

## Managing Your Career – Tip 10

Most of the advice you read and hear about managing your career is directed towards finding what you really want to do and then leaving what you are doing now to pursue your career destiny. This is great advice if what you want to do is different from what you are doing now. But what if you like what you are doing now, want to stay working where you are and want to take better control of your career?

Managing your career is not just being effective at your job, being responsive to others, and working collaboratively in a team environment. It's about knowing who you are. You must be clear about what you are best at doing and be able to tell stories that demonstrate that so you can focus on the stuff that energizes you. You then must be clear about what success would look like for you. Whether your intent is to look for a new job elsewhere or enhance your role at your current employer, the starting point is the same – Self-Discovery.

An effective way to start the self-discovery process is to make two lists. Label the first one “Things I am good at and like doing”. Label the second one “Things I am not good at or don't want to do”. On the first list, describe some things you think you are good at and like doing. Follow these with a story of something you've accomplished or achieved that demonstrates the things you are good at doing AND want to do.

On the second list, describe those things you know you are not good at doing or clearly do not want to do. You'll need to be realistic and honest with yourself. Don't think you're good at something if your heart isn't in agreement. Review both lists with others who know you well enough to agree or disagree with your own assessment. If you have trouble making these assessments, a mentor, a career coach, or career-related books, such as *12 Steps to a New Career*, can help you through the process.

Once you have a clear understanding of what you're good at (your strengths), what you're not good at (your weaknesses), and your likes and dislikes, you have a firm foundation on which you can develop a plan for taking more control over your career. Let's look at two different but common situations that illustrate how others successfully managed their careers within their organizations.

Brad was in charge of putting together programs that would draw crowds to events. He was very adept at doing it and creative in thinking outside the box. He had a reputation for conceiving, planning and organizing high-quality and entertaining events that attracted large audiences.

When Brad's boss suddenly left the company, they recruited someone from outside to take his place. Understandably, Brad was disappointed that he didn't get the job because he felt he had earned a promotion and now he had to report to someone new to the company.

When he prepared his two lists, he quickly realized that the promotion he thought he wanted was for a job that was more focused on managing resources, such as: budgeting, scheduling, balancing workloads with others, and other administrative functions. These were all things he knew were critical to the success of the business but most were things that were on his second list that he didn't think he was good at or wanted to do.

Reflecting on his first list, he could now clearly see his top strengths and had stories he could tell others that demonstrated them. This made him more confident to focus on what he did best if he wanted to manage his career more effectively. He wasn't sure what to do next so he thought he'd pick the top strengths that he liked the most and approach management. Since he thought he had a good relationship with a top executive at his division, he met with him and explained what he felt he was best at doing and used the stories to demonstrate them. He told him that he didn't want to leave the company, but realized that he may need to if a suitable opportunity wasn't available within the organization.

Thinking he would be shown the door, the executive instead asked him to give them a couple of months before making a decision to leave. He explained that they were in the process of reorganizing and they would take what Brad wanted to do into consideration. Three months later Brad was promoted to the top creative director for the division, responsible for the creative development of all programs. He didn't have to leave the company he knew so well and, ironically, the position he thought he wanted now reported to him.

Sue was in a different situation and not yet at a senior level like Brad. She prepared her two lists and realized she was working in the functional area where she was best suited and wasn't doing most of the things that were on her second list. While she had received good performance reviews in the past and was well liked by others, she still felt uneasy about her position. She knew the company was looking to make cost reductions wherever they could find them and other people she knew who she thought also were good at their jobs had left as part of layoffs.

She wondered whether there was anything she could do so that if another round of layoffs came, she wouldn't be part of it. She decided that rather than trying to become invisible she needed to get more grounded in what her company makes and get to know more people outside of her department. She thought even if she had to leave, it would be to her advantage to get to know more people to include in her network.

Here are some of the things she did that she thought were most effective:

- Asked others in her department to explain what they did so she could gain a better understanding of everyone's role.
- Offered to help others in her department when they seemed to be under stress.
- Contacted someone in other departments and asked them if they could show her what they did. She told them she wanted to get a better understanding of how their

department fit in with hers and how it affected what she did. She made a point of building relationships with each of the people in the departments she met.

- E-mailed each of the people she met to thank them for their time. She extended an offer for them to contact her at any time if they had any issues with her department to see if she could help them.
- When someone asked a question about how something worked or where to get certain information and no one offered an answer, she volunteered to find the answer and get back to them.
- When she noticed that another person, whether she knew them or not, was overloaded with some administrative task that no one wanted to do, she took the initiative and stepped in to help without being asked.

Sue soon developed relationships throughout the company and grew her network of personal contacts. Now she was in a position to get answers to questions before others could even begin to figure out where to start to find an answer. She developed a reputation for being the go-to person if you wanted to find out something but didn't know where to start. She knew what department did what and she knew the people in those departments who could be counted on to provide her with what she needed in a timely fashion.

Her boss soon came to rely on her for more than just her job. Senior management noted that she had developed connections throughout the company and had an excellent understanding of the overall business. This fit quite well into their succession planning. While others left the company for personal or other reasons, Sue remained and her compensation reflected management's belief that she was a key employee that they could not afford to lose.

Keeping in mind how Brad and Sue approached taking charge of their careers, think about your particular situation. Do you want to focus more on what you are best at doing like Brad? Do you want to be more aware of what your company does and develop more contacts throughout the organization like Sue? Your situation may be different but the starting point for you will be the same – Self-Discovery – What are you best at doing and what does success look like for you?

Managing your career is similar to managing people, processes, sports teams, or anything else that requires constant attention. It isn't something that you can do once and then you're set for life. You must be constantly thinking about what you most like doing and how you can leverage that by broadening your experience or enhancing your contacts. If you don't, you will again find yourself stuck in a role where you will feel you're not in control of your career.

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