

Building and Using a Career Action Plan

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Today's workplace is full of unpredictable ups and downs. The only thing that may seem constant is change. In order to protect yourself and your family from the fluctuations that occur in the business world, and also to help you live your professional dreams, consider developing a career action plan. It can act as a safety blanket, allowing you to achieve your goals no matter what unexpected events arise.

Start by asking yourself a few questions:

- Do you know where your career is going?
- Do you know where you want your career to take you? How about in one year?
How about in five years?
- Do you know how you will accomplish these short term goals? How about the long-term career goals?

Despite how many of these questions you can answer right now, a career action plan is a helpful and useful tool to have. Particularly if you had difficulty answering all of the questions above, this plan is an essential step in getting your career on a successful track. A plan like this takes into consideration how you want to spend your workday and where you want to spend your workday, so that you can properly prioritize what's important to you and how you can accomplish it.

1. Write Down Career Goals

Think about what's most important for you to accomplish in your career. This could be:

- Having a certain title
- Being promoted
- Having greater responsibility
- Learning a new on-the-job skill
- Earning a certain salary
- Completing something in a specific length of time
- Working with particular clients

2. Accomplish Career Goals through Leadership

By taking on a leadership attitude, you can lead yourself to on-the-job success. Develop your leadership attitude by:

- Discovering how you learn and using that information wisely
- Developing new skills that make you more marketable
- Talking with people who are learning new things
- Challenging yourself to do things that may scare you, like trying something completely new or difficult
- Learning to make good judgments based on the information you have
- Being flexible and keeping calm, no matter what the situation is

3. Take Action

Once you've mapped out what's important for you to accomplish, find out how you can accomplish it. Write down what you need to do in order to accomplish your career goals. Set deadlines for each step, and start acting on your dreams.

4. Defining What's Important to You

If you need more help defining your career goals, try the exercise below:

- What skills do you like the most? Write down the 10 skills that you enjoy using the most in the workplace:

- What do you value the most in the workplace? Some people value creativity, challenge, travel, security, honesty, or nature of the work being done, among other things. What do you consider most important?

- As you develop your career action plan, it's important to note where you are right now in your career. What is your current job status and what is your position like? Does it allow you to use your favorite skills and does it support what you value about a workplace? Does it allow for growth and could it lead you to your long-term career goals?
- As you think about the present, also visualize the future. Assuming that what you're doing now is a good fit, where do you want to be five years from now? Could you consider or explore other positions that can use your favorite skills or support your values?