CNN.com

PRINTTHIS
Powered by Clickability

How to create a career path

(CareerBuilder) -- As a wise person once observed, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there." An employee who doesn't take time to look at where he is and where he wants to be runs the risk of overlooking opportunities, spinning in his tracks and never quite feeling that he has control over his own destiny.

Fortunately, developing a career path isn't as daunting a task as it may appear. Here, experts offer tips on how to chart a course -- including when to stop and evaluate that you're still heading in the direction that's right for you.

Self-awareness

Knowing what you want begins with knowing yourself. An honest appraisal is key to figuring out your ultimate goals.

"I've consulted with people about their careers for over 20 years, and what I've learned is that there are threads that run through our entire lives. It's also true of our careers," says Aricia LaFrance, a career consultant and founder of marketyourway.com.

"It's likely that you have, for example, always loved numbers or maybe you've always enjoyed helping people. Awareness of those threads can create a satisfying career path. Think life-long interests when it comes to career planning and you'll likely be happier in each job along the way."

Joel Garfinkle, founder of dreamjobcoaching.com, recommends thoroughly reviewing everything you have accomplished in your career.

"Focus on the experiences that have taught you important lessons and helped you learn new skills. Look at your résumé and peruse any performance reviews and other feedback you have on hand. Then, assess what you have learned. Take note of any parallels and key information that stands out. As you analyze your past, define and characterize the current state of your career, your 'point A.'"

Sara LaForest and Tony Kubica -- co-founders of Kubica LaForest Consulting (a management consulting and performance improvement company serving clients nationwide) -- suggest taking a business personality and performance profile assessment to use as a guide as to what you are likely to do well at, what you are likely not going to enjoy and conditions that can potentially stress you and limit your success.

They also recommend talking about career ideas and goals with people who know you well and asking for honest feedback.

Creating a plan

"A properly prepared plan of action for your own future career will help you focus on where you are heading and not the immediate day-to-day demands of your job," Garfinkle says. "Goals describe your destination, your 'point B.' If your goals are unclear, your career progression will be unfocused and haphazard."

Questions that he suggests asking oneself in order to help clarify goals include:

• What level of responsibility do you want to have?

• What projects would you like to head?

• What results do you want to achieve in your department or organization?

• What type of company do you want to work for (culture, size, integrity, reputation, etc.)?

• What problems or concerns do you care enough about to focus your entire career on solving?

• What type of environment do you want to work in?

• What type of people do you like to work with?

• What compensation (salary, benefits) do you desire?

• What type of work/life balance is best for you?

"When you're setting goals, think about the end result and then work out the details," LaFrance says. "Then, break those details down into do-able pieces. Each goal should have small, clearly defined action steps to help you get there."

Re-evaluating goals

Don't think of a career path as a one-way road from which you can never divert. Instead, plan on periodically looking at the map you've devised to see if it is still your best route.

Pay especially close attention any time there is a major life event (such as the birth of a baby) that may impact your priorities.

Likewise, the job world itself is not a steady entity.

"Mapping out a career 10 to 15 years into the future is difficult and can quickly become obsolete because there are many variables that affect a person's career, such as the changing economy, the changing focus on how work is done and rapid technological advancements," LaForest and Kubica note.

While it may seem that creating a career path would be limiting in the face of changes and challenges, the opposite is actually true. A well-designed roadmap makes for easier navigation by laying out the larger picture.

"A career plan -- whether it's 5 to 10 years down the road -- helps you take a long, thoughtful view of your working life. You'll be able to look at things in terms of what's best vs. what's speediest, what's meaningful vs. what's easy," Garfinkle says.

Know where you want to go, and chances are you'll get there.

© CareerBuilder.com 2010. All rights reserved. The information contained in this article may not be published, broadcast or otherwise distributed without the prior written authority.

Find this article at:
http://www.cnn.com/2011/LIVING/05/02/create.career.path.cb

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© 2008 Cable News Network