

Managing Your Career

In Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, one segment of dialogue between Alice and the Cheshire Cat went like this:

Alice: Will you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?

Cheshire Cat: That depends on where you want to get to.

Alice: I don't much care.

Cheshire Cat: Then it doesn't matter which way you go.

If we consider our own careers, many of us are much more like Alice than we would care to admit. Most times we are too focused on the tasks at hand and very passive with regard to the long term of our career. Clearly, this is not a desirable situation. Let us consider incorporating the following concepts as components of a plan to self manage our careers.

1) Responsibility: The single most important guideline for managing a career is accepting responsibility for it. Too often we hear that "they" are being unfair, not providing the kinds of challenges we deserve, "they" have passed us over for promotions we deserve, etc. In some instances, these may be valid points. It is a sign of maturity to recognize that no matter what happens to you, you must accept responsibility. A strong sign of immaturity is the unwillingness to accept the responsibility and then attempt to pass it off to someone else.

2) Commitment: In today's business world downsizings, strategic redirections, consolidations, mergers and other such activities are a way of life. There is a temptation to develop a real cynicism towards organizational commitment to employees. No doubt, there is a strong temptation to yield to the cynicism. Don't do it! Individuals cannot operate effectively and achieve their potential without a strong commitment. As it has often been said, "the harder and smarter we work, the luckier we get."



BY RUSS JONES

3) Recruitment/Hiring: In order to be the best possible hire, we need to be as broadly and deeply prepared as possible in terms of developing our intellectual functioning, interpersonal skills, and communication skills. All of us need to identify and pursue the most rigorous educational and experiential opportunities available. And, we need to make good decisions about the positions we choose; from the very first position out of college all the way through our careers.

4) Continuing Education: We must convince ourselves that life long learning is an essential component to our career in order to achieve our potential. Harry Truman once said, "Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers." If we are not taking on the task of keeping pace with our work, our company, our industry and our world, we cannot be high achieving business people. We also need to continue to develop our intellectual, interpersonal and communication skills. We should also emphasize, rather than ignore, development of our weakest areas.

5) Performance Appraisal: Understanding our employer's goals and performance expectations is essential. We need to document these expectations and focus on how our performance will be measured and quantify wherever possible. We must strive to do our best at all times and it is essential to seek ongoing feedback on our performance level. Do not shy away from it. In fact, reluctance to talk to our superiors about our performance is an indicator of when we need to talk most seriously.

6) Rewards/Satisfiers: We need to understand how the reward system works. We further need to understand the degree of compatibility between goals and expectations of the organization and its reward system. Does the reward system encourage or discourage the stated goals and objectives? How does it deviate, if at all? Is risk-taking, innovation, and superior performance rewarded? If not,

why? Do we have to play it safe? If so, we will never learn our limits and never really know what we are able to achieve.

7) Self-Appraisal: With regard to career aspirations, we need to understand ourselves, to know what we want, and what we can expect. We also need to understand our willingness or lack thereof to make sacrifices in order to achieve our ambitions. It is critical that we not fool ourselves or our employer into expecting more than we are willing to contribute or capable of delivering. In turn, we cannot expect a greater reward than our contribution justifies.

8) Be Pro-Active and Flexible: Actively seek out responsibility, challenge, exposure and visibility. Also, be flexible and consider non-traditional opportunities. Pro-active participation and flexibility is required to avoid boredom and burnout, to achieve commitments and realize our potential.

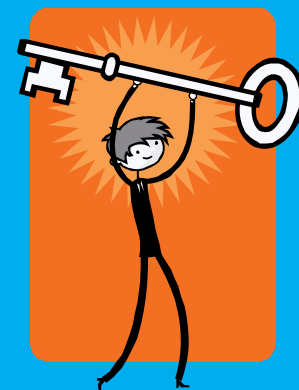
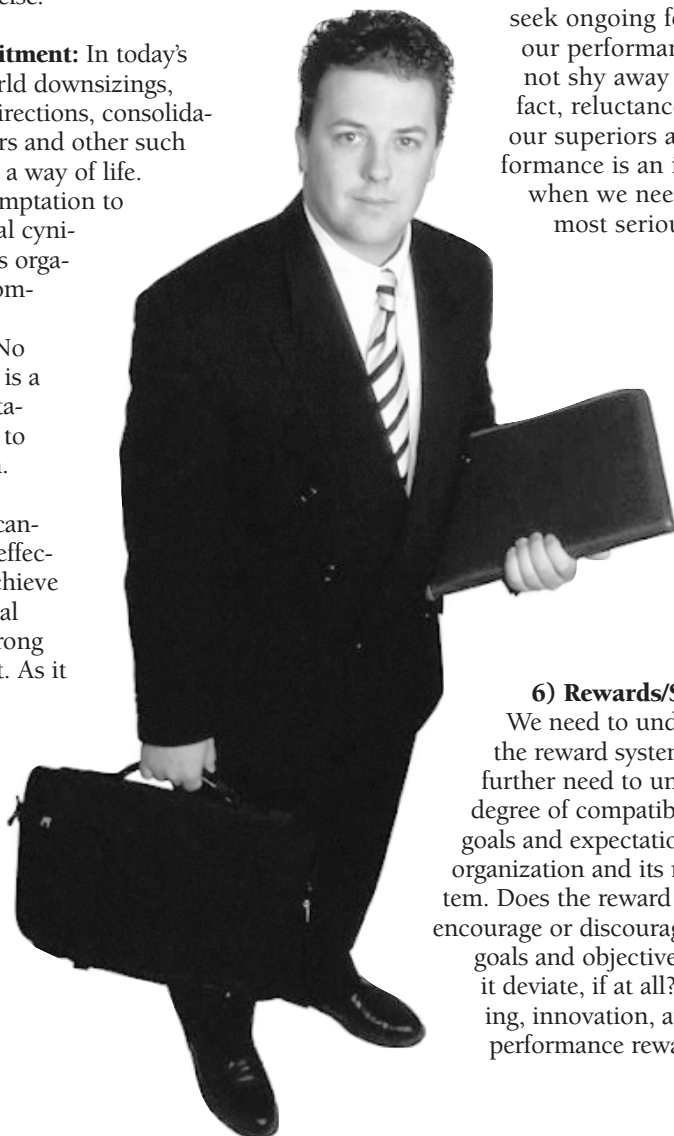
9) Other Interests: We need to develop outside interests not associated with our careers. This is essential to avoid dependency on and identity with our jobs. We must pay attention to our family, friends, faith, community and our society. Making contributions outside of our work allows

us to gain satisfaction from each of these aspects of our lives and gives our lives richness and balance.

10) Separation: When we are in the wrong job or organization, it is essential that we leave. If we are in the wrong job, perhaps we can seek other opportunities within the organization. If we are in the wrong organization we should seek a new position in a new one. It is imperative that we not stay where we cannot contribute effectively or we will not be happy. We cannot let our superiors block us for very long.

If the organizational ethics are out of sync from yours and you are required to come down to their level, don't. Leave. If the organization repeatedly demonstrates a lack of commitment to your long-term success, don't stay. In every case, don't burn bridges. Leave with proper notice and with respect. When you move on, take your pride, dignity, character and good name with you.

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