

Designing Your Career Path

When circumstances cause you to reassess your career plans, take responsibility by gaining clarity of your purpose, identifying your values, and deciding on your definition of success.

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You've been offered a promotion that requires a move. You've been laid off. Your boss wants you to take on a big project. You didn't get the promotion you had been expecting. You've been reassigned. Whatever the reason, your career path looks murky, challenging, uncertain, or just not the way you envisioned it would be. What should you do?

Take charge of your career! Become the "Boss of Me." Choose to be a self-directed leader. What does this mean? It means consciously examining what is important to you and designing your own future and career path. Does this mean you need to have that old standby, a five-year plan? No. It does mean, however, that you need to decide how and what you want to do with your life and your career and then take actions that are congruent with those decisions. You will do this by

gaining clarity of your purpose (your personal mission), identifying your values (keywords), and deciding on your definition of success.

Gain clarity of your purpose

What is your personal mission? For many of us, the answer to this question is as clear as mud. It is like standing in front of the refrigerator saying, "What do I want?" Maybe you want to design certain products. Maybe you want to work in a specific industry. Perhaps you want to manage other engineers. Or you want to run your own company.

Getting to this answer can be difficult. It might require introspection — or bouncing ideas off of trusted friends and family. And, it may take several years to figure it all out. But, trust us; if you don't start trying to determine what it is that you want, it will just be a longer time until you find the answer.

Something to remember is that you may have clearly determined your purpose at some previous point in your life and career. But as time has gone on, and you — and the world around you — have changed, you may be questioning your purpose — something you thought you had long ago resolved. It is worth taking the time to contemplate. You may find it challenging to keep your momentum going if you're no longer clear and confident in your mission.

Identify your values

When companies engage in a strategic planning process, they usually identify the values that are important to them. It is no different for an individual, as she strives to develop the direction for her life and career. Think about the keywords or values that are drivers for you. There are many right answers — you just need to determine what your right answers are.

What types of values or keywords are we talking about? Examples include integrity, teamwork, independence, make a difference in the world, environmentally sustainable, protect our country, and financial wealth. Remember, these need to be the values that resonate with you.

Values are quite integral to who you are — they are woven into the fabric that makes up your self. They are defining characteristics that shape the decisions you make and the actions you take. Unlike your purpose, which may change or evolve as you move through your life, your values are more likely to remain stable — as guideposts for you to rely on.

Decide on your definition of success

At one point in our educations and careers, the prevalent definition of success for many of us is to be "CEO of the Company," where the Company is a large multinational or major employer in the city where we

work. That may sound good, and we wish you were achieving it!

If that is no longer your definition of success, or your objective is no longer clear to you, how do you define success? We suggest you start at the personal mission statement. Once determined, evaluate your progress. Develop an approach to success for yourself. Success may mean obtaining a promotion, satisfying or working for a company that contributes to making a better place. In all cases, it should be a result of your actions. Your definition provides meaning to your life and helps to determine the direction for you.

You might find it helpful in determining your

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work. That may still be your goal — and we wish you every opportunity for achieving it!

If that is no longer your definition of success, or you've realized that this objective is no longer possible for you, how do you develop your new definition? We suggest that you look at the personal mission you have now determined, evaluate your values, and develop an appropriate definition of success for yourself. Success might mean obtaining work that you find satisfying or work in which you contribute to making the world a better place. In all likelihood, it will be a result of your deciding what provides meaning in your life. You get to determine the definition that works for you.

You might find the idea of determining your own definition

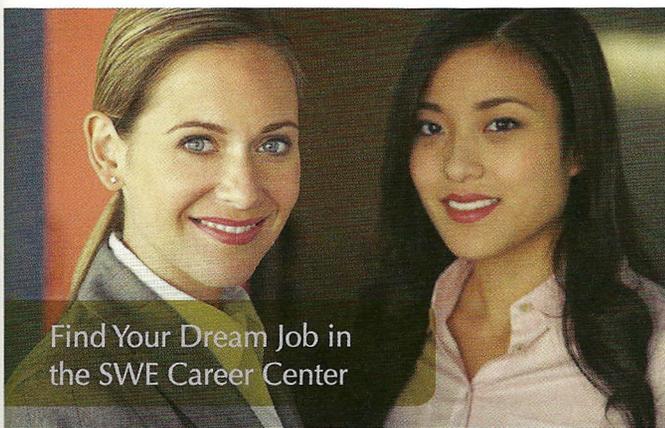
for success a bit scary. Many of us don't understand that we can shape our own destinies. Recognizing that we have control over defining success on *our* own terms can be at once liberating and intimidating. When we were in school, criteria were specified for achieving certain grades. In the workplace, metrics are set for successful job completion. In designing our career paths and our futures, *we* get to set the criteria.

What an opportunity to have the power to create our own personal missions and success criteria! Most of us would likely be hard pressed to identify someone who holds us more accountable to our purpose than we hold ourselves. The real defining moments in our lives come when we decide if we are measuring up to the purpose we've established.

The opportunity to design your own career path is quite exciting. And, it will be easier to accomplish if you gain clarity of your purpose, identify your values, and decide on your own definition of success. ■

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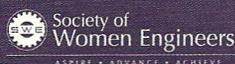


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