



Draw a Plan

Seize Your Potential

By Todd Saxton, Core Excellence, Inc.

Have you reached your career potential—the difference between who, what and where you are and who, what and where you can be? Achieving this requires total commitment, and the clock is ticking. Time is a great gift, and must not be squandered with a Scarlett O’Hara attitude that “After all...tomorrow is another day.”

Unfortunately, countless professionals do have career growth plans that are infected with the notion of waiting until tomorrow. They focus on just getting through the day, watching the clock and counting the minutes to quitting time. As with Scarlett, they may wise up too late and find their professional aspirations have “Gone With the Wind.”

Try this visualization exercise:

It’s five o’clock. You pack the brief case, grab the keys, sprint to the car, then tangle with traffic. You arrive in your neighborhood, wave at the neighbor, slow down for that squirrel, and pull into your garage. You greet the family with a plea to “Give me my space—it has been a crazy day,” throw your shoes off, change into something comfort-

able and exhale while letting go of a day which was just like any other—typical.

If you visualize the sofa as your next stop, then you have arrived exactly where most people do every day of their working lives. If this is you, let’s look at crafting a new visual—a new you driven by passion with a clear mission to change this cycle before it results in a wake-up call that may come too late.

**The fire was lit,
and I resolved
to make it
burn brightly**

My first wake-up call occurred 16 years ago while preparing for final exams with a study group of classmates. Our discussions turned to individual career visions, and we shared our passions for what we wanted to do with our educa-

tions, discussed financial goals, and revealed some of our dreams.

As I listened, I found myself thinking how limited most of these visions were. “That’s it?” I asked myself. “Is that all you see yourself doing...you really think that is the best you can do financially?” “Don’t you think you can do more with your education?” What disturbed me most were the limitations and self-perceived ceilings each person was placing on their lives.

When my turn came, I fully expected to hear praise and accolades for my vision and career goals. Instead, I was greeted with laughter and judgments that I was deceiving myself. My temporary dismay turned to determination. The fire was lit, and I resolved to make it burn brightly.

Wake Up Now

Fortunately, you do not have to experience a traumatic wake-up call yourself. You can develop, start, or re-fuel your career growth plan starting right now. With the steps outlined in this article, you can design a personal career assessment and plan for growth. With a commitment

continued on page 32

to action, this plan can help you achieve your career potential.

Start by writing a timeline of your life leading up to “Who I Am” today. Include only key events related to your career, including graduations, employment, and certifications, as well as awards, organizational affiliations, and volunteer positions. If there are beginnings and endings with any affiliations, memberships or volunteer efforts, include them as well.

You now have a picture of where you have been and how you have arrived at your current career position. You are simply reflecting at this stage—do not draw conclusions or try to analyze things yet.

Under your current position, craft a statement describing yourself—your passion, your role in the office, and your contributions on a day-to-day basis. You might say, for example: “I am hard working, skilled, goal driven, and a valuable contributor to the purpose of our office and the clients we serve.” Think of this “Who I Am” statement as your personal mission statement.

Pursuing career development and success has to be focused with an attainable high payoff, and the plan components must also be supported. The next sections offer an opportunity to assess and design your career plan. Your candor and willingness to examine these areas will challenge you to commit to a plan for career growth and success.

Key Motivator #1 Solidify Your Purpose

To fully pursue your potential, start with the greatest asset you have at your disposal—focus on self. Aligning purpose with career progress is perhaps the most important motivator to address, beginning with some basics regarding who you are and who you wish to be.

Draw a line down the middle of a sheet of paper and on one side draw a tree, including the trunk, branches with leaves, and a root system. If you were to water

this tree, wouldn't you start where the entire tree is fed? Draw an arrow to the roots and label it “feed here.”

Now move to the other half of the page and sketch your best stick person. Some basic understanding of what and who we are is to recognize that we have three dynamic attributes—thinking, feeling, and acting. As with the tree drawing, where do you believe is the primary focus for solidifying your purpose and feeding your motivation? Draw an arrow to the head and label it “motivate here.”

Motivation begins with your thought process—your self-talk

Motivation begins with your thought process—your self-talk. Our passions, goals, and aspirations are mainly influenced by how we talk about ourselves to ourselves. Placing “I can't do that” or “I'm not good at that” limitations on yourself is a motivation killer.

We can speak 180 words a minute, yet think 600 words a minute. The majority of your life is spent talking with yourself and what you are saying is a powerful influence. Are your words motivating your career pursuits, or do you recognize negative thoughts that may be holding you back?

A common negative remark in the business world is “I don't get paid enough for this.” You can reframe that to, “I am here to help with situations like this.” Self-talk is your primary cheerleader that no one else can control. This, too, is a powerful tool for you to use.

Central to solidifying your purpose

is living as best you can to reflect your values, morals, and beliefs. These fundamental qualities establish the parameters that govern your daily behavior and have a large influence on your self-image and motivation. They are foundational in shaping business ethics and driving work performance.

Do you value enhancing self esteem in others, and focus on keeping relationships constructive? Do you do this daily at work? Do you view feedback as a positive tool for your career growth? If honesty and integrity are important to you, can you say you live it? How you present yourself and interact with others will either assist or hinder your career growth.

Solidify your purpose by framing your internal self-talk to focus on the positives in your career, and allow your values to be reflected in your work performance. These are keys in opening new opportunities and career growth.

Key Motivator #2 Raise the Ceiling

Having established an understanding of the foundation of career success, it is time to consider your accomplishments and qualifications. Refer to your timeline and make a list of the accomplishments and qualifications you noted.

the ceiling can always be raised

On another sheet of paper, draw a ground-floor profile view of an office building without a roof. List your accomplishments and qualifications in separate rooms but with related skill sets or certifications together. Also consider rooms in which you would like to build skills and label them “under construction.”

Contemplate these rooms and your current skill levels to see if there are quali-

fications that will contribute motivation for attainable short-term (1–3 years) or long-term (high pay-off) goals. Stack these on a second floor above your ground level rooms. You now have a picture of your potential. Remember—the ceiling can always be raised.

Key Motivator #3 Create and Nurture

Creating and nurturing your business network will put a roof on your office building. As with any structure, we recognize the need for a firm foundation and we know more rooms can be built as we go. We often fail, however, to realize the importance of what keeps things in order and working in the right direction. This is represented by the roof covering your building.

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Consider the members of your support system (including family). Also think about short-term and long-term relationships upon which you can rely—and they can rely on you. These are relationships you will want to cultivate by establishing trust and credibility. These are key players in your network.

A great void in today's business world is the lack of coaching and support for people development. Coaching and support are essential in working relationships, but, for a variety of reasons, people are not interacting in ways to promote career growth.

Do you meet regularly with your

leader? Are you seeking discussion opportunities to stay ahead rather than waiting for wake-up calls? Your career growth and success can be fueled by having a mutually nurturing relationship with those you serve and work for. This will provide support, direction, and new opportunities.

Establish a good rapport and communication with your support system and enlist them in helping you pursue your potential. You are involved in people interactions almost every hour of every day. It is best if the relationships you are establishing are positive. Ask yourself if they solidify your purpose.

On your office drawing, complete the structure showing your key players as the roof.

Key Motivator #4 Exploit Growth Opportunities

There is an old saying that “if the door doesn't open, it's not the right door.” However, I challenge this motivation-sapping notion. I have yet to walk up to a door that opened for me just because I was there (even doors with sensors may require you to wave).

Similarly, recognizing and taking advantage of growth opportunities requires more than just being there—even if you are in the right place at the right time. On your timeline you outlined your life up until today, and now it is time to embrace those accomplishments and consider where you were when growth opportunity knocked.

Think back on your various employment positions, the relationships you built

be prepared to open the doors of opportunity when the knock comes

and nurtured (or should have), and the leaders you had. You are who you are today because of the collective opportunities that you chose to accept. Celebrate who you are today and who you want to be tomorrow, then be prepared to open the doors of opportunity when the knock comes.

Review and revise your “Who I Am” personal mission statement with a look toward changes which may start or re-fuel your career aspirations. Put this mission statement on a final page—then post it as a reminder of what drives you in your pursuit of your potential. Prepare for each day with this mindset: “I am a person in motion with unlimited opportunities to learn and grow.”

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