

Looking after your career and personal development – if you don't manage it, who will?

"Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now." Goethe

Who has your interests at heart and is best placed to look after your career and personal development? YOU DO. Here are some practical approaches to help you take control and achieve your goals.

- **Know yourself – your strengths and talents**
- **Think about your career options and goals**
- **Develop yourself – take the lead and get creative**
- **Track your achievements**
- **Get connected - network**

Know yourself – your strengths and talents

Things come more easily when you're good at them and enjoy them. Work done by the US Psychologist Martin Seligman has found that people are happier if they:

- Are **engaged** in things that play to their strengths and talents. They find they are more often in 'flow', immersed in what they are doing.
- Have a **sense of purpose** - what they do has meaning for them beyond the task itself (for example I would describe making a difference to people through coaching)

You may find it hard to voice your strengths and talents or even admit them to yourself. So how can you get them clear? **Try answering these questions:**

- **What's important to you in life?**
- What do you love doing?
- Think of times when you were immersed in something, feeling successful (it could be a long term project or a one hour period). What were you doing? What skills and capabilities were you drawing on?
- **If you knew you couldn't fail – what would you do and why?**
- What things drain your energy/ do you want to avoid? (sometimes this can highlight other strengths)

Think about your career options and goals

If you have no idea what your career plan is you're not alone. Many people don't know the answer – they have possibilities and ideas but no real plan. They go through life taking opportunities as they come up.

You don't need a single answer, you can have a number of options. So make a list (or create a mind map on a piece of paper) in response to this question:

- **What are all the things you could imagine yourself doing?** (e.g. Musician, presenter, office manager, promotion, continuing in current role). What else comes to mind? – write down your wildest ideas.
- **Highlight the ones which are most appealing** and/ or play to your strengths.
- **Select the ones you are serious about** and might want to explore further.

Developing yourself – get creative

It's easy to get absorbed in doing your job well. If you do that, you could fall behind because you don't grow and develop – you may get overlooked for interesting projects or promotion. So whether it's for your existing role or for one of your possible options, ask yourself:

- **How would I rate my skills currently?**
- **What more do I need to learn and develop to be successful/ more successful at this?**

List your key development goals as outcomes (e.g. When I have become skilled and comfortable in building relationships with new clients) Then get creative about how to get there.

Many people think first about training courses. Ask yourself – **what other different ways can I think of to build my skills and confidence in this area?** (In and outside work). Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Taking time to reflect on something you've done (a project/ task) and think about what you did well and what you would do differently next time
- Reading (books or internet materials), listening to CDs, watching youtube videos,
- Observing others in action,
- Find yourself an internal mentor/ coach who has the skills/ experience you want to develop
- Taking on a responsibility such as leading a social group,
- Going along to free local events and seminars (e.g. Chamber of Commerce, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, local networking groups)
- Evening classes
- Keep a learning journal – what you've done, what you learnt and how you will apply it.

Track your achievements

It's not bragging – being clear about what you're good at means you've got more chance of going for roles that play to your strengths. It's easy to forget things you've done and learnt. You'll need this if you ever write a CV, have an appraisal or go to an interview.

- Keep a log of what you've done, how you contributed to it and what the results were.
- Note down why you are pleased/ proud as well as what you've learnt that you will do differently in future – keep it balanced.
- Have a book that you keep for this purpose and add quotes and emails that others send you appreciating what you've done.

Get connected - network

If you are thinking about changing your role or even taking a different path, talking to the people you spend time with at the moment may not be the answer. Think of people you know who know something about the areas you are interested in (or may know people who are). If you're considering something different you need to find out more before you can decide if it's really for you.

For tips on networking and making connections read the ideas on networking [make this active link to those articles on the site]

More resources

- Working Identity; Unconventional Strategies for Reinventing Your Career: Herminia Ibarra
- Your Best Year Yet; Make The Next 12 Months Your Best Ever: Jinny Ditzler
- What Colour Is Your Parachute; A practical Manual for Career Changers and Job Hunters: Richard Nelson Bolles
- Build Your Own Rainbow: Workbook for Career and Life Management: Mike Scally and Barrie Hopson
- Now Discover Your Strengths; How to Develop Your Talents and those of the People You Manage: Marcus Buckingham & Donald Clifton
- Feel the Fear and do it anyway: Louise Hay

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