

# Keeping Your 2011 Career Resolutions

It's time to make sure your career is headed in the right direction and that you'll take action to make sure that happens this year.

**T**he economic roller coaster ride of 2010 most likely resulted in making resolutions to protect and enhance your professional existence during 2011. You're probably worried about your job, thinking you might be looking for another job, or wondering when your current job search will end successfully.

What you need to do is think and act strategically about your career. The goal for this year is to build and execute a plan that results in a more satisfying and secure situation when you bid farewell to 2011. What I'm going to do in my contributions to this column is to share ideas and techniques from my observations that will help you build a plan. This first segment will introduce concepts that we will explore in more detail in future months. I hope you'll find suggestions that motivate you to get started, take action, and focus your efforts.

The corporate culture requires us to constantly focus on improving our current situation while preparing for a potential change. Even if your current status is

unemployed, you need to improve that situation and prepare for the potential change to a new role. A comprehensive career management plan should structure activities and focus actions around four pillars: situational assessment, networking, personal branding, and skill excellence.

## Situational Assessment

Situational assessment is the critical first step in which you thoroughly evaluate your motivation, mind-set, and current situation on both personal and professional levels. This analysis is necessary so you can get your feelings and emotions on the table in a manner that allows you to understand what underlying motivation drives you to manage your future more effectively and to more clearly see what defines a more satisfying professional environment for you.

A number of books and sources can lead you through this exercise. One of the best is *In Search of the Perfect Job* where author Clyde Lowstuter provides worksheets and guidance for building and interpreting your situational assessment. The value of this exercise will be enhanced if you engage a career management service to help with the interpretation of the

results and converting the output into your career management plan.

## Networking

This is one of the words we hear tossed around most frequently in the workplace and our personal life. Harnessing the potential of the virtual networking world and committing the time to build relationships on an individual level require diligence and rigor.

**Social network.** This is virtual networking using the scale and reach of the Internet. Examples are LinkedIn, Facebook, *LinkUp IMA*, and ExecuNet, as well as alumni websites. These sites offer portals to build the network of contacts essential to increase your reach within our profession and provide a vehicle for you to build personal branding for your skills and expertise.

**Organizations.** These offer high-value opportunities to meet people on an individual level and to develop relationships. Examples are professional organizations, conferences, continuing professional education (CPE) classes, vendor-sponsored events, and appointments driven from virtual interactions. Face-to-face meetings provide opportunities to build key

relationships and to gain broader access to those who influence an organization or opportunity.

## Personal Branding

This involves the steps you take to market yourself and influence how the world thinks of you.

Personal branding is reflected in the approach and quality of your work, appearance, and behavior. You need to examine each of these factors and improve them relative to the culture of your workplace. Consistent attention to these factors in a detailed manner that complements your work culture will increase your opportunities to contribute and gain recognition.

Creating value in an organization is as much about maximizing the impact of “how” you go about delivering your work product as “what” you deliver. Understanding the values of the culture and how to optimize the alignment of your delivery and behaviors enables you to manage perceptions and build credibility. Self-promotion is an art and skill that, when practiced correctly, will distinguish a person in the workplace.

## Skill Excellence

Skill excellence is broader than academic and functional skill accumulation. Achieving skill excellence requires a constant initiative, planning, and learning effort on three levels: skills portfolio, self-assessment, and cultural landscape. Charting a strategy across the three dimensions will enable you to navigate through an organization with greater efficiency and success.

**Skills portfolio.** Your functional skills portfolio and disciplines

need regular assessment and adjustment to optimize their fit with your work environment. This includes staying current with news and trends within your industry and staying current on technology. Demonstrating an ability to relate your functional skills to the value flow and strategic priorities of the business is critical to attracting the attention of the decision makers in the organization.

A very common reaction when a person’s job is threatened is to take courses and obtain additional training. Why wait until your job is threatened? Maintain an active and constant learning curve.

**Self-assessment.** Regular self-assessment and interaction with a qualified mentor or coach is another key to increasing personal awareness and understanding of how to influence outcomes and optimize interactions more effectively. Self-assessment will provide valuable awareness for behavioral strengths and weaknesses plus identify where your behaviors require situational modification for you to be more successful when leading groups and interacting with others.

Various skills inventory and assessment tools exist, and Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO) are two of the most recognized and useful. These assessments are often coupled with feedback gathered from a variety of work and social sources. In all instances, these assessments and interpretation of the results should be completed with a qualified professional. You might check to see if your company has these or similar tools available for employees.

**Cultural landscape.** To fit successfully in an organization, you need to master the cultural landscape in addition to delivering functional skill excellence and practicing self-awareness. The cultural landscape has two dimensions—the process by which decisions are made and who has influence over the decisions—and it exists in both the internal and external environments.

In both environments, it’s critical to map the process in detail regarding how decisions are made and who influences the decisions along the process. Internal mapping clarifies how contribution is evaluated and how recognition is awarded. External mapping identifies the pathway to acquiring information and pursuing opportunities.

The mapping for who influences decisions establishes “targets” for achieving contact and building relationships. High-value targets are those who most influence the process or ultimately make decisions, but a direct path to these individuals rarely exists. Incremental opportunities exist every day to demonstrate initiative and skill set to someone in the decision chain.

Careers are often made or broken based on performance in a single interaction with a key person in the business process or decision chain. Knowing the fit of each individual in the hierarchy of the business process and their influence on the decision chain is essential for you to take advantage of every opportunity to demonstrate your skills and initiative. Each successful demonstration increases the likelihood and frequency that higher-level and higher-value

## Table 1: Career Management Plan Daily Activity Scorecard

Earn 10 points per day by completing the following activities:

1 point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LinkedIn contact added</li> <li>Networking call placed to increase network, build awareness, and identify opportunities</li> <li>E-mail exchanged (reply received) with a targeted contact</li> <li>Target company identified and website researched</li> <li>Article read that will improve your networking skills, interviewing readiness, or quality of your CV</li> </ul>
2 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introductory telephone call completed with a contact or target</li> <li>Pertinent social network joined, such as LinkedIn, <i>LinkUp IMA</i>, or Facebook</li> <li>Pertinent group joined on a social network</li> <li>External target identified, cover letter developed, and CV e-mailed</li> <li>Website researched that will assist in the development of your job search or skill development</li> </ul>
3 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CV posted to website of a target company</li> <li>Telephone discussion with an internal or external contact or target</li> <li>Face-to-face networking or professional organization meeting attended</li> <li>Discussion held with a qualified mentor or professional career coach</li> </ul>
4 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Profile completed and CV posted to a job search website such as TheLadders, CareerBuilder, Monster, QuintCareers, BlueSteps.Job, Sologig, or ExecuNet</li> <li>Unsolicited telephone call received from a target or established contact</li> <li>Broadcast status e-mail sent to your network group</li> <li>Book read dealing with career planning or professional skill improvement</li> </ul>
5 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Telephone call to screen your CV</li> <li>Weekly work plan developed</li> <li>Skill inventory, situational assessment, or personal development test completed</li> </ul>
10 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Face-to-face interview with a target company or meeting with an internal high-value target</li> <li>Development of an action plan resulting from a skill inventory assessment, personal development test, or assignment from your coach</li> <li>Completion of an influence map and target action plan</li> </ul>

opportunities will occur.

### Keeping Active and Measuring Progress

In order to optimize the amount of success you achieve in 2011, you'll need to set goals, build detailed plans, and have a scorecard to measure your progress. Table 1 contains a simple but very effective methodology that provides incentive for discipline, rig-

or, and action by assigning value to activities. Your goal is to earn 10 points each day by completing activities that will drive your career management plan.

If you start doing this now, it will soon become an automatic process that will help you plot your career roadmap in 2011 and help you achieve satisfaction and excellence in your work life and your outside life. **SF**

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