

Map Your Own Career-Development Plan

BY LAURA BRAY

Do you have a clear plan for managing the journey of your career? If not, it's time to take responsibility for your career development instead of waiting for your boss to provide the opportunities. Like any other journey, however, you'll need a map.

Self-Assessment

First, you'll need to find a starting point. Perform a complete assessment of where you are currently in your career. Annual performance reviews from your current and past jobs serve as a good tool. Use them to determine any weaknesses or as suggestions for developmental opportunities. Your family, friends, peers, and even ex-bosses can help with this assessment. Encourage them to be honest with you and share ideas on areas for improvement.

"Developing a self-awareness of your strengths, your weaknesses, and who and what you need to know is very important to becoming a leader," said Barbara A.F. Greene, owner of Greene and Associates, Inc., an executive coaching and corporate mentoring firm in San Antonio, Texas. "Surround yourself with people who believe in you and will be honest with you."

The Internet is teeming with self-assessment tools, many of which focus on career development (www.monster.com has a wide range). You can also seek assistance from your HR department or a career coach outside of your company.

Plan for Improvement

Once you've established the areas you need to work on, develop a plan to address those shortcomings. Greene stressed the importance of creating specific steps with specific follow-up actions. And don't limit yourself to just classroom learning.

"Research has shown that you gain only 10% of



Stand Out From the Crowd

CareerJournal.com (the online career resource of *The Wall Street Journal*) recommends the following steps to revitalize your career:

- Decide to feel differently about your job.
- Be clear on where you want to be.
- Do an outstanding job in your current position.
- Market yourself within your company.
- Redouble your efforts to develop relationships with new people.

your knowledge from courses and 20% from other people," she said. "The other 70% is from on-the-job experiences."

Greene recommends seeking out developmental assignments, such as cross-functional teams and enterprise-wide task forces, both as means to develop skills and to increase your visibility across the company.

"Seeking new challenges while remaining in your current job is a practical, effective strategy to pursue," said Cynthia McCauley of the Center for Creative Leadership (www.ccl.org). These new challenges allow you to develop new skills and work on weaknesses. Seek out tasks without owners or job responsibilities that have historically received little attention.

Greene encourages her clients to write or update their résumé as part of the development plan.

"A résumé shows where you are, where you want to go, and what you need to do to get there," she said. "Updating your résumé doesn't mean you're looking for a new job. You can use it to pursue new assignments within your company, so people know your background."

Greene encourages her clients to venture outside their comfort zones whenever the opportunity presents itself.

"There's a way to create success with something that you're not necessarily comfortable with," Greene said. "I work with a lot of introverts who have to learn how to get outside themselves to be successful."

If you find it difficult to create a plan and specific goals on your own, seek a career coach. The International Coach Federation's Web site (www.coachfederation.org) has listings.

"I meet with both the individual and her supervisor to create a set of 'coaching goals,'" Greene said. "These goals serve as a development plan and identify the types of activities the employee can engage in to accomplish those goals."

Network and Learn From Others

As the saying goes, it's not just *what* you know but *who* you know. Seek out opportunities to raise your profile within your department, your company, and your profession.

Greene recommends involvement with professional associations or chambers of commerce; they provide both a means of development and a way to widen your circle of

contacts. Most groups need volunteers; she advises looking for such an opportunity that fits one of your developmental goals.

Cross-functional teams allow you to raise your visibility with people in other departments.

"These teams help you to understand the big picture at your company, and they allow you to contribute to the company's success," Greene said.

Recommended Reading

CareerJournal.com recommends the following books for those interested in moving ahead:

- "Winning" by Jack Welch (former CEO of General Electric) with Suzy Welch
- "Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done" by Larry Bossidy (former CEO of Honeywell International Inc.) and Ram Charan
- "Leader Shock... And How to Triumph Over It: Eight Revolutionary Rules for Becoming a Powerful and Exhilarated Leader" by Greg Hicks
- "Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value" by Bill George
- "The One-Minute Manager" by Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson
- "Working with Emotional Intelligence" by Daniel Goleman
- "In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies" by Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman Jr.
- "The Hero's Farewell: What Happens when CEOs Retire" by Jeffrey Sonnenfeld

Let Your Boss Know Your Worth

Once you've made some progress on your journey, keep your supervisor informed.

"It's your responsibility to let your company know your worth and ability to contribute," Greene said.

You don't have to wait for an annual review to ask for a raise. Many people can haggle over the price of a new car for days, yet they get cold feet when it comes to salary negotiations. But who else is going to stand up for you? If you feel like you deserve a raise, schedule a meeting with your boss to discuss it.

Carefully plan for such a meeting, including proper timing, said Cyndi Mergle, SPHR, an HR practitioner with Padgett, Stratemann & Co., LLP, in San Antonio, Texas.

"Make sure you schedule the discussion before annual compensation decisions are made," she said. "Once the annual budget is set, your chances of getting an out-of-cycle raise diminish."

Mergle suggested doing some research to determine objective, measurable factors to demonstrate your worth.

"For example, gather data on how you saved the company money (and how much), how you alleviated waste, or how you earned revenue beyond the scope of your job." She said that it's important to show how you consistently go beyond your job requirements. If you just do what's expected, you don't have much of a case.

"Prepare yourself to have this discussion every year. We tend to be passive—don't be! Speak up for yourself; the worst someone can say is 'no.'"

With careful planning, goal setting, and measuring yourself against those goals, your career journey will stay on track.

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