

7 STEPS TO CAREER SUCCESS

It's a commonly known fact that the vast majority of us spend more time planning our annual holiday than our careers. To put that into perspective, we spend more time focussing on planning two weeks away each year (and which are usually quickly forgotten) than our working lives which can span 40 years!

It's this lack of planning that can cost professionals valuable opportunities to progress their career, generate a higher salary and have a wider circle of influence. So often I've met talented, ambitious people who are stuck in a rut and don't know how to move forward and are waking up stressed out each morning knowing that they are seriously damaging their chance of a happy and successful future for themselves and their families.

So, what do you need to do to put your career on track?

I've created these 7 steps to help you achieve the career of your dreams. I've made this report as brief as possible whilst still giving you everything you need to know about the 7 steps. No padding or waffle – just usable ideas you put into action immediately!

Step 1 - Set your Sights

So, what do you REALLY want?

OK, you know you need to be more proactive in managing your career, but where do you start? Simply, by being really clear about what's important to you and set goals based on that. This is key to making the right choice. Our values drive us in everything we do, so the first thing we need to do is establish what our key values are – that is, what drives us to do what we do every day? Set aside some time to reflect on what's really important to you and develop around 6 statements that sum up the experiences and qualities you want from your career, for example:

- I want to be more creatively engaged and fulfilled.
- I want more excitement and to feel that my own talents are more fully utilised.
- I want to keep learning and growing and developing my skills and talents.
- I want to earn more money.
- I want to take more adventurous holidays every year.



Your vision, your future....

Be really clear what you want your career to look and feel like. Don't worry if you don't know specifically which route you want to take. Just bear in mind your values and what would need to be in place for you to feel happy and fulfilled. To create the vision of your future career, make sure you are in a quiet environment where you won't be interrupted, and close your eyes.

Next, see yourself in your successful career in, say, 5 years time. The trick is to make it 'real' by being really clear about what would be in place. Take a few moments to consider the following questions. What do you see happening? What is going on around you? What sounds can you hear? How are you feeling?

Once you've experienced a clear vision, take a few minutes to note down any significant details and also notice how you're feeling. You should feel inspired and excited. If not, was anything missing? Does it signal a conflict in your values? (for example, did your vision of your 'ideal' career show you travelling abroad, when one of your core values is spending time with your family). Work to resolve any conflicts and try again.

To really explore how your values can help make positive career decisions, why not take a look at our Career Values tool? This is available as part of the Executive Careers Toolkit, available to download here.

Step 2 – Discover your Strengths

What do you bring to the party?

The unique set of skills, personal qualities and experiences that you have to offer will be what sets you apart from others in the market place – but only if you are clear on what they are and how you want to apply them.

So, start by writing down all the skills, personal qualities and areas of knowledge which you have demonstrated through your career so far. Write down as many as you can, including any you've gained from outside the workplace. When you've done this, highlight those that you feel you are highly proficient in.

Next take each item on the list and note next to it how much you enjoy using that particular strength area. One way to do this, is to use a scale of 1-5, where 1 is strongly dislike using it, through to 5 which is thoroughly enjoy it. There may also be items which you would really like to use, but which are currently 'untested' or where you know you still need to develop. Note these down on the list, indicating these are still under development.

Once you've done this, you should be able to see those skills or qualities that you are proficient in and also really enjoy using. These are your preferred strengths. You may also have identified some you really enjoy but which you might need to develop further in, as well as some which you may be very good at, but which you no longer enjoy using.

This will give you a great idea of which strengths you wish to market, which you want to develop through your career, and which you now want to avoid!

For a more in-depth view, you can use the Skills Indicator tool available in the Executive Careers Toolkit, available to download here.

Step 3 - Clear the pathways

Once you've created an inspiring vision and identified your key strength areas, it's time to start setting some clear and purposeful goals to propel you towards your future.

So, let's start the goal setting process.

The biggest mistake people tend to make is to try to pin down specific career options too early in the process. You do need to be thinking about setting goals, but these don't need to specify career choices. In fact, this can often limit you before you've really explored what you're looking for.

So, let's start by focussing on what do you know you want – for example, you might not know exactly what you want to do but you know you want to be moving into a more challenging role which enables you to use your creative abilities within, say, the next 12 months. Keep it as broad as you like at this stage – you can always add more detail – or even change it completely - later.

Then review your goal and just check....

- Is it positive? – i.e. is it focussed on what you do want rather than what you don't want?
- Is it clear? – i.e. if you've used a word like 'challenging', do you know what you mean by that?
- Is it aligned? – with your vision and the strengths/qualities you want to use?

The key is to start clearing a new pathway. And at least you'll have a starting point which you can base your thoughts around.

Step 4 - Create an abundance of choice

Right. Now that you have some focus and an idea of your direction, you can begin generating some options. The key to success here is to really free your mind and be creative. If you constrain yourself to what you already know – or dismiss some ideas straight away – you may be missing out on some great possibilities. So take some time with a large, blank sheet of paper and just get writing. Your aim is to get as many ideas as possible down on the page. And write them anywhere on the page – not as a list. This will help you to be less 'linear' in your thinking.

Once you've filled your page with ideas, go through them and highlight those that are attractive to you. Don't worry about why you've picked them at this stage – just follow your gut instinct. You may find that some of these ideas are not related to your current role, while some might be closely aligned to your expected career path.

Step 5 - View and Review

Now take a look at each one you've selected in turn and visualise yourself in each role. What would it feel like to take that career path? Ask yourself the following questions:

- How well does it fit with your values?
- How closely does it take you towards the vision of your 'perfect future'?
- What would you need to sacrifice in order to achieve it?
- How well does it match your preferred skills and abilities?

To take this further, you can map each role onto a personal Career Wheel, which will provide you with a powerful visual aid to making the right decision. This is available as part of the Executive Careers Toolkit, available to download [here](#).

From this, you should now be in a position to select the career choice that's right for you. If you're still not sure, try taking yourself into the future, when you've committed to the course of action to make this choice 'real'. How does it feel? Do you feel excited and inspired? Do you have doubts? If so, ask yourself if they are 'real' or simply a sign that you're moving out of your comfort zone? Remember, in order to grow and develop you need to feel stretched but not under stress.



Step 6 - Keep it on the Radar

You should now be feeling motivated and inspired towards your goal. But it's easy for the feeling to slip away and for the day-to-day pressures to take over. So how can you 'keep it on the radar' and make sure that you proactively move towards it?

The first way to do that is to revisit your draft goal you put together and make it clear, specific and relevant to your new career choice. Add in timescales, even if you're not sure how long it will take - you can always adjust them later.

Next, break the goal into shorter milestones. What are the short and medium term steps along the way? How will you know you've got there? And, very importantly, how will you reward yourself as you achieve each milestone? Giving yourself incentives is a powerful way to keep momentum going.

Finally, be really clear about what the new career will bring you in terms of benefits. It's always easy to stay where you are rather than making a change, so you need to harness what will motivate you.

One way to do this is to create a picture that represents what you hope to gain through achieving your career goals. Is it spending more quality time with your children? Is it a new car? A holiday home? More international travel?

Gather pictures from magazines, adverts or newspapers and create a collage of the pictures or pin them to a notice board and display them where you'll see them every day. This is a powerful way of reminding you of why you need to make the change as well as just keeping your goals 'in mind' on a regular basis.

Step 7 - Take action

Right. It's now time to take some action to make the dream a reality.

Now I want you to look at your goal and identify 3 specific steps you can take RIGHT NOW to move you closer to your goal. And when I say right now I mean in the next 24 hours. This may just be a phone call, researching some information on the internet, talking to a colleague etc. But these small steps are vital to get some traction for moving forward to your goal.

So, if you've been following these steps, you will be well on the way to taking control of your career and paving the way to a future that's right for you.

For those serious about taking their career to new heights, either download the Executives Career Toolkit or contact me.