

Management and Performance Associates – March-April, 2017

At what point should you start thinking about career?



This newsletter was inspired by an expectation stated by a participant in one of our career workshops.

As paradoxical as it may sound, the place to start thinking about your career is the finish line. In other words, think about where you would like to be and what you would like to be doing in five years.

Consider the following dialogue from Alice in Wonderland:

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to" said the Cheshire Cat....

"I don't much care where" said Alice...

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go."
said the Cheshire Cat....

Sometimes, we can behave exactly like Alice. Often we allow external sources to take control. We delegate career decisions to third parties. We decide to move to a new assignment or a new company without a clearly defined purpose. We do it because the circumstances guided us in that direction.

MAPA's take on career is more assertive: Our professional life impacts important aspects of our personal life; therefore, thinking strategically about our career creates conditions for a happier life.

The following are some tips to think strategically about your career.

1. Personal vision

The first step will be to visualize where you would like to be in five years. What kind of activity would you like to be performing? What kind of job would you like to have? Perhaps you would like to start your own business. Since our professional and personal lives are intertwined, visualize a position in line with your motivation, family situation and lifestyle.

For instance, if you value the time spent with family and local friends it doesn't seem to be a good fit to choose a position that demands frequent travel and spending many days away from home. Aligning personal and professional life must be the most important criteria when building your personal vision.

2. Next career step

It is extremely naive to imagine that your personal vision will become reality in a five year period without a substantial effort on your part--It's not just going to happen. Think of career development as a continuous journey, with many stops needed to make it to your final desired destination. Therefore, you need to think short term; the first targeted stop should be a time period of six to eighteen months.

For instance, if you are currently performing as a Training Manager and your five year goal is to become the Human Resources Director, then your next career move could be, for instance, to Labor Relations, so as to obtain a broader view of the Human Resources function.

The above is an example of a lateral move – a position in the same pay grade, with the same level of responsibility and complexity. A vertical move would be when the next career position involves a

higher level of responsibility and complexity; such as moving from junior analyst to senior analyst.

There are two other possible career moves. Although it's counterintuitive, moving backward might be necessary when you need to learn something new before advancing your career. Think of an Audit Supervisor who would like to build a career in Information Technology. Most probably this person will start in technology as an analyst (going back to an individual contributor position), not as a supervisor. It is a strategic and calculated move to change the direction of a career.

The final possibility is to stay in the same position in order to obtain depth and build a career as a specialist – becoming an expert in the field.

3. Current Situation

Once your Personal Vision (long term career objective) and the next step to make in order to move in that direction are established, it's time to reflect about experiences, knowledge, talent, personal characteristics, areas of expertise; and to start mapping skills, competencies and knowledge you need to acquire in order to make this movement successful. Comparing the current situation with the next career step will give us the opportunity to reflect about the learning curve ahead.

4. Action Plan

So what do you need to do in order to make your next career step? From your analysis of the mapping technique in step 3, look for concrete actions to develop each identified gap to work on. Your development journey will become more enjoyable and effective if you find a variety of ways to close the gaps. In addition to classes, certifications and training programs you will need high impact development actions, such as the following:

- Lead a project
- Participate in volunteer activities
- Deliver presentations
- Become a technical coach

- Search for a mentor or coach
- Observe how more senior professionals deal with complex issues and make decisions
- etc.

Remember that life is not linear, personal interests change, what is important today may not be the same tomorrow, the family dynamic may evolve and new horizons may open up. Therefore strategic thinking about your career requires constant reassessment of the future we wish for. It's a continuous development creative process.

MAPA Consulting can help you and your team to develop these competencies.

See you next time. As always, we welcome your feedback.