

## Career management planning

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In nearly 10 years of consulting to employees and individuals going through career problems, I have found that marketing principles and actions can get a person out of the most hopeless circumstances, and generate more and better options for them.

Like marketing management, career management is a strategic discipline - the steering of your personal product, price, distribution and promotion.

You can't hand off your career to anyone else - a healthy career is about knowing where you'll add the most value and getting better at negotiating what you want from employers.

Career is a big concept which, until lately, companies only brought up when hiring or firing. Meanwhile, it has always been on the side burner for employees - how is *my* career doing - where am I heading - am I happy - how can I get a life - what to do about the new boss--and so on.

Once the economy recovers, you'll see employers offering career coaching because they need to tap into your talents. Companies require productivity and the war for talent made them begin to think on a larger scale about capturing human energies. The writing is on the wall- individual passion and ability are a frontier where companies need to boldly go. And if they can keep good people *by* helping them have the career they want to have, so much the better.

You can encourage your management in its nascent attention to your interests, strengths and career and personal goals. Manage up; talk it up, open up. Help them see how best to

Here are the basic 4Ps of any career marketing management plan. Do one every year regardless of your situation - whether you are looking or not. Share the highlights with your boss, work contacts and the people closest to you.

### Product

Begin with knowledge of yourself, fleshed out *by* research into corporate needs. Essentially, work means solving problems. And all organizations - large, small, profitmaking or even charities - face the same problems.

There are just four big ones - making money, saving time and money (being efficient), finessing external or internal relationships and coming up with new ideas.

So, which problems do you care about most? To be most productive for an organization, what should they have you do?

A key 21st century self-management skill is to know and articulate your strongest interests, qualities, strengths, goals and (not least) needs. What is the "fit" - based on your personality and personal goals - the working conditions (culture, environment, management style, tools, terms) you thrive on? Your career fulfillment and the employer's business needs should intersect, and at that point, compensation discussions take on a different meaning.

### Price

Learn how to put a price tag on the business value you contribute.

Experience itself is a merely a feature, so instead of the years you've racked up, talk about the benefits you've brought to the table.

Nobody is a generic commodity. "I can get trade marketing managers for X!" is not what you want to hear. You want to shift the employer's thinking to what your work, as evidenced by achievements expressed in terms of the big four business problems, is worth to them. You want to get used to saying "based on *my* knowledge of industry rates, and the value of my accomplishments for other companies in the past, I would come in at the top end of the range for this position."

You must know your street value. Salary benchmark surveys abound on the Internet - and you can do your own among your counterparts at a range of comparable companies, if you ask them in a professional manner and share the information without identifying marks.

### Place

I agree with Woody Allen, it really is about showing up...but do you have a plan for where *you* need to "distribute" your offer? It's not who you know, it's who knows about you. And you control that, so broaden your reach and frequency.

How many of your peers in other companies have you met so far this year? Associations and conferences provide forums for broadening your contacts. So do events outside your field where you can be exposed to new ideas and new people.

What industry, general business, pop culture and personal development stuff are you reading? When are you speaking, exhibiting, judging, or doing pro bono or volunteer work? Where (in print or on the Web) are you showcasing your ideas? If you've got more than two years' experience, you're ready to include a good recruiter or two in your ongoing' career management plan.

### Promotion

Hiring opportunities come from changes in competitive conditions, and from the decision makers who need to manage to those and accomplish results.

That is why informal but strategic communication is the driver of your career future. Get your message in there before they have to resort to the formal recruitment process. Positioning. Branding. Making the connection for decision makers between your achievements and the business issues that keep them awake at night. Talk achievements and expertise, not experience.

People are way too formal in how they approach career communications. Do your current and former colleagues and suppliers know your marketing message? Are you being nice to people you come in contact with - behaving more like a professional consultant than a member of it (dysfunctional) family?

I think of career marketing as a perennial shopping or fishing trip, or if you prefer, a permanent cocktail party. Object: getting to know those people who could (should) be your next boss. Find four or five companies you'd like to be part of, become a fan and watch what they are up to. Be able to speak about the challenges they face and how you have had an impact in similar circumstances. Use all of the career marketing techniques above to become known by the leaders you'd work for there. Ask for introductions by mutual contacts. Always be ready to introduce yourself .with a zinger about the benefits of what you do.

There are many tactics in the career marketing arsenal. While you're busy working, keep shaping the next stage of your career too.

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