

Developing your career plan

A Badenoch & Clark guide

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Some 60% of people in professional roles have told us that they would consider moving jobs for career progression*. Making that move the right one requires careful consideration. Is this next move a stepping stone to even bigger and better things? What skills do you need to hone to make your next-but-one move? What are employers looking for in your profession and how do you match up?

No matter what the economic climate, if you're ambitious, you'll need to have a good idea of the routes you may take and how to make the journey easier.

This guide highlights the top ten things you'll need to consider when developing your career plan.

1 See your career as a journey

Having a clear idea of where you want to get to is the best start. It's this vision that will keep you energised in the good times and focused in the down times. It's your clarity of purpose that will make the difference between getting to where you want to be or ending up blown off course and somewhere else. It is most likely that you'll need more than one employer to get there so work out some milestones – they might be skills based, salary based, responsibility based. One thing for certain is they really shouldn't be job titles.

Your career is something you build continuously rather than an endless string of jobs you move onto. It's about increasing your knowledge and building up the right skills and experiences that are valued by employers. Keep an open mind on the precise route you take to get to where you want to be – there's almost certainly more than one way to get there. If you are focused on your end goal, you'll pick up development opportunities as you go. The more you add to your skills and experience along the way, the more routes you'll open to get there.

2 Identify what motivates you

There are plenty of reasons why we fall out of love with our jobs, from outgrowing the role and wanting a greater challenge to craving new experiences or a different leadership style. And while most

things can be addressed with the support of your manager, work feels less like work the more you enjoy it. In deciding where you want to be, make sure it's somewhere that will hold your interest long-term, suits your preferred lifestyle and uses your skills to the fullest. The things we are good at are often the things we enjoy most. This is a good place to start, especially as personal development will ensure you don't limit your ambitions. What do you like about your existing role? What topics do you get passionate about? What projects get you excited? By courting the sectors, specialisms and cultures you're most likely to thrive in, the more likely you are to develop a genuine, unwavering and continued commitment to your career path and become a rising star of your profession.

3 Identify which competencies are needed to progress

Once you've established what interests and motivates you, the next step is to ensure your skills and competencies match your chosen career path. You will need to fully identify (and understand) what competencies are required in order for you to move onto the next level, and furthermore, succeed at that level. Does your ultimate role need analytical reasoning, commercial awareness, or does it rely more on strong communication skills and leadership qualities? Some of these you may already be very strong at, however, where

*Badenoch & Clark Workplace Studies 2009



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Gordon McCulloch, Deputy CEO at Renaissance Capital in Moscow

you're not, now is the time to start focusing on improving these areas. Get an objective opinion by asking your manager how you rate at these competencies, and how you can improve on them in the future. The more you begin to recognise where your strengths lie competency-wise, and where you need to improve, the more attainable that career path becomes.

what to expect for yourself. Compare everything you've learnt about your prospective employer's commitment to providing compelling career paths, with your own career goals. If these don't tally, you may need to adjust your expectations or seek out an alternative employer. If it's good news, you'll want to agree a development plan with your new boss in due course.

4 Are qualifications or experience more valuable?

Some roles do require specific qualifications, but whilst employers are attracted to well-qualified business people, they are even more attracted to those who demonstrate a commitment to being experts in their field. For many professionals, the qualification is the starting block, the rite of passage. It gets you through the door. Alone, the letters after your name will not be enough to guarantee your future career. It's your hands on experience and exposure to specific types of work that builds your career prospects. Being skilful in what you do and having a demonstrable track record is the most important quality. John Melbourne, SVP International Operations of MPSGI sums it up beautifully: "ACA gave me the discipline to keep on delivering and the appetite to keep on learning, but the right letters after your name aren't enough to open the doors to more senior jobs. It was easy for me to get a finance job in industry from practice. But every step since has required technical expertise, consistent delivery and commercial credibility."

5 Did it happen for them?

At interview, employers will be selling their credentials to you just as much as you to them. Promises are easily made, but you'll want them to be rooted in reality. So be sure to ask for real life examples of where and how they've supported their employees to reach different career milestones. Firstly, is there a culture of organic growth? What different career paths have been made possible company-wide? Ask for examples of individuals who have progressed up and across the organisation. This will give you a measure of long-term feasibility. Next, what career development opportunities were given to the previous incumbent, and what path did they travel? Where were personal development, secondments or training given? At what pace did they progress? This will tell you

6 Put your plan in context of the market

While you may already have mapped out in detail your career path, market conditions will always play a hand in how quickly and to what extent you can achieve your plan. While a clear focus and drive is essential, you need to be realistic and put your aspirations into the context of the current market. Career openings and opportunities are naturally limited in a downturn, likewise, the skills and competencies that employers demand may also adapt – what is in demand in a buoyant economy is often at the bottom of the list in a downturn. Bear in mind that market conditions are constantly changing, and consequently your expectations may need to fluctuate with the times. If you can remain flexible and open-minded, then your chances of fulfilling your longer-term plans are more likely to come to fruition.

7 Consider all your options

Continuously scan your environment for development opportunities. Keeping your end goal in mind makes it easier to spot exciting opportunities that come your way both inside and outside of your organisation. Knowing your options prevents you feeling trapped in a particular role and helps you to stay positive and focussed. There's plenty to keep a look out for too – secondments, special projects, mentoring, coaching, having a great role model, work shadowing, technical training, soft skills training, conferences, seminars and networking events. Exhaust all these options before you consider a career move.

Gordon McCulloch, Deputy CEO at Renaissance Capital in Moscow adds, "There's plenty of time early in your career to consider what you want to do. But get involved, stick with things for as long as you're learning and gaining experience. Keep a list of your

accomplishments, keep your CV up to date and stay abreast of market trends.”

8 How mobile do you need to be to reach your goal?

As globalisation continues at pace, international exposure will only become more desirable. Your career progression may require you to develop an appreciation of different markets, either domestically or worldwide. If international exposure is your ticket to the top, how far, frequently and for how long are you prepared to travel? If travel, secondments or relocation don't fit in with your lifestyle or circumstances, investigate your options. Speak to your boss about how that exposure might be gained in another way; consider what other routes you could take to attain your ultimate career goal. If mobility does appeal to you, find out what it'll take to be granted envoy status.

9 Know what your employer wants to see first

In order for you to progress along your chosen career path, you need to be aware of what it's going to take to get there. Part of achieving your objectives and long-term plans will come from understanding your employer's expectations of you. If you want to get ahead, it

helps to have the support of your manager so that they can give you the tools to get there. They may have concerns or areas for improvement that you have not considered yet. There may also be other wider corporate or department issues that you are not aware of which could get in the way of your progression. Talk to them about your aspirations and plans, so that they can give you a fair assessment on what you need to do in order to achieve them – and what opportunities may be on offer either now or in the future. The more honest feedback you can receive, as well as advice and guidance, the more likely you are to succeed on your path.

10 Review your plans and chart your progress

Do make sure that the goals you set and the milestones you noted at the beginning are not forgotten. Write them down somewhere and refer to them frequently. No performance review, appraisal or career conversation should go by without direct reference to your career plan. By being aware of where you are going and the timescales you set yourself, you'll know whether you're making the appropriate progress. And remember that there's more than one route to get to where you're going. Take stock to see if you've changed direction and reset your course accordingly. This way, you'll take advantage of the development opportunities that come along and be able to direct the conversations you have with your boss to plan for an immediate future that achieves both of your objectives.

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