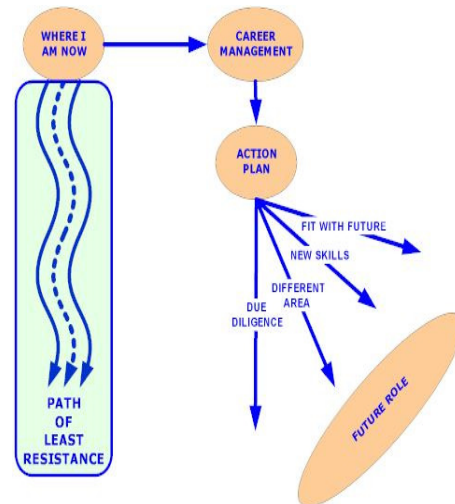


Where do you want to be in your career in five years time?

By Chris Johnson

If you could leap forward in time and take a look back at your career, what would you see? Would you be pleased with what you saw? Or would you be filled with regret; “Oh if only I had done ...” In order to consider whether your goals have been fulfilled you need to start with the end in mind.

Most executives spend their working lives constructing and honing detailed and innovative plans for their business, including making sure that the talents of their employees are used to the optimum. Yet, they rarely consider their own careers and how they fit into their own plans; which is rather curious when you stop and think about it. Most executives will agree that, if you want to succeed in something, having clearly defined targets, goals and detailed plans on how to actually get there will help. So why is it that all too often we fail to take time out from ‘managing the business’ to ‘managing our own career’?



I think this is partly due to an inability to take time out and simply take stock of our lives. We work in an era of flatter, faster changing organisations and roles. We handle a more complex mix of multiple roles, dual careers, flexibility and choices. Change seems to be foisted upon us. Indeed, the “average” manager changes roles at least every four years. We know that high potential managers change roles even more frequently, rattling through promotion, vacancies, fast-tracking or else being approached by a third party. Inevitably, this means that most senior people make short term choices and consistently fail to consider whether the moves fits with their longer-term view of their career.

A good example of this was Simon, who was a very talented GM marketing on the board of a leading organisation. However the business he worked in was the subject of a takeover bid and Simon felt he had to move on and move quickly to be ahead of the ‘fallout’. He quickly secured a position on the board of a listed company as Country Marketing Director with a very talented CEO as a boss.

Within six months, I got a call from the CEO asking if I could help: Simon just didn’t fit in and was leaving, his confidence was badly shaken and his CV had a hole in it! Luckily for Simon, his CEO recognized what was going on and decided to try and help Simon rebuild his career. Over the following six months Simon and I worked together and within the year he was on a new board with a different CEO whose style worked well for him. Over lunch one day Simon commented that “he could never have hoped to be enjoying a role so much”. The message is clear it’s not just about ‘a job’ it’s about ‘the right job’

From my experience of coaching a variety of businessmen/women, from a diversity of backgrounds, I have come to the conclusion that this is due to the fact that many people follow the “line of least resistance” in their careers. We progress from one opportunity to another without considering: “Where do I want to be?” and “What do I want to do with



my life?" If you want to be in charge of your career it is perfectly possible – you just need to invest time and thought, to understand yourself better and match those aspirations to new opportunities.

Alison was the Country Sales GM of a large international business. Alison “loved the company” but “hated the job”. Working through the background of this, she realized that although the role had status and rewards, it was unfulfilling. She recognized that she was a pioneer and enjoyed leading from the front, particularly where it involved technology. Following a series of discussions, Alison switched roles and she now loves her job as Head of Global ‘e’commerce.

People who do take charge of their career reap the benefits over and over again. I am sure many individuals will identify with those who one day decide that they have had enough of the day to day corporate life. It’s not all plain sailing; we can easily get distracted, even when we think we have a plan and clearly defined goals.

Kerry was a talented director who decided to leave corporate life and start her own consulting business. She had enough courage to go it alone, worked hard and it started to work for her. Then a past CEO from a previous role seduced her back into corporate life having spent 18 months creating her own business. It only took six months and Kerry understood all those reasons why she left the corporate world! Today she has returned to her original plan, the business is growing and now she employs six people. The corporate life beckons no more!

My message is this - **“Take charge of your career; after all it is yours.”**

Tips for the journey:

- ⑥ Be proactive, ‘Take charge of your career’
- ⑥ Get clear on your long term goals
- ⑥ Don’t compromise, particularly around ‘culture fit’
- ⑥ Don’t fool yourself about how hard it is to do
- ⑥ Take time, it’s a journey not a quick fix
- ⑥ Think about the barriers, what are they and how can you overcome them
- ⑥ Activate your network!
- ⑥ Find someone to help you stay on track
- ⑥ Don’t self seduce yourself into the wrong role

Take time to reflect then get into action. Remember it’s your career, no one else’s. Good luck!

