



CAREER VISION

Identifying and Working Towards Your Vision

“First say to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do.”

-Epictetus

In keeping with this year’s theme of growth through the seasons, this issue encourages reflection on these and other questions: What is and isn’t satisfying about my current work role? What professional development steps could I take that would encourage skill development in preparation for a change? What opportunities does this organization offer me to engage in those steps?

Can you identify a career goal that you would like to work towards? If you find this task to be challenging, take heart -- targeting a career goal and working towards it takes effort, commitment and organization. As such, we’d like to share some helpful tips regarding career goal-setting and professional development:

1. Clear definition
2. Timeline and milestones
3. Support
4. Celebration

Clear Definition. First, it is essential to have a clear vision of what you want. If it’s not specific, how will you know whether you’ve attained it? Therefore, we suggest that you begin by narrowing down your career goals to one that is clearly defined and that you feel strongly about. For example, you know that to gain visibility and move into a leadership role in the workplace, you might want to improve your communication skills. This is a rather broad and vague goal. How might you narrow down such a goal? To make this goal manageable, it might be helpful to decide whether to focus first on writing or speaking skills. What is most important or valuable to your employer and your current position? What type of activity can you undertake to learn more and demonstrate progress in the area that you choose to focus on? Ideas include finding a mentor to review your communications, volunteering for a project that requires a new type of writing (say a proposal), taking a grammar class, joining a writing group, signing up for an on-line business writing course, or reading a book.

Timeline and Milestones. It is important to realize that attaining a goal and reaching a state of change is an evolutionary, not a revolutionary process. Choose goals that are likely to stand the test of time and maintain your motivation, recognizing that some goals that you select may require a greater investment of time and resources (such as completing a degree or attaining

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licensure). Therefore, it is important to be realistic about the time that will be needed to reach a goal and to be clear about the steps that need to be taken and the resources that are available to reach that goal within a given timeline. Something as simple as drawing an actual timeline and identifying when the half-way mark is reached can provide incentive and an opportunity to acknowledge milestones along the way.

Support. Career development theory suggests that we are more likely to opt for career choice goals that are consistent with our interests when we experience a high amount of emotional, practical, or financial support from others. Supportive family members, friends, co-workers, and employers help to buffer the natural stress associated with making career changes, and they often serve as helpful role models. Call upon the experience of employers, mentors, and friends who have accomplished the goal that you've identified and ask them the steps that were involved and how long it took them. Modeling your behavior after the successful behavior of those around you helps you to build confidence and to make proactive steps towards the future.

Celebration. Finally, celebrate accomplishments along the way, whether it is completion of a goal or the milestones attained on the path to meet a larger objective! Treat yourself and perhaps your supporters to an experience or a reward that is enjoyable to you. This is not only fun, but it's likely to maintain motivation because there are successive things to look forward to along the way - - that way, goal attainment becomes more of the growth and lifestyle process that it is. Your success can be contagious and provide incentive for similar goal-setting actions among your supporters. Celebration also provides a chance to reflect on how much you've accomplished, to re-evaluate the importance of that goal in your life, and to praise yourself for the positive steps you're taking.

In conclusion, research strongly suggests that we are likely to be more motivated by goals that are challenging, yet attainable; that are consistent with our needs and values; and that are supported by others in our lives.

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