

SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION BY DESIGN

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A successful transition to a new position should be carefully planned for well in advance of the actual career change date. Thinking about what you want to do with the rest of your life and taking the necessary steps to get there are critical to insuring a smooth transition. The career plan you should develop will serve as your game plan for greater career success.

**“If you don’t know where you’re going,
any road will take you there.”**

Do you know what you want to do with the rest of your professional life? It’s a tough question – and most executive personnel struggle with determining an answer. When I ask them what has kept them from planning for their professional future, most tell me about their busy work schedules. The increasingly up-tempo worldwide operations and short-notice business changes and responses to natural disasters make it difficult to plan the next week or month, much less a few years in advance. Others respond with assurances that “They can do anything.” Perhaps it is true; however, an employer would prefer you to have specific career goals in mind before applying for a position.

Change also stands in the way of answering this key question. If you don’t know what is coming in terms of technology, workplace shifts, business consolidations, acquisitions, and the geographic shift of jobs to the sun belt, how can you possibly plan effectively for them?

Ironically, the little time you spend now in developing a game plan for your career will pay extraordinary dividends in the future. As you begin to do some planning, uncertainty will fade. You **CAN** plan for your future – and increase your potential for greater success in the process.

The purpose of a career plan is to outline your values, goals, and interests to help you reach your professional objectives. A well-designed career plan is flexible, leaving room for unexpected events and opportunities as well as shifts in your own career aspirations. Take ownership **NOW** of your future career success.

Asking some basic questions may help bring your goals into sharper focus. For example, within the next five years:

- Do you want to continue working for the same company? Industry? If so, what will be your role?
- What income package do you want to earn?
- Do you want more decision-making authority? More influence on other people?
- What type of industry interests you?
- What type of company – small, medium, large corporation? Publicly or privately held? In what stage of the business cycle – start-up, high-growth, entrepreneurial, mature or bureaucratic?
- What type of boss would you like to work for?
- Do you desire more time for family and leisure activities?
- How much business travel do you desire?
- What about geography? Where do you want to “settle down?”

- What new skills will you be using? What training will you need to acquire them? Do you need to go back to school for an advanced degree?
- Will you be working toward short-term results or long-term initiatives?
- In what type of environment will you be most productive?
- Do you want to work independently or as part of a team?

The goals and list of action items you target are the heart of your plan. Your goals are long-term initiatives; the action items are the specific tasks that will help you achieve the goals. Here is an example:

GOAL:

Secure a career-enhancing management position in a high-growth property management company located in the mid-west.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Join your target industry's profession association.
- Subscribe to the association's professional publications and begin a professional reading program.
- Subscribe to and read the *Wall Street Journal*.
- Research the industry to determine types of management positions and associated salaries.
- Use the Internet to research potential target companies.
- Attend the target industry's professional association annual conference.
- Begin to develop a professional network of industry contacts.
- Notify appropriate industry recruiters of your future availability
- Develop a professional marketing package that puts "your best foot forward." Make sure all your marketing material describes your past accomplishments in the jargon of the target industry
- etc.

When developing your career plan and fulfilling your goals and action items, seek help from others. Family and friends, current and former colleagues, and/or your mentor, perhaps a professional career transition organization and others likely will have valuable advice that can help you begin the planning process and keep you motivated. They can also point you to useful resources – such as books and Websites – that can help in each planning stage. Most people appreciate it when someone seeks their expertise – you just need to ask.

A word of caution however: Be very careful of the "Dream Stealers." These are people who will tell you that you ought to be grateful just to get a job; that you can't possibly achieve that which you are striving for; that you should simply "settle for what they did." Dream stealers are everywhere and will be very uncomfortable when you do succeed because it will bring into question why they did not achieve the success that you will – if you plan carefully!



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