

Turning HOPE into a STRATEGY

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You have your heart set on the next big goal in your life — a raise and significant promotion, a seat on a corporate or non-profit board, an honor or award, a major career shift. Whatever your vision of the future, you will need more than hope to achieve it. You will need a strategy supported by concrete action plans. To reach your objective, you will need to do a situational analysis, perform a reality check, determine a path to take, develop an action plan, and then implement the action plan.

Are you ready?

Do a situational analysis

For your situational analysis, you will need to examine your skill set to determine where you are strong and which areas need improvement. Evaluate your strengths: your skills, your education, your career to date, the projects you have successfully completed, your activities within the organization where you are employed, and the activities and projects that you have undertaken outside of your employment in the larger community. Identify your weaknesses as they pertain to your specific goal. Look at others who have achieved it, or a similar goal, and determine what attributes they possess, both personally and professionally, that you will need to strengthen in yourself.

Perform a reality check

Do you have the right qualifications for your goal? If you do not, then what are the gaps? Can you close the gaps to develop the needed qualifications? If you cannot, or you would prefer not to spend the time and energy to do so, you need to stop, take a deep breath, and change your goal.

For example, you may want to serve on the board of a Fortune 100 company or a family-owned company in your community. But once you look at the composition of the current board, you realize that you have to be either the CEO of another Fortune 100 company or

be related to the family. If you do not meet those qualifications, it is time to reorient, evaluate your qualifications, and select an alternative goal, or recognize that while this may be a future destination on your journey, it may not be your next major step.

Determine a path to take

What is strategy? It starts with having a vision of your future. "The best way to predict the future is to invent it." What do you desire? What is important to you and when would you like to get there? How much risk are you willing to take?

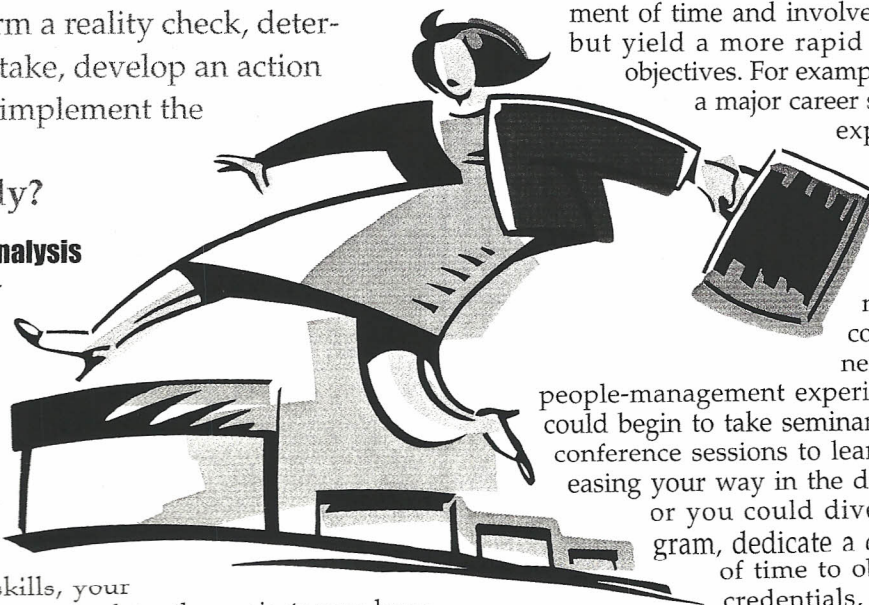
There are usually several different paths to take in reaching any destination. Some may take longer, but be more scenic. Others may require a significant investment of time and involve a high level of risk, but yield a more rapid realization of your objectives. For example, you want to make a major career shift from recognized expert in your field of technical design to program management. When you review the skills required of program managers, you discover that you lack the necessary financial and people-management experience to qualify. You could begin to take seminars and attend various conference sessions to learn about these areas, easing your way in the direction of your goal; or you could dive into a degree program, dedicate a concentrated amount of time to obtaining educational credentials, and close your gaps more quickly.

If you are a real risk-taker, you might consider outlining a plan to develop the needed qualifications through on-the-job training in a deputy-type position, and pursuing a sponsor to bring you on to his/her team and teach you the ropes. In this case, you start as the new kid on the block and build your new reputation as a leader through the bumps and successes you work through aboard a speeding train.

Of course, you could always just hope that someone might think you would be a good candidate for a program manager slot; but this leaves your destiny to others, and, in general, is not likely to be the best or most effective strategy.

Develop an action plan

Once you choose your path, you will need a plan of action with milestones along the way. This will allow you to measure your progress and alter your course as necessary. Remember, sometimes your path will need to change as you proceed partway down the road. Have you ever been on a road trip and encountered



unexpected construction? To avoid being delayed for an undetermined time or turning around and returning home, you probably responded by quickly scoping out an alternate route and proceeding on your way.

What about that next promotion? You have reviewed the job description and you know what gaps you need to fill. You have mapped out your path. Now you need an action plan that enumerates each step. You would not take a road trip without making sure that the car's oil had been checked, the gas tank and windshield-wiper fluid container were both filled, and that the tires were in good condition. You would also know before you embarked how many days it would take, where you would stop each night along the way, and what sights you would visit. You need to look at your career as you would such a road trip. You want to determine which tasks you will take on; what skills those tasks help you develop toward the new job you desire; particular training courses you need to complete and when; who will mentor you in specific areas; and how you will obtain the necessary feedback to adjust your course of action and/or your performance to achieve each milestone.

Implement the action plan

Now you are ready to move forward. All you need is commitment and responsibility as you fol-

low the path and implement the action plan you have developed. Do not let potholes deter you. As Thomas Edison said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." You will not achieve every milestone on your journey; do not be afraid to correct your course. Seek to understand why you were unsuccessful on a particular part of your plan and determine alternatives that will allow you to proceed.

Pursuing your path and action plan with flexibility and persistence, not just hope, will place you well on your way to achieving your desired goal.

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Endnotes:

¹ Alan Kay, www.quotationspage.com.

² www.quotegarden.com/failure.html.

Reaching Out to Schools, It's EASIER than You Think

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When my children first entered elementary school, I joined the Parent Teacher Association. One of the questions on the application was "What talent do you have that you could share with the PTA?" I proudly indicated that I was a member of the Society of Women Engineers and that our local section did elementary outreach programs. I thought that I would get a call immediately. The call never came.

Years later, I know better what it takes to get in the door at the local elementary school.

So, if you are a mom or a dad and a SWE member, and would like to do an outreach program at your elementary school, here are some suggestions:

Join the PTA.

Go to a meeting and find out who is really in charge. Find out if there are already activities where you can help. For example, there may be tutoring going on at the school. Or, as was the case at my children's school, they had a science night and were always looking for help.

MEET ONE-ON-ONE with someone in charge. In my case, I got involved in our school's "Bright Ideas" program. The Bright Ideas chair was a scientist at heart and welcomed me with open arms. That was four years ago. Now, I am always called by the Bright



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