

KICKING YOUR CAREER UP A NOTCH

Every day provides opportunities for career growth. Here's some food for thought for firing up your career:

Ask. Interact with a host of professionals doing something different than what you do. You might do this at school career nights, at business networking events, or even at social events. Ask questions and listen very carefully to the answers. You'll be amazed at how much information you can gather by asking professionals how they got into their career. Think about how you can apply what you have learned to improve your job performance, make your job more enjoyable, or switch careers.

Explore. When you find someone doing something interesting, try to accompany them at work even if it is only for a few minutes. While with them, observe, ask questions, and help if possible. Decide what you enjoy about the experience and what you don't. Make arrangements for an extended visit in the future.

Plan. If you don't have a career plan, develop one. It might be more practical for you to have a decade plan, a one-year plan, a one-month plan, or a one-week plan. What is most important is to follow it. Your

plan should include your goals, a general outline showing the major steps to get from where you are today to where you want to be, and a very detailed road map, including dates, of what you need to do in the immediate future.

Document. When you finish an important project, write a paragraph about it. Record what you liked about the project and what you did not. Most importantly, record what you did to make it a success. Reviewing this documentation should help you to determine where you want to advance, prepare your résumé, and prepare for job interviews.

Prepare. It is good to always have a current résumé that ROARs (is Results Oriented And Relevant) because you never know when a great opportunity will come up. Also, be prepared for an informal job interview at any time. You never know when a casual conversation may actually be a job interview. Be as informed as possible about people you might expect to meet at conferences, business meetings, and other events. Appear interested in conversations and be prepared to ask questions.

Prepare more. Be sure you have appropriate insurance for personal liability, medical emergencies, and disability.

Save. Saving for retirement, for a home, for college, and paying student debt may not be the most pressing thoughts for every professional. However, these need to be considered throughout one's career. You may not always be able to practice your profession. Having a healthy retirement savings plan may be what preserves your lifestyle and offers career flexibility. Money saved from a young age grows dramatically, so don't forget the retirement savings, especially if employers match employee contributions.

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