



**WMRC**

**CAREER PLANNING  
ADVICE**

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# 1

## Importance of career planning

The environment where we live and work in is undergoing constant change and as working professionals, it is important to navigate your career carefully in the face of those changes.

Skills which were before in great demand could find themselves obsolete within a short span of years or even months as technology progresses and new jobs are being created. Coupled with that is a shortening of business cycles which could result in sudden jolts to the demand and supply of key job skills.

As a working professional keen to make a mark in your career, it is only natural that careful planning must be carried out in order to reach your desired goals and results.

There is a strong correlation between job satisfaction and career planning. Studies showed that people who think more about their careers and make conscious efforts to steer their work lives in planned directions, enjoy greater job satisfaction and sense of autonomy in their lives. They are more likely to feel engaged and be in control compared to those who leave their career successes to chance.

Career planning applies to those who are fresh out of school and seeking employment for the first time, as well as people who have already been in the workforce for many years.

For those seeking employment for the first time, a systematic approach towards career planning would yield valuable results and benefits as they would have the advantage of starting on a fresh sheet of paper. For matured professionals, it is never too late to start planning your career as the process continues to accrue positive benefits even as you grow older.

The focus in career planning should be on Employability rather than Being Employed. In today's labor market, being employed no longer guarantee a prolonged livelihood. Companies go through 3Rs - Restructuring, Reorganization and sadly, Retrenchment and it can be extremely stressful and depressing to be a victim of corporate redundancy.

The focus on Employability means you stay attractive in the job market, even if the economic environment turns unfavorable. Through the process of career planning, a high level of employability is ensured which in turn leads to higher chances of success in securing job interviews, and outperforming other candidates in getting a job.

The goal of career planning is essentially to bolster your confidence as you move from one job to another, being aware of your value in the job market and exerting control over your career destiny.

## 2

# The career planning process

A systematic approach towards career planning involves a 3-Step process that examines the Current Situation, Future Goals and Ways of Getting There.

### Current Situation

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Looking at *Current Situation* requires you to draft a so-called 'Inventory List' of all the experiences, skill sets, knowledge and qualifications that you have accumulated to date. It is advisable that this be done in a comprehensive and unhurried manner involving a high degree of self reflection and honesty.

Work experiences determine to a huge extent, the professional work and scope that you have been exposed to in the past. Such experiences can be varied across functions, industry sectors or even across geographical regions in today's mobile workforce. It is important to present work experiences in a chronological order and ensure each career movement is coherent with your overall career goals.

Work experiences should also reflect an increasing maturity of your role which is evident by broader functional coverage and job responsibilities that involve supervisory or management elements.

When presenting work experiences, employers and recruiters are especially sensitive to broken job history which is not properly explained, as it could either signal carelessness or perceived as a deliberate act to conceal information. More of how to deal with this is discussed under *Resume Tips*.

With globalization and the increased use of sophisticated technologies in the modern workplace, firms are looking out for people with skill sets which can be readily plugged into usage and if possible, on the first day of work!

The ability to use modern-day office software and Internet applications is considered a basic skill that every working professional should have. Although most tertiary institutions have taken steps to ensure those skills are imparted, what happens if you lack the required level of proficiency? Reviewing your skills hence enables you to zoom in on specific skill sets which require further training or development, in order to fulfill the requisites for a job role.

Knowledge and your professional qualifications are important aspects which employers scrutinize carefully when considering a job applicant. Knowledge equips you with the fundamental know-how and framework to execute a work task, and without it, it is almost impossible to even get started in a role.

## 2

# The career planning process

Similarly, qualifications are especially crucial in professional occupations such as accountants and lawyers, as they represent a level of professional experience and know-how which are recognized in their respective fields of practice.

A critical aspect of the *Current Situation* involves an examination of your personal attributes. Personal attributes are all things associated with a person's character, likes and dislikes, working style and the ability to get along with peers and superiors.

Firms typically operate under certain unique styles and mindsets which can vary significantly from one firm to another. Due to that, they typically prefer to hire people whom they are comfortable with; and able to fit well into the organizational culture.

An honest evaluation of your personal attributes could reveal someone who dislikes uncertainty, values punctuality and work-life balance. Or it could reveal someone who could be full of creative energy, likes change and an unstructured work environment.

Understanding your personal attributes is therefore important as they are key considerations when deciding which types of companies to work for or job to undertake.

As human beings, we can sometimes be blind to our own strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, etc. For that reason, it is advisable to have a close friend or family member to sit through with us in this self-evaluation process to uncover a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of ourselves.

## Future Goals

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Every working professional works for certain goals in mind, but somehow in the midst of career disruptions or catastrophic economic events, those goals could at times be muddled or lost.

Time and again, among the successful people whom we have worked with, every single one of them demonstrates a clear vision on what their career goals are and how they want to go about achieving them.

Without *Future Goals*, it is impossible to derive much success or satisfaction in your career, not to even mention about achieving them.

Future Goals are seemingly more evident among fresh graduates who are usually full of hopes about their future and enthusiastic about what they want to achieve out of a career. That enthusiasm somehow dies off as one gets older and worn-out from unpleasant work experiences.



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## 2

# The career planning process

To be fair, it is now increasingly likely for people to get laid off or made redundant due to corporate restructuring or downsizing. With greater uncertainties in business demands and cycles, setting career goals has taken a back seat or even ignored, as many are unconvinced of its benefits.

However, it is precisely for the purpose of handling career disruptions that makes setting *Future Goals* even more crucial.

Setting *Future Goals* involves a clear visioning of the eventual destination in your career. Just as we embark on a journey with the aim of reaching a pre-defined destination, planning for our Future Goals in the distant future give us better clarity in the various career plans we might want to take in the near to mid term future.

Short term goals can be from 1 – 3 years and they outline the achievements that one would like to have in the immediate future. Medium term goals are those between 5 – 10 years while those in excess of 10 years are usually considered long term goals.

Given that the external environment changes, and the world 10 years down the road is likely to be very different from where we are currently, it is good practice to revisit long term *Future Goals* every 3 – 5 years to tweak them if necessary, and to ascertain if adjustments need to be made to short and medium term goals in response to longer-term changes or demographic shifts.

In career planning, it is important to ensure *Future Goals* are coherent over the short, medium and long term. For example, if you aspires to be a Director for Investments after spending 15 years in your career, you would look at first assuming an Investment Analyst role in the short term and becoming an Investment Manager in the medium term.

The above example of a future goal is based on the attainment of specific job titles. Career aspirations can however be in other various forms which can be tangible (such as job titles, salary packages) or intangible (such as attaining certain career status or achieving certain standards of living).

When thinking about *Future Goals*, the key is not to be restrained by immediate practicality or the feasibility of things. Remember that long term goals could span more than 10 or 20 years, and what seems impossible now could very well be highly achievable in the future.

Stretching one's imagination is good as it encourages you to think beyond the existing boundaries and to explore new frontiers. You will be challenged to be more proactive and accountable for every career step you make, knowing that every one of them makes a difference to how successful you will be in the future.



## 2

# The career planning process

## Ways of Getting There

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Having assessed the Current Situation and set Future Goals, *Ways of Getting There* bridges both steps by putting clear action plans in place. This final step involves a high degree of thinking through on the practical ways needed to get to the desired end states.

The Current Situation step would have yielded a clear and objective picture of your current skill sets, experience and personal attributes. Future Goals step would have provided you with directions on how you should chart your career in the short, medium and long term.

The challenge now is identifying the path you should take in order to get you to your final destination. Top on your list of considerations include the following:

- Do you possess the requisite skills and experience to be an ideal candidate for the job in question?
- Are you currently in the right job or company preparing you for your future dream job?
- Should you consider accumulating work experience in another function or industry to pick up the skills needed?
- Would retraining or attending courses be sufficient in building up your skills for the role?
- Would accepting a more junior role within your desired job scope gel with your future goals?
- Should you be getting mentoring assistance or guidance from a more experienced person in the industry?
- Should you be joining industry associations or clubs to expand your network of useful contacts in your desired industry/ job?
- Which professional executive recruiters should you work with on the basis of trust, integrity and professionalism?
- How would you have done differently in your career if you have the chance to start all over again?

The last question is included not for the purpose of 'crying over spilt milk' but rather to identify means of rectification. People do make mistakes in their career moves and it is instructive to reflect and learn from those mistakes rather than to repeat them again.

### 3

## Five useful tips in career planning

Building a career is a top priority for most working professionals and as much as every professional wants every career move to be well-planned and in line with the grand scheme of things, it is sometimes not possible due to the rapid speed of change at which businesses are operating today.

The best guarantee against job loss and skill obsolescence is still an active and conscious effort towards managing and planning your career success. We have compiled five useful tips in career planning which should be helpful to you.

### **1. Take personal responsibility of your career and be accountable for every step you make**

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Rather than putting the blame on the economy, your organization or people around you when things go wrong, it is considerably more constructive and sensible to realize that nobody or no employer is responsible to ensure you have a job or a successful career.

No one besides ourselves can have a greater influence and control over our career successes or failures. The first step towards achieving success in anything in life is being responsible for your own actions.

We sometimes meet with professionals who join companies with the expectation that their all career needs would be well taken care of by their employers.

They assume that as long as they do well in their job, their opportunities within the company would be limitless. They would be rotated across various job functions or departments, or posted overseas to gain cross border experience – all these with the promise of broadening their skills and increasing their value within the firm as well as in the job market.

Some professionals who have work for extended tenures in their firms assume they will never be fired as their relative seniority and 'importance' within the organization would somehow shield them from the harsh market realities.

Perhaps the public images of large companies during recruitment drives in recent years have been overplayed, causing such unrealistic expectations and complacency. The reality is that in today's competitive business environment, companies are less likely to offer you a job unless you possess the right skills and experience they need.

Just as businesses compete fiercely amongst themselves for customers and market share, the competition among professionals for jobs is just as intense, if not more. It is hence necessary to gear yourself up by taking action today.

### 3

## Five useful tips in career planning

### 2. Be aware of the stage of your career and how you can add value to prospective employers

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In the competition for jobs, everyone stands an equal chance of getting selected, provided of course you possess the requisite skills and experience. If you do not possess them, you need to carefully weigh your positioning to understand how prospective employers might perceive you.

Depending on how experienced you have been in the job market, employers usually assess your candidacy differently. If you are fresh out of school and seeking a job for the first time, the key selling point is your potential as there is hardly any relevant skills or experience to speak of.

It is therefore crucial for you to demonstrate you have high potential for a job role during interviews. Interviewers look for positive traits such as self confidence, communication abilities, attitude, learning capacity and interpersonal skills when selecting candidates for entry-level positions.

If you have accumulated a few years of work experience, the assessment criteria become shifted in preference for the relevant skills and experience you can bring to the role.

Interviewers will ask detailed questions on how you handle work situations and could test you on specific skills or knowledge you need in order to do the job well.

As you progress in your career and gain more work experience, employers become more interested in how your skills and experience can contribute directly to a job role. In other words, their evaluation will be based increasingly on your relevant experience rather than your potential.

This is understandable as senior jobs require people who have demonstrated capabilities to perform in the past – i.e. a proven track record and in the job market, past performance is often used as a useful indication of how well you would perform in future.

### 3. Focus on developing your soft skills and embrace life-long learning

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It is common knowledge that in order to be very successful in your area of work, you need to build up your core expertise as you advance in your career. Your core expertise represents your know-how and ability to execute your chosen role well.

However, building your career involves more than just your own efforts as you will be working with others, and how well you work with others determine to a large extent, how quickly you will be promoted from performing an execution role to a managerial role.

### 3

## Five useful tips in career planning

To work well with others require soft skills and they are typically non-technical skills that include amongst others, communication ability and the ability to get along well with others. Soft skills are essentially a measure of how well people like and enjoy working with you.

Without soft skills, it is easy to find yourself stagnant in your career. You will find your peers having better soft skills surpassing you in promotions and getting placed in exciting managerial roles that expand on their current responsibilities.

Besides soft skills, you also want to invest in yourself by constantly picking up new skills and knowledge. A basic degree can only take you that far, and what you learn ten years ago would have vastly different applications in today's world.

By enrolling yourself in new courses which are relevant to your profession and career, it shows your seriousness in wanting to improve and upgrade your skills and knowledge in order to stay competitive in the job market.

Your current employer will find it hard to find someone else to replace your role at a lower cost, while prospective employers will perceive you in a different light compared to others deemed less serious about upgrading themselves.

### 4. Beware of losing momentum and interest in your career

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For many hardworking professionals, it is easy to be totally engrossed in their work so much so that they lose sight of what is really important to them. Long hours and work stress can take their toll on their personal lives which could in turn have devastating effects on their careers.

The right balance is therefore needed and to be successful, it is advisable to treat your career like running a marathon. Unlike a sprinter who goes all out to dash for the finishing line, a marathon runner conserves energy and strives to maintain sufficient strength and stamina to finish a run.

A marathon runner knows when to take breaks during a run to replenish his fluid level and constantly practice positive self-talks to focus his mind on achieving his goal, rather than being encumbered with physical tiredness.

So it is with building a career – the right amount of stress and relaxation is necessary for optimal balance and results.

You need to also be aware of losing interest in your career. This is common especially after you have spent some time in the same job which no longer offers you new challenges or new things to learn.

### 3

## Five useful tips in career planning

If you are faced with such a situation, it could be a ripe time for you to consider a new role – a role that could once again rekindle your interest and passion to perform.

Before taking active steps to explore a new role outside of your firm, try to speak with your direct superior to see if there are further scope for you to develop professionally within the department or if need be, in other departments within the firm.

You should also check out what is available in the job market, looking within your industry or in other industries which you could have an interest in and which you could add value with your skills and experience.

The key here is to avoid being bored with your job – as low motivation easily leads to low job satisfaction which in turn affects job performance.

### 5. Take calculated risks to steer your career to new heights

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As in the investment world in which risks and rewards commensurate, it is necessary to take appropriate risks if you want to advance your career.

Taking career risk exposes you to new opportunities and growth areas which you never thought exist. Of course, you would want to reduce the uncertainty of undertaking an unsuitable role by doing a good amount of research on the opportunity and the company.

Your research should yield evidence that the new role has the potential to enhance your career. Ideally, it should expand on your current job scope and responsibility and if it is in a new field, opens up new areas of growth potential for you.

Likewise, the company should be one that share similar values as you do, so that you are fully convinced that it is a firm that you aspire to work for and to build your career with.

By pushing new envelopes for growth in your career, you will reap significant rewards as your exposure and new skills acquired become even more valuable and sought after in a tight job market.