

Stay ahead in your career



Career management is a philosophy, a way of thinking, and an attitude. The essence of successful career management is to establish a firm foundation on which to build. Self-knowledge is that foundation stone. Remember the Thomas Edison's dictum about success being 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. There is a Thai saying that experience is a comb, which Nature gives to man after he is bald.



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As a general rule it is prudent to accept the fact that no matter where we work, we are always in competition with millions of similar businesses capable of doing the same work with greater eagerness. The globalisation and information revolution have brought a deadly meaning for our careers. The sad news is that nobody owes anybody a career and thus one has to own a 'career' as a sole proprietor. In our career, one of the core principles that stands out from many others is to take responsibility for everything that happened in our lives. Key here is responsibility - to be able to respond. Every person, whether he is an employee or self-employed, is like an individual business. Our career is our business and one is its

CEO. Like a CEO one must respond to market forces and competition through differing ways, protect from harm and position to benefit from changes in the operating environment. Take control now and you will be better motivated, have more energy and discover that you are of value.

Managing career expectations

Career management is a philosophy, a way of thinking, and an attitude of mind. It is a process through which you move. For many, it requires a radical change in thinking about themselves and their work. The essence of successful career management is to establish a firm foundation on which to build. Self-knowledge is the foundation stone of a successful career. There is a Thai saying that experience is a comb, which Nature gives to man after he is bald. This saying is indeed true. Following can be of much help in managing our career expectations:

- 1. Go for grassroots level experience:** I started my career in industry as a factory accountant in a plant located in a remote place near Ranchi. Being a bachelor, I had to struggle to find food but nevertheless relentlessly pursued for about five years with my mission to learn the basics in factory operations and accounting. Several

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years later, I realised the value of such grassroots level experience.

2. **Deserve to desire:** One needs to go through the period of struggle to perform various tasks with excellence. This struggle starts by taking responsibility in routine areas such as invoicing, bill passing, reconciliation, inventory verification, filling columns in daily activity reports, cash disbursement, etc. that is categorized as not so exciting for us. It is this struggle that brings reality to our expectations.
3. **Win with fairness:** Life is competitive and one plays to win. One must, however, strike a balance. Will we win at any cost? In pursuing one's endeavour, each person must think about values. Winning without values provides dubious fulfillment.
4. **Enjoy work:** The greatest fun is in hard work. Work and career is all about reaching your full potential. This in itself leads to enjoyment and fulfillment.
5. **Care for your health:** A professional career is indeed very stressful. Good health is like a credit balance in the bank. Grow it, maintain it, but do not allow its value destruction. The penalty is very high in later years. Direction is more important than distance.

Managing career shifts

Everybody realizes the existence of turbulence and the need to adapt to such turbulence. This turbulence in the work place brings with it career inflection points. The defin-

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ing point of taking action in our career determines whether it bounces upward or slumps into decline. This situation is called a career inflection point. In this period there is a profound shift in the operating environment that requires one to respond with action. Though such action may not cause discontinuity in our career, it may still unleash forces that in time will have a lasting and significant impact. Globalisation is a key example in this regard. Career inflection point happens to

everyone. To find out whether one is facing a career inflection point one must be alert to the changes in the environment. Often one does get mired with the shelter one gets in an organization that one is employed in and this tacitly relinquishes responsibility in the interest of our employer.

One must train to look for strategic inflection points that may affect our career. Be a paranoid about one's career. One way to do this is to act like a CEO to seek outside views and stimuli.

Actions such as attending industry conferences, networking with colleagues, reading periodicals and more will enable one to determine whether one has reached the career inflection point. One must continually question the tacit assumptions underlying our daily work. Success in navigating a career inflection point depends largely on the sense of timing. It is quite likely that these shifts may still compel one to deny the very existence of such changes. Such denial can either come from the inertia

of success in career that one has attained or perhaps the fear of the unknown in making a change may force one towards status quo. Either way, denial can cost us time, causing one to miss the optimal moment for action. Simply stated, the early bird gets the worm; late-comers get the leftovers.

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impacting one. Look for opportunities that actually takes advantage of the changes. Ask questions on the outlook of the industry, its importance to one from a career standpoint, skills needed to progress in the career and seek a role model to shape our career. These questions will give one the clarity and conviction to cross this career valley. Go with the flow rather than fight it. Change is about taking risks and understanding that sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. The art of being successful is to maximize the wins and minimize the losses.

Going through career inflection point calls upon understanding the environment, determination to take control of our career, aligning our skills to the new world and resolve to fight fear and anxiety of change. It is like immigrating to a new country. At times looking back may be tempting, but it is counterproductive. Stay away from bemoaning the way things were in the past, as it will never come back. Pour one's energy into adapting to the new world, into learning the skills to prosper in it and into shaping around one.

Selecting the best fit

Many of us do get caught in the myopic syndrome of being found fit for any opportunity that one seeks to hunt. One needs to stay away from any such provocations to make snap judgments. Some of the tips that are worthwhile to consider are:

■ **Expand the horizons:** Many of the talented professionals may be actively pursuing practice, teaching and employment as optional

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opportunities. In each of these options one must carry out due diligence in order to map the individual character and goals to determine the best fit.

■ **Be consistent:** Create a rating system for relative skills and competencies. This will enable one to focus on harnessing the superior skills and competencies.

■ **Do not rush to judgment:** Attributes such as leadership, motivation and interpersonal skills aren't often communicated through a resume.

■ **"Sell" our talent:** The most competent may be evaluating more than one opportunity, so make sure to evaluate why one is the best fit for such opportunities.

■ **Do not procrastinate:** If you have lost a potential opportunity to competing offers in the past, perhaps procrastination may be the culprit. Moving along the process not only enhances our ability to secure the best opportunity, it also improves overall productivity.

■ **Winning plan - Ask for feedback:** Ask superiors, peers, coworkers, and customers on how one is doing and ask them how to do better. A little feedback goes a long way. Asking early and asking often should be our philosophy.

■ **Making a good first impression:** First impression matters in our pursuits. In this external appearance, maintaining good eye contact, being yourself without self-praising and listening more than talking are important aspects that needs to be practised.

Ways to grow

In the old days one was rewarded for managing more people. In the new game, people float from project to project, from team to team. Job definitions become blurred, titles become almost meaningless. What matters is what you know and how well you apply it to the business and how much you get paid. Those who play this game well are most likely to rise up and grab one of those increasingly scarce and lucrative jobs.

■ **Love what you do,** which entails figuring out who you are.

■ **Never stop learning** about new skills and processes.

- Try to get international experience even if it means only a short stint overseas.
- Create new business opportunities. It could lead to a promotion.
- Expect more raises, but fewer titles and fewer people reporting to you.
- Be really outstanding at what you are doing now, this week, this month.

Surviving a job hunt

Interviewing is like dating with a lot of rejection along the way. Retaining our morale up without allowing it to sink into the bottom of the abyss is key to reaching the ultimate goal. Do volunteer work, avoid pessimists, and don't beat yourself up if the job hunt is moving slowly. Some more ideas that one can consider are:

- Contact your references to get leads on new opportunities. Try to find out if you do some work for them. In fact, taking a creative approach to meeting new people, and casting a wide net, can keep you feeling connected to the working world.
- Volunteer your services to a worthy organization or cause. It is also a great self-esteem builder besides complimenting our resume with a fresh network of people for building job-market contacts.
- Containing financial woes is an important task. Find productive activities while you're job hunting.
- Avoid negative people. Keep in touch with friends and colleagues who think more of you than you think of yourself. They will inspire and encourage you.

How to stay ahead in a down market

In the face of all the negative news

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stories about the job market, there is a temptation to throw up our hands, thus leading one towards depression. This situation somewhat gets provoked by the news media that keeps haunting one with the outcomes of a sluggish economy. Here are some ideas to stay upbeat in a sluggish job market:

- Seek out success stories. Always think of people who've found new jobs, and ask them about their experiences. Ask them what helped them to stay positive and focused, and then try to internalize their approach. This will reinforce in your mind the fact that, even in these tough times, people are find-

ing jobs.

- Set short-term, attainable goals. Create weekly, manageable goals that take you towards the ultimate goal of finding a job. Noting your productivity and accomplishments will help you stay motivated.
- Enlist a job-search mentor. Find a close friend or former colleague whose opinion you respect to 'coach' you. Review with him your job-search plan and weekly goals to make sure they're realistic.
- Seek out ways to stay busy. Keep your skills current in your field. This is perhaps the most crucial step of all.
- Avoid taking cover. Do not hide behind a computer. Work hard to increase or maintain the visibility through contacts.
- Build a circle of allies. Fortify your current relationships and work on making new ones. Allies will be helpful in providing leads on new opportunities.
- Adjust your attitude. Do not panic. Realign your strategies to pursue your goals. Roadblocks should be perceived as opportunities to change ways.

The road to success

Success or failure the choice is ours. Success is indeed a journey that is never ending as it involves coping with unusual problems. Success is not about winning even though this happens to be the widely held perception. Continue to dream all the way courageously to achieve unending success despite setbacks and failures during this journey. Every one of us experience downtimes in our career. Most of us have also felt let down or failed at times. The difference

between those who succeed and those who fail is in the 'attitude'. Remember failure is never final. Sterilising the attitude of the mental bacteria of negative thinking brings possibilities or opportunities. This enables us to engage in possibility thinking to achieve success in our endeavours.

According to Winston Churchill, victory comes to those who work long and hard, who are willing to pay the price in blood, sweat and tears. Hard work is the basic building block of every kind of achievement. Without it, everything is pointless. If you look closely at all organizations, all great people, the one common denominator that runs through them is work ethic. The bottom line is that nothing meaningful or lasting comes without working hard at it. It is important for one to establish a strong work ethic to be able to accomplish things one never dreamed possible. Some of the key steps to be successful in our endeavours are:

- Build self-esteem
- Set demanding goals
- Discard fixed conventional ideas
- Always be positive positive attitude comes from love & respect
- Think of how to do it, not why it cannot be done.
- Establish good habits there are no holidays in life
- Master the art of communication real passion makes communication easy
- Learn from role models... excitement is contagious
- Thrive on pressure apply the pressure in every part of our life
- Be ferociously persistent never

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- doubt whether you can do the job
- Learn from adversity thrive on toughness
- Never let success sabotage your dreams survive your own success

Perseverance will pay

Staying ahead in our career requires a rhythmic approach like a ballet or music. Mastering the rhythms through diligent practice provides the wherewithal to overcome any situation. In any endeavour, the

way to win is to know the rhythms of the opponents and apply the rhythms that the opponents do not expect, producing formless rhythms from rhythms of wisdom. In this pursuit one needs to learn to see everything accurately. Being deadly serious by mastering the art of overcoming any situation brings achievement of our goals and objectives.

The book *Success Secrets* by Mark H Mark H McCormack talks about drawing a Career Curve in sports. There are four learning curves that recreational athletes follow on their road to mastering a sport. One is that of a Dabbler who enthusiastically starts to take part in a sport but soon abandons it as his enthusiasm level wanes out. Then there is the Obsessive who starts by making tremendous progress and pushes himself mercilessly to maintain the growth. Eventually he too burns out by injuries. There is the Hacker who becomes adequately skilled at a sport and then is satisfied to maintain that plateau. Then there is the Master who realizes that excelling in sport is a constant tug-of-war between progress and frustration. I draw this reference as there is a parallel between success in sports and success in one's career. Most of our careers tend to follow similar curves. It is thus important that one must determine how one should manage his or her career.

I am a big believer in Thomas Edison's dictum about success being 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. The moral that ought to be plastered everywhere: 'Tomorrow will take care of itself if one does an excellent job today'. ■