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Career planning is an oxymoron

“The biggest mistake that you can make is to believe that you are working for somebody else. Job security is gone. The driving force of a career must come from the individual. Remember: Jobs are owned by the company, you own your career!”
Earl Nightingale, motivational speaker

Some employees have the expectation that their company, their Human Resources department, and/or their bosses should be doing something for their careers, such as planning it and making it happen as if nothing would get in its way. Is this assumption naïve? Yes, completely. But don't get us wrong. Good companies do have succession plans, human resources departments create policies that support the issue, and good bosses work on the development of their employees. That does not mean that a promotion is guaranteed, and that whatever was planned will happen. The key word here is development.

The partners of MAPA Consulting have recently worked with three very large global companies on the issue of Career Management. The following is what their programs emphasize, and we believe it is worth sharing with our readers. We are not surprised that they all focus on the same issues.

1 | Up is not the only way

In today's market, where change is the rule, we need to reinvent ourselves on a daily basis. Not doing so means not developing, stagnating and becoming outdated...Many people do not see this as a development option. Therefore, as managers, it is our duty to highlight to our employees that this is a career development option, and that not taking it might signal that the end is near—in other words, not an option if we want to

keep our jobs and stay updated in market trends.

2 | A lateral move brings breadth

We heard from a professional who spent his whole career in sales and then got a lateral transfer to Risk Management. He and most other employees who have made this kind of change mention that more than any skill, the new job provided a fresh and different perspective. Don't miss that opportunity, as there is a huge potential for development. We remember a promising young executive in a large global bank being transferred from a corporate bank relationship management position to Human Resources Head....Many internal competitors saw his career as over. Actually, he later became the next president of local operations. That different perspective was critical for his development and his future promotions.

3 | Sometimes we need to go down before going up again

Oops...you have invested years of your life in a career, only to realize that you do not enjoy what you do. Or, you just need a change to align your motivational profile. Once again, we emphasize the word *options*. One option is to go down now in order to go up in the future. If you make a dramatic career change, you cannot – realistically – expect to be paid the same, or to have the same level of responsibility. It is like starting over, from the beginning. During our workshops we met a senior executive who shared his experience. Although senior, he realized that he did not have a practical understanding of the business, since throughout his career he had staff positions in the Legal Department. A decision was made to accept a smaller position in the front office, with the purpose of learning and development. This executive now occupies a



very senior position, in charge of a division—a clear example that his move paid off.

4 | Sometimes we need less responsibilities to find personal balance

The following real life stories illustrate the point well. First, a senior female executive, with regional responsibilities, refused a promotion to a global position, because, as she said, “I am forty years old and I want to become a mother. It is now or never.” Second, an executive did not accept a divisional position in the United States because of his wife’s career in their native Latin American country. A third person mentioned the lack of mobility due to the impossibility of him leaving his ageing parents behind. This is the 21st century. Sometime ago, these characters would have been characterized as “losers.” Nowadays, we say they value balancing their personal and professional lives.

We recommend managers engage in frank conversations with their direct reports about the “liabilities” that come with a promotion. Most people just focus on the advantages (higher salary, more power, status, etc). What about the disadvantages? Less time to spend with family due to client meetings, working dinners, and business travel. Please be aware that we’re not saying one is better than the other. People need to be aware of the consequences of their career decisions, both positive and negative. Unfortunately, they are part of the same package.

5 | Effective careers are a combination of having the talent plus the alignment of values and motivators

A few years ago we were facilitating a team building exercise for a client. During a discussion one participant verbalized that he was offended when his colleagues smoked during meetings, as this was against his

principles. He became speechless when we asked “Where does the money that pays your salary come from?” The client was a large global tobacco company. Alignment of values is critical for a successful career. Also, don’t minimize your motivators. Motivation has to do with what gives you pleasure. Do you enjoy what you do? The perfect alignment of the planets occur when you do a job that is meaningful, you enjoy doing it, and of course, it pays you some money . . . If not, how would we explain professionals working as teachers, for a reduced salary, when their talents could place them in a larger corporation, making much more money than they currently do?

We would like to wrap up this article with a quote from Marylyn Monroe: **“A career is wonderful, but you can't curl up with it on a cold night.”**

See you next time. We welcome your feedback.

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