



## 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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**Y**ou'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 that you determine, evaluate, and develop an appropriate definition of success for yourself. It may mean obtaining a satisfying or rewarding job that contributes to making a better place. It may be a result of your work providing meaning to determine the success for you.

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