

Reaching Your Career Goals

It won't be long before we will say goodbye to 2011. How is your career management plan progressing?

This is the fifth installment of our six-part series aimed at providing the framework for building a successful career management plan. We've explored the components and application of the four pillars: networking, leveraging self-awareness (situational assessment), skill excellence, and personal branding. As 2012 comes into view, it still isn't too late to build a career management plan. An effective plan will optimize application of technical and relational skills within your current work environment as well as provide a solid network and foundation should circumstances require you to launch an external job search.

In August, we discussed how personal branding combines with your technical and relational skill sets to create a powerful personal value proposition in the workplace. Your value proposition will differentiate you with decision makers in the organization so you become the candidate of choice for opportunities and assignments. Now let's examine building a strategy to target and achieve long-range career goals.

Breaking Through One Step at a Time

At some point in time, everyone starts at the entry level of an organization. From there, skill application and development combines with network connections and soft-skills acumen to significantly influence your path and trajectory. Having a vision coupled with well-planned strategy is essential for you to be selected for role opportunities that build an internal knowledge base and business acumen required for higher-level roles.

The majority of senior-level executives in a functional area arrive in their roles via a shared career path. It's important to identify the underlying roles and processes that drove their progression and then plot a high-level view of the experience and organization support you would have to gain in order to arrive at a targeted level or area of the organization.

The main factors driving success in your organization most likely will be tied to gaining experience within certain functional areas and geographies and working with certain key functional leaders. This sounds obvious, but you must take ownership for managing relationships and acquiring the development necessary to gain access to

the roles you need to move up in the organization. Evaluate the pillars of your career management plan, and assess if you are building the network, skill excellence, self-awareness, and personal branding to compete successfully.

Consistent and Persistent

You won't always be first in line for roles needed to move up in the organization. Understanding and acquiring the technical requirements for targeted roles, consistent demonstration of skill excellence in current roles, and taking ownership for building relationships with the decision makers will significantly increase your career momentum and prevent stagnation or stalls. Table 1 highlights the key competencies for job levels and how the factors within the pillars of your career management plan should evolve and mature to satisfy them.

The emphasis and mix of required technical and relational skills changes with each level of progression. Some people will rise through the organization quickly, some will plateau at a certain level, and some will leave the organization. The combination of technical skills developed and soft-skills tools from your career plan will optimize your success within your

Table 1. Career Progression Path and How to Influence Success

Job Bands:	Key Competencies:	Career Plan Evolution:
Vice President	Strategy Vision Integrity Leadership Facing skills	Network: Experts and advisors to provide insight and support Skill Excellence: Commanding presence Self-Awareness: Master of grasping situations and maximizing outcome Branding: Face of the function
Executive Director		
Senior Director	Tactical delivery Influencing skills Accumulated technical expertise Delegation and staff development Breadth of experience Depth of perspective Trust	Network: Well connected within the broad organization and profession Skill Excellence: Superior technical skills and knowledge base Self-Awareness: Organizational maturity and ability to bring closure to issues Branding: Partner of choice
Director		
Associate Director		
Senior Manager	Timeliness Leadership qualities and fit with company Quality of insight Integrity Commitment Relation building and conflict resolution Professional growth exhibited	Network: Map influence sources and build relationships with impact Skill Excellence: Continuous development and knowledge growth Self-Awareness: Ability to build relations and manage perceptions Branding: Demonstrate capacity, quality, innovation, and delivery
Manager		
Senior Analyst	Aptitude Analytic skills Innovative thinking Maturity and fit with role Adaptability	Network: Gain traction in the organization Skill Excellence: Aptitude and accuracy Self-Awareness: Gain insight and prepare Branding: Demonstrate initiative and ability to apply skill sets with quality results
Analyst		
Entry Role		

current organization or help you, if necessary, to find a better fit in a new company.

Play to Win

A career management plan is your personal business case to assemble a resource base, assess the landscape, and create professional equity in the place where you invest the majority of your life. Your network is your advisory board; self-awareness enables you to take an objective view of the landscape; branding is your marketing plan; and skill excellence is your face to the customer. Professional equity will be created in proportion to the quality of the components of your career management plan and how well you are able to align them with the drivers of the career ladder for

your organization.

The workplace is a very competitive arena, so it's critical for you to know where you want to go in the organization and clearly understand the rules of engagement for how to get there. Then you must decide if you're willing to make the commitment, sacrifices, and efforts required to earn the opportunities and fit into the culture. If not, then it's best to leverage your diagnostics and career management plan to exit and find a place where the job opportunities and cultural fit are more compatible.

In evolving and maturing the elements within the pillars of your career management plan, remember these essentials:

Network—Maintain a solid base while building an upward

presence. Remember that the five people you associate with most at work will have the greatest influence on your future.

Skill Excellence—Continuous learning and growth. Focus on acquiring the skill and experience foundation necessary for roles two levels above your current place in the organization.

Self-Awareness—Don't overplay your strengths. Adapt style, and modify delivery to complement the culture and ensure fit. Practice your elevator speech. Exercise good listening skills.

Personal Branding—Quietly and steadily distinguish yourself through quality delivery that adds incremental value to the client. Anticipate, innovate, and excel at execution.

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A career is a marathon, not a sprint. The hills get higher as you progress, so you must prepare for the climb. It's never too late to build a career management plan. Tomorrow is another day at the office where your ability to network, interact, demonstrate skill excellence, and show your personal brand will be tested against your peers. Anticipate, innovate, and excel in your execution with the help of a solid plan. **SF**

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