

Get in Control of Your Career

Take steps to ensure you have a career –
From developing your personal business plan
To adopting life-long learning goals.

By Ron Prokosch

Realities of the past such as full-time, permanent employment, and the value placed on loyalty and tenure are gone. The business world now stresses flexibility, with value given to performance and skills. Company paternalism, linear career growth, and one-time learning are things of the past.

Today, reputable companies don't guarantee continued employment to new, or old, employees. The current trend is this: You are hired to do a specific job at a specific salary with certain benefits. If you do this job well – and if your colleagues and superiors do their jobs well – you might be employed for a long time. Do the job poorly – or choose a company where others do their jobs poorly, or where business suddenly turns down – and the company may be faced with the decision to terminate staff.



Today's employees must accept the fact they will have multiple careers and must continue to upgrade their job skills or face being left out of the job market.

Although there is massive change and uncertainty in the career management environment, there are three things we know for sure: that change is here to stay; that life will not go back to what it was like before; and that each person must control their own career or someone else will do it for them!

Controlling your career means, among others, knowing what an employer's expectations are, as well as understanding your own needs and those of the changing marketplace.

To fully understand your employer's expectations, look at the changing attitudes regarding company loyalty and trust. In the workplace, our first loyalty has to be to our own needs. It sounds selfish, but it's really an expression of selfness, the cornerstone of "non-dependent trust." As William J. Morin says in his best selling book *Trust Me*, "Non-dependent trust takes our natural desire to trust others and fits that inclination to the business environment."

At some point your manager's needs are likely to take precedence over your own needs. So your first loyalty is to yourself. But this doesn't mean that you have no responsibilities to the company or to your colleagues. In fact, focusing on the difference between loyalty and responsibility can help you become an outstanding employee.

Loyalty is unquestioning, but responsibility demands that you analyze a situation and make decisions based on your analysis. When you carry out your boss' directions without question, you're being loyal, but you may also be acting totally irresponsibly.

Responsible employees think about the tasks they are asked to perform by asking themselves some questions:

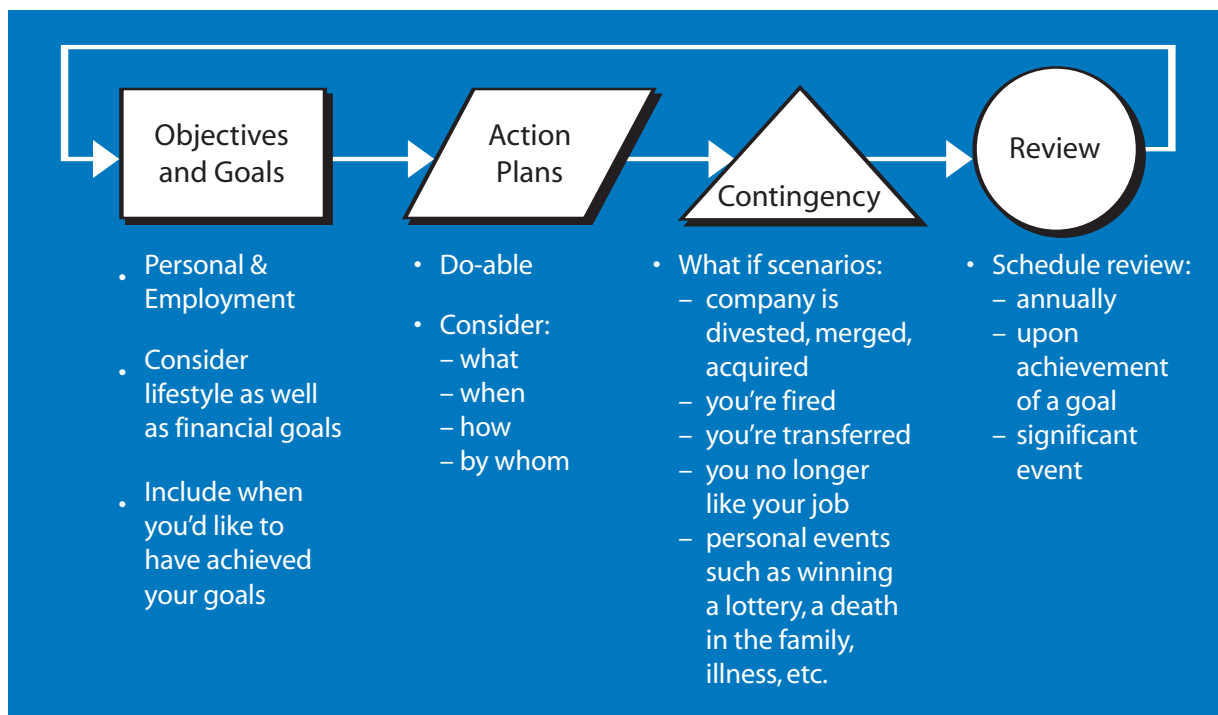
- Does this instruction make sense to me?
- Is this instruction compatible with similar tasks I've done in the past?
- Do I understand my instructions well enough to complete the task?
- Do I know how my performance will be measured and rewarded?

Answer "no" to any of these questions and it's your responsibility to discuss the situation with your manager.

Today's successful employee combines the desire and ability to contribute at a high level of efficiency with excellent work skills. Such employees are constantly learning new skills and acquiring knowledge in their fields. Even if such training or education isn't provided by the company, these individuals are willing to make the investment on their own. Successful employees will examine their own performance and ability to contribute continually and make an action plan for the future.

You, as an employee, must consider that you are in "business" for yourself. Just as in any business, you must have a business plan. Keep in mind that business planning is a dynamic process not a one-time event: keep the process going and write it down.

Your Personal Business Plan



Here is a suggestion for a good business planning process (see diagram above):

1 – Have an objective or goal.

Ask yourself questions such as: Where do I want to be in one year, five years, ten years, on retirement? The closer your objective time-frame, the more precise you can be; the further out in time, the more your objective becomes a vision of the future. Set short-term objectives congruent with your long-term vision.

Quality and style of life can also be a part of these objectives. Consider your financial resources, interests and values in the context of your employment.

2 – Break your personal objectives into achievable and “do-able” actions.

Figure out what is to be done, when, how and by whom.

3 – Build on some “what if?” scenarios or contingency plans.

Consider:

- That your company may be divested, merged or acquired;
- That you may be fired or asked to transfer;
- That your job may no longer give you the kicks it used to; and
- That personal events – illness or loss of a parent or loved one, maybe even winning the lottery – may require you to implement plan “B” or “C”.

Review your progress and renew your business plan on a regular basis or upon a significant achievement or event.

Also keep in mind that, over time, your values, interests, and personal situations may change and, therefore, your objectives or goals may change.

While there are no guarantees that a career will always be secure, there are two important steps that will improve your personal career security in the 1990s and beyond. The first is to remember that a specialist must also be a generalist who understands the larger, organizational and societal context in which we work. This includes understanding such concepts as non-dependent trust and company loyalty.

The second step is to learn new skills and concepts. Businesses, industries and the marketplace are all changing at a dizzying rate and show no signs of slowing down. Unless you take responsibility to keep abreast of what's happening and augment your skills accordingly, you might get left behind. In the 1990s and beyond, education is survival and life-long learning the essential rule.



This article was written by **Ron Prokosch**, President of **The Prokosch Group**. Ron is a CMC and CHRP and has been consulting in the areas of Human Resources and Executive Search for over 20 years.



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