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# Take Charge of Your Career

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Who's in charge of your career development? In the past, employers were primarily responsible for managing careers. Opportunities were often pre-determined, and in many cases, somewhat out of your control.

But in recent times, the employment contract has changed. You now have the opportunity to take charge of your career destiny—choosing the status, pay, flexibility, and work environment important to you. Think of yourself as a small corporation—You, Inc.—and appoint yourself Chief Executive Officer.

As CEO, you're responsible for the bottom line. Your future is entirely in your hands. Don't let the fancy title intimidate you. Even if you've never run a company before, you're imminently qualified for this job. All you need is a plan. For helpful tips and sound advice on becoming the boss of your career, read on!

## Know Yourself

CEOs are honest about their organization's strengths and weaknesses—they understand what they can and cannot do. When it comes to your career, you need the same level of self-awareness. You're unique, with talents that

make you ideal for some jobs. But those very same talents may make you unsuitable for other occupations.

Ask yourself the following questions, and you'll be on your way to finding a career that's right for you:

- What are my talents, skills, strengths, and interests?
- What types of people do I work best with?
- What are the values essential to my job happiness?



*When mapping out your career, know your strengths and weaknesses.*

## Get to Know the Right People

Effective CEOs know that alliances are essential to success—that's why they surround themselves with good mentors and advisors.

You can capitalize on this concept by forging alliances with people who share good ideas and helpful information. Find a mentor who will "show you the ropes." Introduce yourself to a workplace achiever. Knowledgeable people can make your road smoother by providing career tips that aid in your quest for success.

## Maintain Balance

People sometimes lose sight of the forest through the trees. Effective CEOs realize this and try to keep perspective, even during hectic or trying times. In this vein, remember that career satisfaction is only part of a fulfilling life. Things like love, friendship, happiness, and time for yourself are equally important.

Don't allow your work to become all-consuming. Workaholics are prime candidates for burnout, and some never fully recover. If you're working 70+ hours a week,

something's got to give—either the workload, or more likely, your mental or physical health. That's why it's critical to keep a realistic perspective on the role work plays in your life.



### **Keep an Achievement File**

Good CEOs take the time to recognize and celebrate successes. Do you? When you perform well on the job, do you write it down? If not, start a file to track the projects you've completed, skills you've learned, and goals you've accomplished. You may also want to keep a written record of the education or training programs you've attended, thank you notes you've received, and positive comments in e-mails or notes from your boss or co-workers.

Why? Your accomplishments are a "calling card" for your future. When it's time for a performance review, you can refresh your manager's memory about your achievements. When you need to update your resume, you'll be able to provide concrete examples demonstrating your skills. And when you're having a bad day, sneak a peek at the file and remember the wonderful things you've accomplished!

### **Play Nice**

You know the old adage: "What goes around, comes around." It holds true in all aspects of life, especially business. And successful CEOs understand that being a good leader means treating people well—even enemies.

As the head of your career, you too must treat everyone with respect. If you're angry with a co-worker, communicate your feelings quietly and tactfully. Anger is powerful, so take care not to "explode" on the job. When it's time to transfer departments or start with a new company, resist the temptation to burn bridges by "telling off" an adversary. Remember, if you don't have anything nice to say, you shouldn't say anything at all.

As much as possible, try to stay out of the "rumor mill" at your office. Gossip and backstabbing will only come back to haunt you. It's a small world, and you never know who will turn up at your new job. If you treat every person with kindness and respect, your career can only benefit.

### **Don't Play the Blame Game**

The buck stops here. Successful CEOs understand that they must take responsibility for the health of their organization—even though they don't have direct control over everything that contributes to its well-being.

This attribute is a difficult one to cultivate. After all, when something goes wrong in your

career, it's easy to fault someone else. In some cases, other people or circumstances really may be to blame. But before you point the finger, take a step back and ask yourself a few questions:

- What could I have done differently?
- Why didn't I see this coming?
- What can I do to make sure this doesn't happen again?

Blaming someone or something else may make you feel better temporarily. But this type of behavior is negative, and it can result in a cycle of workplace unhappiness. By taking control of the situation instead, you'll avoid feeling like a victim.

### **Think Like An Owner**

Achieving long-term career success isn't easy. If it were, we'd all be driving around in expensive sports cars. But by becoming CEO of You, Inc., *you* control your career path by thinking like a career *owner*. Now get out there and take charge!