



## YOU ARE THE CEO OF YOUR CAREER

BY GRETA DAVIS

Growing your career requires focus and planning. Just as a CEO carefully manages a business, we're individually responsible for guiding our careers and setting the stage for success. Drawing parallels from strategic planning and business development, individuals can use similar strategies to take charge of their careers. Let's explore four key components of successful business management and relate them to a deliberate career growth strategy.

**VISION.** A company's vision is about what it wants to become. For example, some companies aspire to be the market leaders in their industries. Other companies focus on stability and steady growth. Identifying your career vision involves exploring who you are, what matters most, and what you ultimately want to achieve in your career and life. Start by asking yourself, "Where do I want to be in 5 or 10 years? What position do I want to hold?" Your vision paints the picture for your career destination.

**MISSION.** A company's mission statement is about purpose. It answers the questions "What do we do? Whom do we serve? And how do we serve them?" Similarly, as you consider your career direction, it's important for you to contemplate your purpose. Another way to think about your mission is to focus on what you enjoy doing now. As

you consider where you want to be in your career, what is it that excites you? What do you see yourself doing? What is most fulfilling for you? Aligning your mission and your vision allows you to gain the most from your career and be fulfilled.

**PLANNING.** Many companies establish vision and mission statements but never achieve their goals because they fail to execute. Using the principle "beginning with the end in mind" from Stephen R. Covey, identify the developmental milestones and key career positions needed to arrive at your career destination. Considering your career objective, what roles, skills, and experiences are necessary to be selected for that job? Working backwards in this way can help you identify your next steps to advance your career.

**DIFFERENTIATORS.** Successful companies emphasize their key differentiators in the market, leveraging what makes them unique and how they add value to their customers. The Hedgehog Concept is a strategy tool introduced by Jim Collins in his book *Good to Great*. It's about identifying and focusing on what you do best. This focus helps companies achieve their business goals. Similarly, as you manage your career, it is important to identify what sets you apart and clarify strengths and qualities, which provides insight to your core differentiators. You can use these

insights to clarify what you have to offer, distinguish yourself from the competition, and move your career forward.

### CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT.

Great companies value continuous improvement, which involves making incremental changes to improve efficiency, quality, products, and services. For the individual, a continuous personal improvement process involves identifying areas of growth, honing critical skills, enhancing performance, and building work assets critical to future success. Seeking feedback from a boss, peers, and other stakeholders provides critical insights necessary to make this happen. Other activities that support continuous improvement include joining relevant professional organizations, finding a mentor, and targeted training.

The time you commit to investing in your own career development will reap long-term benefits. Think of your career as your business. Use these principles to manage your career, achieve your goals, and find fulfillment.



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