

Don't lose your way

Job success requires planning and focus – create a career map to keep yourself on track

WHETHER you are unemployed or have an unfulfilling job, you probably suffer from an ailment that plagues many people: career disorientation.

You are not where you want to be professionally.

Somewhere along the road to professional happiness, you veered off course and lost your way.

If you are driving and are lost, a map is a handy tool to help get back on course. A career map is just as useful in curing career disorientation.

Once you know the path you want to take, it is much easier to get to where you want to go.

The four key elements in your career map are:

1 Find the big picture

To create a career map, you must be able to take a step back and examine your position.

More often than not, you may need to take many steps before the big picture becomes visible.

The whole purpose of a career map is to create a path to your end goal. Being able to envision the entire path is crucial.

As you step back to examine your situation, ask yourself these questions:

- How far into the future do you want to plan? One year? Five years? Ten years?
- What job characteristics are most important to you? Location? Salary? Room for promotion?
- Is there flexibility for unexpected detours? You never know when a spouse will find a job in another city or when a new boss will make your current job unbearable.

2 Do some research

Planning should not be a stationary act. A vital part of effective career mapping is gathering information.

After all, you cannot fully prepare for a journey unless you have a detailed understanding of the places you want to go.

Determining the path you want



There could be unexpected detours ... you never know when a spouse will find a job in another city. - APpic

to take for the next few years requires a lot of legwork.

You must identify the specific actions you need to take on the road to success and fulfilment.

There are numerous methods to obtain all the information necessary for creating a sound career map. Some of the most popular choices include:

- Reading trade magazines and professional industry analysis;
- Interviewing industry experts; and
- Finding a mentor who is already successful in the job you aspire to be in one day.

3 Start marketing yourself

As you examine your path to

success, you must determine how to get yourself on that path. This means you need to be in contact with the companies and/or industries you see in your future.

Landing the job you want is not an easy task. That is why marketing is an essential part of career mapping.

Above all else, a self-marketing strategy for career mapping should address these three issues:

- **Market identification:** Just as a business must decide on the customers to whom it will sell its product, you must decide on the companies and industries to which you will sell yourself.

Be specific. Having only a general

idea will leave you unfocused. Make a list of specifics so you can properly allocate your time and effort.

- **Strength/weakness identification:** When a business sells its product, it does not just tell you the product's name. Advertisements emphasise the advantages of a product.

You need to emphasise your strengths and downplay your weaknesses as you market yourself.

Have your closest friends and colleagues help you to compile a list of your positive and negative characteristics.

- **Mission statement:** It may seem trivial to develop a mission statement for yourself, but it performs a

very valuable function. Creating a mission statement requires you to concisely explain your goals.

4 Plan for the unexpected

Often, as a person develops his career map, he realises that he is far off course.

This is perfectly normal, but it also means that getting on the right road will require a change of direction.

What the future holds is always a mystery. Drastically changing your life can only complicate things.

A very important concern is your financial stability. A career map is only valuable when it is realistic, so it should address any of your financial concerns.

As you plan for the future, ensure you have a financial plan to tackle the worst-case scenario.

With each step along the way, your career map should answer the question: "Can I afford to continue on?"

And the answer must be "yes".

Conclusion

Planning before you act allows you to make focused moves. Once you have plotted your course, you must act without hesitation.

Don't forget to check your career map regularly to ensure you have not veered off course. Make forecasts and continue to plan.

When the job market is rough, the people who do well are those who have a strong idea of where they are trying to go.

Remember, driving is a lot easier when you keep your eyes on the road. Happy planning! - Source: Straits Times/Asia News Network

■ **ARTICLE by Nathan Newberger, a job and career expert at www.WorkTree.com.**