They often frequent these places to find new recruits. That is why part of your career plan should be to join some outside organizations that are directly related to your work. They can help put you in contact with just the right people to help your career move along in the right direction.

Another place to find recruiters is through recruiting agencies and online. You can look in the yellow pages or search for them through the Internet.

Of course, the best way to find a recruiter is through a personal reference from someone who has been successfully recruited and placed.

WHEN TO USE A PROFESSIONAL RECRUITER

If you are employed and don't have enough time or motivation to look at other jobs, but are interested in what the marketplace is doing, then you can benefit from a professional recruiter. At no time should you pay for the services of a recruiter as that fee should be paid by the employer. If they ask you for payment and you are an entry to mid-level employee, then don't use them. Online recruiters might charge a fee to see listings, but typically this is only for higher-level executive openings.

A professional recruiter is a great networker. If you don't have time to network, but know that you are being held back by a lack of attrition or other issues in your own workplace, it doesn't hurt to get in touch with a recruiter. They can network your résumé confidentially saving you lots of time in doing it yourself. They can bring out-of-state opportunities to your attention and you know that these are live jobs, if the recruiter wants to be paid.

A recruiter will brief you before an interview to give you pointers on how to present your strengths to the company. They may even give you some indication on the character of the hiring manager and the company culture. This is invaluable to making a good presentation. This is called the briefing. If you had to go it alone, no one would brief you or tell you what to expect. If you want someone in your corner while you are interviewing, a recruiter can be irreplaceable.

After the interview, the recruiter will also debrief you. They will run through what the interview was like for you and whether the job interested you. After they get feedback from the employer, they will also pass along that feedback so that you can start to pinpoint any problem areas with your interviewing skills or overall background.

WHAT RECRUITERS OFFER YOU

If you are an executive, there is no doubt that you will benefit using a recruiter. The recruiter can offer you listings that are not posted online or in the newspapers. They can give you an idea of how the marketplace is doing for your chosen field. They can even show you that you can be making a lot more by going with a different company. They will do a lot of the legwork of getting your résumé into the hands of a decision-maker.

They will put you in contact with people directly, if there is a match. They can also be a lifelong ally in your quest for career advancement. If your career plan should stall in the placement that you took, then you know whom to contact to help get it started again ... your executive recruiter.

A good recruiting firm will keep your resume active by placing it within a database. This database is searched when new openings come along. You may not hear from a recruiter for months and then out of the blue, you get a call. Once you are in the database and you are an executive, you can be sure that they will call you when a match appears. Since they work on commission and the executive positions have higher salaries, it's in their interests to keep your name on file indefinitely.

If you find a good recruiter who places you successfully, you now can also refer your family, friends and colleagues to him or her. They can be someone who can help you network more outside your own company. If you help to refer someone who is placed, you now have a contact in another company that may be hiring in the future and have a need for a person just like you. That person you referred to the recruiter will want to pay back your kindness by handing your résumé directly to a hiring manager, if possible. Never underestimate the power of good networking. It can open up doors where none appeared to have existed before.

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RECRUITMENT AGENCIES

Selecting a good recruiting agency can depend on what you want out of the experience. Recruiting agencies are listed in the phone books and online, so they aren't difficult to locate. There are a number of considerations to choosing your personal recruiting agency.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A RECRUITMENT AGENCY

You can sign up with multiple recruitment agencies. Avoid contacting more than one recruiter per agency. It can be a little tricky if you get a job description from two different recruiters that look like the same job.

Make sure you are not applying for the same job through two different recruiters, but that doesn't mean you can't sign up with more than one recruiter, as long as they aren't in the same agency.

Here are some great pointers on what to look for in a recruitment agency ...

- **Location**
Is the agency local? Do you need an out-of-state networker? Will the interviews be conducted in their offices? Then, make sure they aren't too far away.
- **Fee**
Does the recruiter charge you a fee? If so, then you might want to look for others that don't. Some executive recruiters might charge the executive being placed a fee, but it's up to you whether to take a recruiter who charges a fee when others are available that don't.
- **Industry Knowledge**
Does the recruiter have knowledge of your industry? Do you think they can put you in contact with people in your professional arena? How well can they match your skills to available positions based on their industry knowledge?
- **References**
Did you get a reference to a particular recruiter from someone who was recently placed? They can give you an idea on the expertise and effectiveness of the recruiter. The reference can also get you noticed by a more selective recruiter.

- **Length of Service**
Since many people are attracted to recruiting due to high commissions, you may want to ascertain how long a particular recruiter or company has been doing recruiting. The more years of service, the more likelihood that they have a large network of contacts.
- **Rapport**
You should have a good rapport between you and your recruiter. They should be courteous and professional and not waste your time.

WHAT TO AVOID IN A RECRUITMENT AGENCY

While most agencies are reputable, there can be some that are a large waste of your time or an outright scam. Learn how to discriminate between those agencies that can help you in your career path and those that should be avoided.

Here are some red flags that signal that you might not want to work with this particular recruiter or agency ...

- **You Pay The Entire Fee**
This can be a scam for people who pose as recruiters, but instead charge the potential employee fees for their services. These services can go from interviewing and job preparation, résumé help, to job placement. You should not ever pay the entire fee for any recruiting agency. They may sometimes charge a subscription fee to see a listing, but typically there are so many that offer this service for free, why pay for it? Employers are more than happy to pay reputable recruiters to find them good talent.
- **Too Many Interviews**
This may seem a good thing, until you realize that you are being used as filler and many of the interviews weren't even near your qualifications. Some agencies get paid by the interview, so the more people they send, the more they make. This is great for them, but a total waste of your time. Your interviews should be exactly close to your qualifications and you should have a good shot at getting the job, otherwise they shouldn't send you in the first place.
- **Asking For References Before An Interview**
Recruiters make their money through networking. Sometimes that networking is done by obtaining names from their present clients. If you are asked for references before an interview is even set up, they may be fishing for other talent, not particularly you. Talent that pays higher and is in the executive level.

- **Discussing Your Other Leads**
Don't discuss your other offers or leads with them until you have a contract. If a job is open and they are in the business of placing people and they find out about it, there's no reason they won't try to get one of their people placed instead of you. This is also common if the lead you got wasn't with their agency.
- **Little or No Contact**
Your recruiter should be actively working to place you. If you don't get a phone call after you've signed up with an agency, you are probably not being marketed. Don't assume that because you send in a cover letter and a résumé that someone else is now taking care of your job search. You still need to do your own work and keep the recruiter as just one option you are exploring.
- **Short-Term Contracts Only**
There are agencies that specialize in short-term contracts only. It's up to you to decide if you want to take this type of job. If you do, it's possible long-term assignments will not be made available to you. Once you start to contract, it can quickly become the only type of work you get.

If you want a more long-term relationship and are not in financial straits, hold out for a job with benefits and with a long-term future.

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RECRUITMENT SERVICES

There are all kinds of recruitment agencies out there, from selective executive recruiting agencies to temporary and contract worker recruitment agencies. The level of service you get from any one can vary substantially.

Listed below are all the potential services you can encounter within a recruitment agency, but that doesn't mean that your particular agency will provide this service. It is just a listing of the types of services that recruitment agencies have offered in some cases. Check with the recruitment agency you are considering to see what types of services they are willing to provide for their job seekers.

PLACEMENT

This is one service that all recruiting agencies try to provide for their clientele. Obviously, not everyone that goes to a recruiting agency will be placed. It really depends on how marketable you are and whether they have any openings that fit your qualifications. You may be marketed for a short period of time aggressively and then placed in a database, if nothing comes of it. Then, you will hear from the recruiter more infrequently. This is due to the fact that other people are coming in trying to be placed and previous placements failed. Your chances of a successful placement with any recruiting company can decrease with time, if they lose confidence in your ability to interview and get the job.

RÉSUMÉ HELP

Some agencies will help you develop a résumé that is attractive to a prospective employer and which can help you get an interview. They will offer you suggestions for the types of experience you should highlight that is more in demand in the current job market. They may ask you to emphasize other types of experience, if they feel it is hurting your chances to get an interview. If they do offer résumé help, they shouldn't charge you for it. They won't actually change the résumé for you, that's up to you. However, they might indicate what to do to make it present your strengths better.

INTERVIEW TIPS

Your recruiter will brief you before an interview on the company and the person you are going to meet. They may give you tips on how to present yourself so that you can make a favorable impression on the hiring manager. They can tell you a bit about the position you are applying for and how you might best fit into that company.

SALARY OVERVIEW

Your recruiter should know what the average salaries are in your field and what you can expect to get from your years of experience. They can tell you if the market has taken a downturn and you need to realistically revamp your salary expectations in order to secure employment. They might give you good news and tell you that you were underpaid and worth a heck of a lot more. Either way, they should have a great idea of how to handle any salary negotiations that are going on between you and a potential employer.

SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Some recruiting agencies will assess your skill level so that they can be accurately represented to a potential employer. If you are an administrative assistant, for instance, you might get a typing skills test. A programmer might have other types of tests, sometimes even chosen by the employer. This can take a bit of time, but it is a sign that the recruitment agency is invested in offering only high quality employees to the companies that have hired them to recruit talent. If you do well, you will be more easily placed.

FEEDBACK

Your recruiter will be with you every step of the employment process. They can provide you feedback about the way you handle yourself in an interview, the references you chose, your career and salary expectations and much more. Listen carefully to what they have to say to you, especially after an interview. The feedback you get from them will help you to fine tune the image you present to employers and can up your chances of getting a job offer, if the first few interviews don't pan out. As long as your recruiter has faith that you can be placed, they will continue to contact you. If you fail to take their feedback into account and blow too many interviews, they may decide that you aren't going to be easily placed and work with people who are more open to working with the feedback the recruiter gives to them.

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CONCLUSION

Planning your career is not a mystery. It doesn't require a whole lot of luck as much as it requires planning and a commitment to make a concerted effort to follow that plan. If you are not happy with your career choices, odds are you won't stay in it for the rest of your life anyway. The business markets are too dynamic and flexible today to plan for a lifetime career. Even if you do everything right, the forces of global economics can force you take a hard look at your career and make some proactive decisions.

So, let's review the simple process to start to take control of your career path.

KNOW WHO YOU ARE

This is the first step to finding a career path that is satisfying and exciting. Realize that who you are can change too, over the years and that's okay too. You may want to be an engineer for the first 10 years of your life and open a bike shop for the next 10 years. There is no law that says because you have certain skills and interests that this is the only path open to you.

You should embrace you passion and understand what motivates you to succeed. The more excited you are about your work, the more this comes through to others and helps to set you apart from all the people who just show up to make a paycheck.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

After you've decided on areas that might interest you, you want to research potential jobs to find out if they fit your criteria. You can do this through the Occupational Handbook available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' home page. Or you can look through the information available at www.careeronestop.org for information on different job titles.

All of your research doesn't have to be just on paper. You can take the time to meet people in the professions you are targeting to find out what they like or dislike about their jobs. You can attend professional organizations to meet recruiters and network with people who might already be in the profession.

There are a few items that you want to ascertain when you do your research ...

- the educational requirements
- the trend for that profession in the marketplace
- the salary associated with a particular job
- any special certifications you might need to obtain the position.

You will want to target any opportunities that can help you achieve your training or educational goals that are related to the field of your choice.

HAVE A PLAN

You should write out your five-year plan with a list of goals for each year that will eventually get you to your final goal. You can have more than one career plan, in the event that you hit a roadblock in one area that you can't bypass. They can be closely related or as different as night and day.

You should focus on one plan only until you can go no further. Then, you can take out others and see if you can tweak your final goal or transfer your skills to another goal that you also liked.

Always have your career survival kit handy. It should contain your résumé, cover letters, a copy of your plan, business cards and a list of all your networking buddies. These items should be updated periodically to reflect your most current skills and achievements.

Each goal should have tasks assigned to it that are measurable and that can be achieved. You should review your plan monthly to decide if you are on target or have slipped off the map. Once you know what you are working towards and have set up steps to achieve your goal, just follow the plan step-by-step to get there. If you encounter roadblocks that you can't seem to bypass, you might want to consider getting help with your dream.

PREPARE YOUR FINANCES

In order to implement any career change plan, you have to have the financing to do it. If you expect to spend a large period of time in pursuit of further education or training, then you want to seek out ways to support your goals financially.

If education is one of the steps on your career plan, then start to understand the FAFSA program and how to apply for financial aid. Look at how much money it will take to get the degree that you need to be qualified for a job. If you need specialized training, make sure that the money that you pay will in fact have a good return on investment.

Avoid diploma mills and don't assume that because a school offers courses that they offer job placement. Always check with the admissions office to find out what type of placement services a school offers their alumni.

Maybe your goal is to start your own business as a career path. This will require even more financial planning. You will have to be able to support yourself until the business becomes established. You will want to identify different credit resources to keep your business afloat, if you encounter cash flow problems.

Always keep at least six months' emergency funds in a bank account, in case you are suddenly laid off. This can help to make your transition smoother from one area of work to another. Having financial worries can affect your performance and your potential to successfully transition to a new career or find a new job.

GO TO SCHOOL

The statistics show that schooling is not a waste of money, if it leads to a degree. You want to make sure that the course of study you have chosen prepares you to qualify for the job that you want. You should make sure that the school is accredited and has a good reputation. You should try to find out what previous graduates have done with their degrees.

If you need to supplement your income, the school might have work or study opportunities for qualified applicants. They can also have internships available to help students pay for their tuition. Another great resource to help you fund your education is your current employer. Some companies have tuition reimbursement plans for employees that are seeking to go for further education which is relevant to the position they are currently in. If you are seeking to get into management, an MBA can help you achieve that goal and the company might be willing to share the burden of tuition.

UPGRADE YOUR SKILLS

Along with getting academic instruction, you want to continually upgrade your skill set. If you have computer skills in one area, try to widen them to multiple areas. You can do this through on-the-job training or non-profit organizations. It would be best if we could always get paying opportunities that help us to keep our skills in top shape. That isn't always possible. In that case, you can volunteer your time to organizations that might help you to develop skills that you lack. Seek to volunteer in areas that meet your professional goals and try to avoid doing only menial jobs that won't mean much to your career objectives.

GET FEEDBACK

You might get discouraged or find that you aren't making the progress that you expected, even after a year. You may want to enlist feedback from your employer, if the goal is within your company structure, to find out how to increase the chances of meeting your final goal. If you are considering a career path change, you might want to seek out the services of a career coach who can help review your plan, your tasks and find out why you are hitting roadblocks. They can offer you guidance and insight into the industry you are trying to break into. They can form a partnership with you that provides feedback and encouragement, hopefully motivating you to succeed.

NETWORK

No matter whether you are in your company, at a social function or in a classroom, you have to network to get leads on any openings for other jobs. Even family, neighbors and friends can also offer assistance with networking.

If you need a job because you are laid off, don't be shy about telling people you are unemployed. The stigma of being laid off has considerably lessened over the years, due to the number of people who have experienced a layoff at one time or another in their career.

If you want to achieve a new position in your current company, you should try to network with your colleagues and human resources. They can offer you the information you need on positions that are opening up and how you can position yourself to be the first in line to qualify.

If you are looking for a position outside your company or in another industry altogether, you can start to network through professional organizations and conventions. This is a great way to understand if a new profession is right for you or if you are merely dissatisfied with your old job. By talking to people who are already in a position that you admire, you can gain valuable mentors, contacts and even reap a job offer in the future.

If you are not a good networker, then you want to hire someone who can do it for you ... a recruiter. Recruiters are professionals who receive a commission to place you at a company. They can help you to understand the market and to better present yourself to an employer. The quality of recruiters and the services they offer can vary greatly. You will have to do research to make sure that you are using a good recruiting agency and that you aren't wasting your time.

UNDERSTAND THE WINDS OF CHANGE

You will find that the actual achievement of your goal doesn't come in a lump sum transaction for the most part. Usually, a large goal is achieved through a series of many small steps that all lead to a final outcome. For that reason, the saying that the early bird gets the worm is very true in the marketplace.

You are the one that has to know when things are changing in your environment or in your own understanding of who you are. You must not only learn to accept change, but also to embrace it. Soon, you may find that learning to ride the winds of change isn't terrifying, but exhilarating. You may be looking forward to a new career and a new outlook. You won't suffer from panic or depression, knowing that you had a plan and it will eventually work out if you take the steps to make it happen.

You will become a creator of your own job opportunities and life can become meaningful and satisfying once again.