

How to Manage Your Career

It's important that you see your career as something you manage. Your organisation will support certain aspects of your career development, such as learning new skills, acquiring relevant knowledge, etc. But it's ultimately your responsibility to ensure that any unfilled needs are satisfied in order to help you feel motivated, happy and to perform well at work.



Your career may well be the primary vehicle for satisfying many of your personal needs, i.e. your need to feel a sense of belonging, to feel appreciated and to achieve your potential. While we all have different interpretations of these needs, your job(s) can play a key role in satisfying them.

Steps to managing your career

While some people might plan exactly what they're going to do in their careers and how, it's more common for careers to evolve out of self-exploration and opportunity. The following guide is designed to help you review where your career is now, and make any changes you feel are necessary to help you progress.

1. Identify your personal drivers

Step one is to understand your primary needs and drivers. Ask yourself: "what do I need from my career?" Think about the part your career plays in your life compared with other aspects, e.g. family. Does your job need to have a certain degree of flexibility, for instance?

Also consider what will make you feel truly fulfilled – what are your measures of success? And how many of your needs do you feel you're currently fulfilling?

Ask yourself: "what do I know about myself that will help me make good career decisions?" What are your preferences regarding:

- working environment/culture, industry or sector?
- working with people and management?
- location, hours of work, holidays etc.?

Reflect on your personality. How well does your current career play to your particular characteristics?

What are your personal values or beliefs? How important is it to you that the work you do fits with these?

2. Audit your talents

It's important to maintain a record of the achievements, skills and other competencies you develop throughout your career. **Journaling** is a really good way to do this. Keep a note of all relevant development activities, events, responsibilities and achievements so you can keep your CV up to date:

- What skills, experience and knowledge have you acquired (and would like to acquire)?
- What responsibilities have you had?
- What have you achieved? Consider your outputs and the outcomes from your various endeavours.
- What are your key strengths?
- What has been the highlight(s) of your career/life to date?

Remember to include your experiences and skills acquired from relevant leisure and social activities, not just work.

3. Discuss your career ...

... with your manager. A career discussion with your manager can help you work out the best ways of bringing the opportunities you are looking for into your current role. Be clear in your own mind what it is you want to achieve and present some suggestions or options. You should work in partnership with your manager to discover solutions that are mutually beneficial. Be realistic and open to feedback and advice. Remember, your manager will have objectives to meet and boundaries to work within.

... with your colleagues/friends. If you're struggling to find direction or answers to your career questions, ask your friends. If you feel frustrated and not sure how to take the initiative, ask the people whose opinion you value what they think you are good at or should be pursuing.

... with your family/partner/etc. Your career will impact on the people in your life outside of your job. Their opinions will be valid and they often have a good insight into your true needs.

4. Develop your knowledge

The more you know about yourself, the easier it is to identify the right career opportunity. The more you know about what's available, the greater choice you'll have. It's important, therefore, to be knowledgeable about your field of interest and to research other areas to explore any potential opportunities.

When considering your career options and choices, do you know what skills and experience you need? Do you know enough about the industry or sector to gauge whether opportunities are easy to find and the operating environment will suit you? Investigate this by:

- looking at the job market and noting the requirements for the type of job you would like to do.
- tapping into your network for contacts in your field of interest.
- attending events, meetings, exhibitions etc.
- reading relevant journals, magazines and publications.

5. Exploit opportunities

If you feel that your talents are not being fully utilised or developed, look for opportunities where you **can** apply your skills or gain experience. For example, volunteer to organise an event or be part of a working party, join a project team, offer to help induct new team members or overhaul ineffective systems or processes.

Keep your eye on internal bulletins for vacancies or secondment opportunities. Ask colleagues in other departments about any future opportunities and ask them how best to make your interest known. Ask your manager about job rotation or shadowing programmes.

6. Increase your visibility

Not all career development opportunities are easy to spot or create. In order to make sure you're considered for any that arise, you need to increase your visibility within the organisation through self-promotion. Market yourself and demonstrate your talents wherever possible. Exploit the opportunities that come your way, and try to create your own. Think especially about promoting your ambition and potential in order to find opportunities to develop your skills and knowledge. For example, if you want to manage others, you'll need to demonstrate that you are responsible and have good interpersonal skills. Some additional suggestions are to:

- participate actively and positively in meetings.
- get involved in events and team activities, e.g. exhibitions, social events, charity work, staff council meetings etc.
- offer to buddy, coach or mentor other team members.
- get to know people at all levels in other departments.
- write articles for in-house newsletters and/or blogs.

7. Network

Networking can be done both internally and externally. It involves building a directory of contacts with whom you can build productive, long-term, mutually beneficial relationships, and call on each other for advice, information, help or support.

Some networking top tips:

- Make the most of any networking opportunities in order to find new contacts to add to your network. For example:
 - join a professional association
 - keep in touch with former colleagues
 - participate in web forums or networking groups
 - attend events

- Talk to your contacts about yourself, your career and your skills in a way that is clear and memorable.
- Find out as much as you can about your contacts so that you can do your best to help them in return.
- Work at maintaining relationships. Get to know your contacts on a personal basis and keep in touch regularly. Don't just contact them when you need their help.

8. Check your progress

In order to feel satisfied in your career, it's important to regularly reflect on where you are, compared with where you would ideally like to be. Of course, your organisation's performance/appraisal milestones present a good opportunity for self-reflection. But evaluating your progress is equally something that you can do yourself at any time, and can be particularly relevant at times of personal or organisational change. Some key questions to ask yourself include:

- to what extent does my current situation meet my needs, desires and preferences?
- how much of my talent is being used/developed?
- how could I improve things, e.g:
 - by making adjustments to my working style
 - negotiating some changes to my current job
 - identifying and exploiting opportunities to address any gaps
 - changing my role
 - or even deciding that I need to move on to continue to further satisfy my needs?

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