

Now's the time to set career goals

Linda White
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You've cleared space on your desk for your new calendar. As you stare at the pages not yet splattered with coffee or covered in doodles, you wonder if this is the year you'll quit smoking or lose weight.

But have you given any thought to setting some career goals?

For some, it could be finding a job they really love, landing a promotion or earning a raise. For others, it could be working fewer hours or simply doing less of what they don't like and more of what they do like.

Take stock of strengths

Taking stock of your strengths is a good starting point.

"There's tremendous career power in understanding what your best strengths are and accepting them," says Mary-Frances Fox, president of Work Creatively in Toronto. "Have a good handle on what you like to do and your favourite kinds of problems to solve."

Ask yourself the following questions: What's easy for me? What do I always focus on? What do I naturally gravitate towards? What's clear for me but more difficult for others to grasp?

Once you understand your strengths, consider how you can use them to set goals for the year ahead and be prepared to share them with your current supervisor or prospective employer.

"It's good to start revealing your strengths in a good and interesting way," Fox says. "If you keep it a secret and don't run it up the flagpole, chances are your employer's not thinking about what you like to do."

Your strengths can set you apart from others with similar experience or designations. "Companies don't hire just to fill a spot anywhere ... You need to draw employers a picture of why having you around is better than not filling a position," Fox says.

She points to the following as strengths an employer wants to hear about: the ability to save time, the ability to make and/or save money, the ability to nurture relationships with customers or as a member of a team, being efficient and being innovative.

"If you can show them how you can save time and money, then you're talking 'boss talk' rather than like an applicant," Fox says. "That makes you look more valuable, either in a company you're currently working for or in a new company."

Mary-Frances Fox is president of Work Creatively Career Advisors Inc. She can be reached at (416) 922-4476, (888) 315-0003 or mffox@workcreatively.ca.