

## Top Ten Tips for Taking Control of Your Career

It goes without saying that the number one thing you need to do to manage your career within an organization is to work hard and do a really good job, exceeding expectations wherever possible. But that in itself is not enough to actually take control of your career and achieve your aspirations.

Here are my top ten tips for taking control of your career (without necessarily leaving your organization):

### **1. Be clear on what's important to you in terms of your career**

We can often be very focussed on all the things that we're dissatisfied with in terms of our career but a lot less clear on what that means in terms of what's important to us and why. Put aside time to reflect on your career to date and the decisions you've made. Self-assessment activities or psychometric tools and working with a coach can help you develop your self-awareness and gain insight into what's important to you in relation to your career.

### **2. Develop a picture of future success.**

As well as being clear on what's important to you, you need to be clear on what you want from your career. Project yourself into the future and imagine that you are totally satisfied with your career. Develop a picture of all the ways that your aspirations would be being met. This picture of future success sets the direction towards which you can focus all your career development efforts. Of course, life is changing all the time and your picture of future success will change with it so you will need to review it regularly.

### **3. Focus on the steps you can take in the short-term**

As mentioned above, life is changing all the time so it is impossible to develop a long-term career plan that is structured and predictable. Instead, you need to focus on those concrete things you can change, specific skills you can acquire or particular tasks you can complete in the next 6 to 12 months which will take you in the direction you want to go.

### **4. Recognize the progress you have already made in your career**

Whatever stage you're at in your career, it can be safely assumed that you have made some progress already, that you're already on the way, and that you have at least some of the skills and resources you'll need to make the progress you wish to make. Recognize the progress you have already made in your career, identify those things that have helped you get where you are to date and build on those things that have worked well for you.

### **5. Do your homework**

There's no point thinking about your own strengths and aspirations without thinking about how those could align with the goals and ambitions of your function, organization and industry. With your picture of future success firmly in mind, think about your organization's vision, goals, opportunities and challenges. How could your picture of future success fit into your current organization? Does the role you want to develop already exist, at least in part, within the organization? If not, how could it add most value to the

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organization? How could it help the organization achieve its vision, deliver its goals or respond to the key trends in the industry?

### **6. Identify the key people you need to influence**

Taking control of your career is not just about what you know and want, it's also about who knows and wants you. Progressing towards your picture of future success requires you to identify the people you need to influence to shape your role. This could include your manager who can approve a simple expansion of your current role, or it could be people and groups who need to believe in the possibilities of the new role you want to shape. What strategies can you use to raise your profile with these key decision-makers and demonstrate your credibility?

### **7. Continually develop the knowledge, skills and resources you need**

Organization processes are normally designed to achieve the needs of the organization not your career fulfilment. However, with the direction and energy of your picture of future success, you can more assertively pursue formal and informal opportunities to take training, meet people, and investigate opportunities that align with your career aspirations. Don't limit yourself to your own industry sector. Beg, steal or borrow great ideas from other environments. Keep up to date. Read widely, make useful contacts and go to exhibitions and conferences.

### **8. Raise your profile in your organisation by making the best and most visible impact you can**

Learn the art of self-marketing and develop your "personal brand" making sure that you communicate three key messages: (1) what you do well; (2) how you make a difference; and (3) the kinds of challenges and projects you'd like to take on so your career will develop.

### **9. Find mentor(s) and sponsor(s) to support you**

To make progress in your career you will need the help, support and encouragement of others. Take some time to identify those individuals who could assist you in some way. Find a way to inform them of your aspirations and career goals and ask their advice on how best to make progress.

### **10. Build your network and develop relationships**

Even with the speed, ease of access, and global reach of information, people still make decisions based on personal experience and relationships. We want to know, like and trust the people we work and partner with so people will rely on their own experiences with a person and the references of those they trust. Your challenge is to take advantage of this situation by getting connected and expanding your network.

Above all, taking control means taking action so have a plan and make it work for you. An employer is responsible for getting the best out of you, but no one else will look after your career but you.

Remember, there are three types of people in the world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen. And those who ask, "what happened?" When it comes to your career, which do you want to be?