

Self-Managing Your Career

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The world of work has changed dramatically in the past couple of decades. No government or business sector is immune: no participant in the workforce is either. We are now truly in the Information Age, the Knowledge Economy – yet if you are over 40 you were trained for Industrial Age workplace expectations. Even if you are younger, there are many aspects of a traditional workplace which you may have been socialized to.

This is an important distinction to make because unless you are awake and alert to the implications of your early conditioning, you may find yourself being far less proactive about your career than you should be. I encourage you to read what follows and be honest with yourself if you are still making excuses or finding reasons to put off taking charge of managing your own career.

One of the most persistent expectations I see in my coaching and workshop clients relates to loyalty. We were raised to believe that we would have one or two careers in our lifetime and that we could count on our managers to have the interest, longevity, and wisdom to look after our career best interests. Our job was to remain loyal to our bosses and our companies and in return we'd be taken care of.

That is no longer possible in a world where organizations and positions are re-aligned, re-structured, re-mandated, up-sized, down-sized, and outsourced on a regular basis. I can't stress strongly enough how critical it is for you to give up any illusions or delusions you have about employer loyalty, or your need to remain loyal either to your employer or your specific boss or manager. To many of you, this will sound like a harsh, uncaring statement. But I see the trail of bewildered, dejected, angry, confused and deflated individuals when they finally come face-to-face with this new workplace reality. Then there are the cynical people who on the outside appear to be looking out for number one. But this is often an illusion. Inside, they are hurting just as much as the people who still believe that if they just work hard enough, produce enough results they'll be fine, they'll have made themselves so invaluable that they'll be kept on even if times get truly rough.

In the Information Economy we *must* expect and plan to have several careers in our lifetime. We must also anticipate that the transition between those careers won't always be nice and smooth. If you work for someone else, you must wrap your head around the likelihood of being unceremoniously dumped, suddenly discovering that your skill set is no longer useful, or finding out that you are in some other way surplus to requirements. It is imperative that each of us takes charge of our career and mindfully manages it to ensure that we achieve what we want and deserve in life.

There are 7 key steps that I've discovered to effectively self-managing your career:

1. **Know yourself** - become familiar with your inner landscape: your strengths, your technical and subject matter skills, your transferable skills, your values, your preferred work environment. Take courses, read books, hire a coach.
2. **Have a goal** - know what you want to achieve this day, this week, this month, this year, this job, over the next 5 years. Write it down. Create a visual manifestation board. Post it somewhere you'll see it regularly.

3. **Constantly improve your ability to communicate** - learn how to state your needs in a way that others can hear them; learn how to hear and understand the needs of others. Once again, courses, books and coaching can make a huge difference.
4. **Invest in your own development** - it is great if you have a boss or organization that invests in employee growth (technical as well as personal): but don't rely on it. If you don't think you are worth investing in, why would your employer? This means getting used to spending money on your growth and evolution, taking evenings, weekends and vacation time for courses, workshops, seminars and retreats. In the words of the great Ernie Zelinski “...*spend more on your career training and personal development than on your next hairstyle.*”
5. **Network, network, network** - keep in contact with people throughout your company, in other companies, in professional associations, etc.; share information with them: remember, someone who is your supplier today may be your employer tomorrow
6. **Become a 'diviner'** - learn about your organization as well as your job; understand the purpose of your team, division, department within your company; know how your company fits in to its industry sector. Keep abreast of what is happening in the broader business world that may impact your organization. Read the signs and talk to others about the implications for your immediate work environment. Don't be blindsided by either good news or bad news.
7. **Be a mover** - when your current work environment isn't working for you and you've given it your best, move on. Don't be apologetic about it; don't feel like a sneak or a cheat. If you do, seek coaching or counselling because your inner state will transmit to others and will block access to that move you seek! It used to be that 2 years was the minimum expected time in a job. Not so these days. A friend of mine was hired 4 months ago by a start-up company. There are signs and rumors that all is not well with their venture capital deal. She has already begun to look for her next job so that she isn't caught in the downsizing that appears to be inevitable. You have to have some discretion in how you talk about situations like this, but keep remembering that the world is a very different place and expectations are different.

The good news in all of this is that there is incredible freedom that comes from taking charge of your life, your career. In the Introduction to *The 500 Year Delta*, Jim Taylor and Watts Wacker talk about the four freedoms we have that no previous generations had access to. They are: the freedom to To Know, To Go, To Do and To Be. Because of the Internet and other electronic vehicles, we can so easily Know more than any previous generations. With international travel and the rise of the global economy, we can Go almost anywhere our heart desires. We can Do almost anything we can educate ourselves before; we are no longer limited by job inheritance (if your father was a miner, you'd become a miner, etc.). And finally we can Be anything we want. Tired of Be-ing a teacher or a corporate executive, in today's world you can redefine yourself almost overnight and become an alternative health guru, a writer, an artist, a consultant – virtually at will.

I encourage you to claim those four freedoms, especially as they relate to your career. From this point on live with the full awareness that you have the freedom To Know, To Go, To Do and To Be. Have a great life.

Short Career Management Bibliography

The world is awash in books to help you with the life-long task of self-managing your career. Some good reading materials I am familiar are listed below. Some have been around for a while, but they all will be helpful in helping you take charge of managing your career.

Rick Jarow. *"Creating the Work You Love: Courage Commitment and Career"*. Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books. 1995

Gregg Levoy. *"Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life"*. New York. Three Rivers Press. 1998

Louise LeBrun. *"Fully Alive! 3rd Edition"* 2007. WEL-Systems Productions, Ottawa, ON.

William Bridges. *"Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes"*. 1980. Perseus Books, Reading, Mass.

Jim Taylor and Watts Wacker. *"The 500 Year Delta: What Happens After What Comes Next"*. 1997. HarperCollins. New York, N.Y.

Matthew Fox. *"The Reinvention of Work: A New Vision of Livelihood for Our Time"*. San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco. 1994

Ernie J. Zelinski. *"Real Success Without a Real Job: There is no life like it!"* 2006/07. 10 Speed Press, Berkeley, CA.

Self Managing Your Career is offered as a half-day workshop by Gwen McCauley - coach, facilitator, educator, author and owner of OUICoach™, specializing in life and career transition, reclaiming creativity, and retirement readiness workshops. Gwen has successfully transitioned her own career from corporate executive to entrepreneur. Gwen is committed to helping clients create work that works for them. She can be reached at gwen@ouicoach.com, www.ouicoach.com or 1.800.913.2203.