



Book Disaster Proof Your Career

Tactics to Survive, Thrive and Keep Ahead in the Workplace

Patrick Forsyth
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Recommendation

Many business experts have written books about career planning in the traditional sense of how to work your way up the corporate ladder. However, the days of working at one company for your entire career are long gone, so you need a new approach to navigating your career path. In this book, writer and consultant Patrick Forsyth expands on the interesting concept of “career management.” This is the “art and science” of attaining a state of constant preparedness for the next big thing, whether the opportunity comes along inside or outside your company. Embarking on this ongoing, lifelong process is essential to staying relevant and highly employable amid the constantly changing demands of the new millennium. You probably won’t experience any “aha!” moments reading this practical, commonsense guide, but it’s a helpful refresher about career-planning principles and pointers. *BooksInShort* feels it serves as a good jumping-off point for anyone hoping to further his or her career.

Take-Aways

- To safeguard your career against threats, perform well, garner positive attention and regularly acquire new skills.
- Use “career management” to develop your abilities and increase your value with an eye toward the future.
- Focus on building your achievements; they are your primary vehicle for advancement.
- Be ready at all times to take advantage of career opportunities.
- Exude confidence to enhance your image and get ahead in the business world.
- Counter your negative “self-talk” by educating yourself about the aspects of your performance that worry you. Learn practical strategies for coping with each issue.
- Conduct a self-assessment and choose a career path that offers the best chance of success.
- Create an “action plan” for attaining your short- and long-term professional goals.
- View your performance review as a forum to further your career agenda. Collect useful feedback and request training courses that will help you grow.
- Always maintain a positive attitude and strive for excellence.

Summary

“The 21st-Century Workplace”

The only thing you can truly count on in business is that tomorrow will not be the same as today. Economic upheavals, rapid technological advances and other changes continually reshape the work world. Managers now face shrinking budgets, growing competition and other challenges. Many organizations are struggling to survive, so their employees’ welfare may not rank high on their priority lists. Thus, staffers must take it upon themselves to safeguard their careers from potential dangers.

“Whatever your expertise at present, it is a fact that its nature and level will need to change...you must make sure that you are always ‘career-fit’ now and at any time in the future.”

So how do you protect your value in your company and in the job market at large? The answer is to stay “career fit.” Performing well in your current position, taking a proactive stance in managing your success, and regularly acquiring the skills and knowledge you need to advance are vital steps. Your goal is to ensure that your superiors have an ongoing awareness of your talent that puts you top-of-mind when a new promotion, appointment or opportunity arises. “Career management” offers a practical approach to developing your abilities and making yourself an essential part of any firm. This approach will enable you to:

- “Become secure” in your current position.
- Prepare for any fresh opportunities that may arise.
- Establish yourself as an “asset” to your company.
- Increase your value to potential employers in the job market.
- Receive the compensation you deserve.

Be Prepared

To begin managing your career, assume a state of “readiness.” Always have an updated curriculum vitae (CV) or résumé on hand. Understand that you’ll need to tailor this document to meet the needs of each prospective employer. Also prepare a portfolio of your achievements. Include past performance reviews, awards or even a positive letter from your boss. Continually monitor the job market so you’ll know where opportunities might surface, and keep a close watch on changes and developments within your organization.

“Success doesn’t come to you, you go to it.” (American educator Marva Collins)

Present a personal image that aligns with your career goals. The way you dress and interact with others says something about your professionalism, as does the look of your desk or office. Every word you speak or write also sends a message about who you are, so developing your communication skills is crucial to your success. Cultivate your ability to negotiate, persuade, listen and learn, as well as any other communication proficiencies your job demands.

“There is nothing you can do that will guarantee success...But there is a great deal you can do to make success more likely.”

The axiom “who you know is as important as what you know” continues to hold true in the business world. Identify the people who have the potential to help or hurt you. Build reciprocal relationships with those who can positively influence your career. Understand the dynamics of office politics, and consider how you might use them to your advantage. Don’t contribute to your organization’s “rumor mill,” but be sure you know what people are saying about you – and about possible opportunities and pitfalls in your firm.

“People are a significant part of your passport to a successful career.”

Being busy and active in your company won’t help you if you’re not attaining meaningful results. Achievement is the primary vehicle for advancement. You will get ahead only if you are meeting or exceeding your goals and obligations. When you are performing well, let people in your organization know it. Tooting your own horn might feel inmodest, but it’s essential to furthering your career.

Cultivate the Right Attitude

Exuding confidence, but not arrogance, will enhance your image in the business sphere. Everyone gains some self-assurance over time and with experience. Your “self-talk” also contributes to how you feel about yourself. Negative, anxious thoughts about your performance can erode your poise and even increase your risk of failure. To counter your harmful thoughts and emotions, empower yourself with knowledge. For instance, if public speaking makes you nervous, identify the specific aspect of it that undermines your confidence – say, butterflies in your stomach or the fear of rejection from the audience. Then learn practical strategies for coping with the issue.

Craft Your Plan

Getting where you want to go is difficult if you don’t have a plan. The first step in formulating your career plan is to conduct a self-assessment. Begin by evaluating your skills. Are you detail-oriented, good at solving problems or great with people? Now identify your “work values.” What aspects of work make it meaningful to you? Take an honest look at your personality, and determine how well your character traits match up with your values. For example, if you are drawn to innovative work, but you are naturally a cautious person, you may need to adjust your values or discover new ones that align with who you are at your core. Next, analyze the factors in your life that might affect your career. For instance, if you have children in school, you may not be willing to move for a job. Once you have conducted your self-assessment, you will be able to choose a career path that offers you the best chance of succeeding.

“Your manager (well, a good one) is the best resource you are likely to have available regularly to assist your development.”

Next, identify your short- and long-term career objectives. To ensure that you are basing your goals on hard facts, gather information about salary levels and qualification requirements in your chosen field, and find out how big your particular industry is in your area. Keep your career targets flexible, so you can adjust them as your company or the job market changes. When you have identified all your objectives, write an “action plan” with specific steps you can take to achieve them.

The Performance Review: A Vital Opportunity

Most organizations require their employees to undergo regular performance appraisals. Instead of seeing your review as a negative experience to endure, approach it as an important part of your ongoing career management process. An appraisal can provide helpful information about your progress and your achievements, so you can continue to improve your performance. Annual or biannual reviews can be useful forums to further your career as you examine the factors that will determine your future

success.

“Progress in your career means being fit for the job now and also in terms of whatever you may do in future.”

Approach the appraisal process in three stages: the preparation, the meeting and the follow-up. Begin by finding out the procedures your company follows when conducting reviews. For instance, ask what will you need to bring, how long the meeting will last and what topics the appraisal will cover. Inquire if you need to fill out any forms ahead of time, and if your manager will be using a rating scale.

“Given that you work, and are likely to go on working, in a dynamic environment you have to actively plan and take action to stay secure and move ahead.”

Gather all the items you will bring to the meeting. This should include a record of your past appraisals as well as evidence of training courses you have taken, important work events you have organized or participated in, and feedback you’ve received from your co-workers, customers or other people. This “appraisal collection file” should also include an outline of your performance successes, such as meeting certain targets or deadlines. Build this file throughout the year with your appraisal in mind.

“The opportunities in corporate life come largely from achieving what is required of you.”

Preparing for a performance review also involves anticipating the issues your supervisor might raise and knowing how you will respond to any possible criticism. Develop a strategy for spotlighting your achievements over the past review period. Ask yourself what training or development courses would further your career – both immediately and in the long term – and form a strong case for why the company should provide or sponsor them. Don’t be afraid to “aim high” in your training requests; it’s “better to suggest more training than is approved than to have no ideas.”

“The best moments to press home and initiate action to further your career may be when things are going well.”

On the day of the appraisal, take particular care with your appearance and adopt an open, cooperative manner. When asked to give an opinion or respond to a question, be clear and positive. Actively participate in the discussion, listen well, be receptive to criticism or suggestions, and look for opportunities to contribute. Stay calm and collected throughout the session. By the end of your appraisal, you should accomplish several goals: review and record your performance rating, bring your development strategy up-to-date, identify some “lessons learned,” and plan for the next review period.

“Career management is as much an art as a science.”

The appraisal process doesn’t end with your meeting. Afterward, you must follow up on any points you and your boss may have agreed to, such as checking out available workshops or seminars, or researching and discussing additional information about a topic or project.

“Thinking About Development”

Self-development is crucial to staying career fit, so you should participate in a variety of learning activities relevant to your immediate and future work goals. Begin the development process by examining the requirements of your current position and assessing how well your skills align with them. Next, consider what new abilities or attitudes your job may demand in the future. Are there areas in which you need to improve? Once you have identified all your weak points, decide which ones are most crucial to your success and make them your top priority. Then establish how and when you will address them. Finally, gauge the cost of the development activities and determine whether you or the company will pay for them.

“A fundamental basic to creating career success is belief and thus confidence.”

You can pursue continued learning in several ways. Conventional forums include classes, “seminars, meetings, workshops and conferences.” For some companies, outdoor leadership or team-building exercises work well. Others may use simulations, job swapping or job sharing. Or they may enable staffers to engage in “open learning” activities, including watching videos and reading new texts, at their own desks. In many larger organizations, employees can now develop their skills through a company library or resource center.

Career Building Top 10

Futurist Alvin Toffler once said, “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.” View your professional development as an ongoing process involving these 10 steps:

1. **“Resolve to be a regular ‘self-developer’”** – Be proactive in researching and participating in learning activities. Commit to being a lifelong learner.
2. **“Analyze and set clear objectives”** – Understand what you hope to achieve in your career, so you can stop wasting time on work activities that don’t further your goals.
3. **“Make and use a plan”** – Generate your career strategy, then “put it in writing.”
4. **“Create sufficient time”** – Make your professional development a priority. If necessary, devote a “set number of hours per year” to updating your skills.
5. **“Learn from experience”** – Use your experiences, both positive and negative, to build a better future.
6. **“Learn from others”** – Everyone has something to teach you if you are willing to pay attention.
7. **“Spot opportunities”** – Watch for developments that may enable you to further your career plans.
8. **“Utilize a mix of methods”** – Employ various techniques, such as optimizing your relationship with your manager and making your performance reviews more “constructive,” to help advance your professional agenda.
9. **“Monitor progress”** – Assess which development strategies are working for you and which aren’t, then adjust your plans accordingly.
10. **“Aim high and be positive”** – Excellence should always be your goal, and attaining it requires an upbeat attitude.

About the Author

Patrick Forsyth runs the U.K.-based Touchstone Training & Consultancy and has written several books, including *How to Motivate People* and *Successful Time Management*.
