

## Steer Your Editing Career

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Speaking before a full-house at the March 24 EAC Toronto branch meeting, Mary-Frances Fox began her talk on career management by giving the following advice: "Have a career plan, an action plan, a dream with a deadline."

While at the helm of Work Creatively, a career-management coaching firm, Fox has helped many employees and individuals to navigate career challenges. She observed that career management concerns not only freelancers or people about to leave an in-house position, but also those staying in their job.

### Know Yourself and Your Skills

Knowing yourself, your strengths, and your limitations plays a key role in successful career management. "At all times," Fox said, "know and be able to articulate what's unique about you—your passion, strengths, skills, and goals." In looking at your own work performance, ask yourself: "What conditions help me perform best?" These conditions can include the people, management style, culture, and location of a job. This question applies also to freelance editorial work.

As part of this process of self-understanding, Fox suggested another style of identifying oneself: "Describe what you do, focusing on the value of your work, without mentioning your job title or employer."

Probing deeper, Fox also gave a set of questions to identify your "moneymaker," or your most profitable skills within what you do. These questions deal with why you work in a certain field (in the case of editors, a genre or type of publication), and what differentiates you from others. Be honest with yourself in understanding how you handle and solve problems, she suggested.

Understand the type of problems you enjoy solving. "Above all," Fox said, "know clearly what comes easiest to you, and whose needs you understand most." Armed with this self-understanding, you can steer your career to make your limitations irrelevant. As you learn more about what you want to do, concentrate on those skills—build on them and market them as your forte. The goal is to surround yourself with opportunities to do what you are great at, and get rid of the need to do what you don't do well.

### Communicate Your Goals

Fox introduced various easy methods to ensure that your communications assist your career goal. The four "AIDA" steps work effectively in preparing a cover letter. The acronym stands for Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. In your cover letter try to build rapport by citing what you know about the company and its services. Then introduce yourself, your expertise and strengths, and why you're a good fit for the job. Next, illustrate your accomplishments, stating the results your actions produced in solving a problem or situation. End with a request for an interview. In your follow-up, be sure to say something interesting to help them remember you.

An easy way to illustrate your accomplishments—in either written or spoken communications—is to use "WAR" stories. These are three-part stories that describe what happened, the Action you took, and the Results of your actions. Another strategy during interviews with potential employers or clients is to "act like a consultant—a solution provider." Fox admonished her listeners: "Don't talk about duties, but focus instead on results." Similarly, place the emphasis on the potential good you could do for the company, not on your history.

### Take Advantage of Networking

Underscoring how invaluable networking is, Fox mentioned that "two out of three jobs come from those who hear about you." Phone referrals work more effectively than resumes in landing work. The latter account for only 25 per cent of available work, since "good jobs are rarely advertised." Fox added that management typically approaches business and professional networks when a position or job becomes vacant. Failing that, the company then goes to an agency or places an ad. The key, Fox suggested, is to build and maintain a "success circle" of 25 to 50 people who know what you do well and what you love to do. Cultivate this circle, and keep them updated on the direction you want to take. These people are your "career insurance," and the best promotional force you can have. The next time they come across someone looking for an editor, members of your success circle will call your name to mind.

### Market Your Services Effectively

An improved marketing strategy results in more options and opportunities. Sharing her marketing expertise, Fox discussed at length the basic four Ps of a career-marketing management plan: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion.

Whether you are an employee or your own boss, view yourself as a product and be able to articulate your strengths, qualities, interests, and goals. A key aspect of marketing your services, Fox suggested, is to be available. "Go to places where people who need your services will find you," she explained.

"Broaden your contacts, not only among your peers, but also with other groups--especially where there are no editors." Part of this process involves education, because-as Toronto member Robyn Packard mentioned in response--other people don't necessarily know what editors do.

### An Exercise and a Testimonial

Sharing another useful tool to make self-marketing easier, Fox asked audience members to trace one of their hands on a piece of paper in order to write down what she calls Messaging at Your Fingertips™. Each fingertip stands as a reminder of things you can say about yourself and your career: your specializations, contact base, approach to work, passion, and market knowledge. If you draw a blank when you should be describing yourself professionally, simply look at your hand.

At the end of this instructive talk, a member of the audience who had attended a similar lecture by Fox in the past testified to the effectiveness of the strategies discussed. Following the guest speaker's advice had resulted in four job prospects, she said. Inspired by this success story, and the useful tips shared, the attendees left the meeting with plans to set in high gear their career-management goals.

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