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# Career Planning

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## From the Editor

I can remember as a kid waiting for Tuesdays. That was the day the *Star Weekly* was published. To this day, I couldn't tell you what issues were dealt with between the covers. The best part was the funnies.

They made me laugh as much as they made me think. Pogo observed in one of the strips, "We have met the enemy and we is them." Not a bad observation at all about self-defeating behaviour. But L'il Abner cut to the heart. Remember the time he asked, "If life's a feast, how come so many people are starving?" That single question asked us to consider why we aren't taking advantage of the vast resources that are in front of us.

At LIVE Consultants, we help organizations take advantage of the resources and talents they have. We do this through development programs and strategic planning.

*Marilyn Baetz, editor*

## About the Author and the Article

When was the last time you took stock of the skills and abilities that you have so that you could develop a career plan that would be satisfying and enjoyable?

If you're like many people, you've probably let your career *just happen*. If that's the case, you could be in for a rude awakening as organizations reshape themselves. "Organizations are not able to promise career growth like they did in the past," Stephen Baetz writes. "Now, more than ever before, each of us has a clear obligation to own our own development [and] establish our own career direction."

To do that the author offers several techniques that can be used to start the process.

Stephen Baetz is a principal of LIVE Consultants Inc., the organization sponsoring this publication.



*Stephen Baetz*

# Own Your Career

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I have an addiction. As far as I can determine it hasn't cost me a cent ... at least directly. I don't think it's dangerous to my health. My family hasn't been affected in a negative way. I used to claim that I could quit anytime I wanted to. But the truth of the matter is, I can't.

I'm addicted to CBC radio.

Every time I get the chance to indulge my habit, I do. This is radio with texture and substance, touch and instinct. It breathes; it sees.

If memory serves me correctly, it was the Tuesday just before Christmas. I had settled in to *As It Happens* and Michael was interviewing Joe Clark as part of a year-end retrospective. Joe was particularly reflective about both Canadian unity and his role in the Constitutional debate. Michael shifted. He wanted to know where Joe was headed, what his ambitions were.

I remember hearing the usually tactful answer about how his party already had a leader. I heard the pain of political scars being touched. Joe wanted time to assess his options so he could determine what he wanted in his future. Joe was himself, hopefully pragmatic. Michael was empathic.

"My brother asked me a very common sense question the other day," Joe recounted. "You know what you do, but do you know what you don't do?"

What an insightful question! Joe understood the significance. He had charted public life but was wondering if there were other worlds to know. Joe was looking at options.

From there, I wondered off thinking about career and the courage it takes to reassess direction and the nature of the contribution we make.

I suppose there was a time when we didn't think about planning our careers. That was before our vocabularies spoke of rightsizing, skinning down, redeployment, and human resource reallocations. In generations past, we could choose lifetime employment as long as we performed well. Now organizations promise a different future: they speak of *lifetime employability*. The new commitment is

to training and job experience that will serve you well no matter what organization you are a part of.

This shift repositions responsibility for career development. Organizations are not able to promise career growth or promotions like they did in the past. Now, more than ever before, each of us has the clear obligation to own our own development, establish our own career direction, and find opportunities that will satisfy our aspirations.

As Michael and Joe continued the conversation, I began to think about how individuals — regular Joes if you would — might go about the process of assessing their careers and creating options for themselves. What resulted is a laundry list of techniques I had experienced in workshops, read about in books, or had heard about from professionals in the field. I offer this list, then, as a basic primer as you think about assessing your career and developing options. The list of techniques isn't meant to be exhaustive, only a start.

## Technique #1: Balance Sheet

Take a plain sheet of paper, draw a line down the centre, and write the word *Strengths* at the top of one column and *Weaknesses* at the top of the other. Then list your strengths and weaknesses. Use work, personal, social, and family experiences as you create your list.

The challenge that you'll face is getting a balanced list. Unfortunately many of us know uncommonly well what we cannot do and are less aware of what we can do. I think this happens because many of us have been managed on the basis of MBE — Management by Exception. That's when somebody says to us, "When you've got a problem come and see me." So we have been trained to identify our problems, know our downsides, and understand our weaknesses. What we don't hear is, "When you've got a success, come and see me." As a result, we are often less clear about our successes, our strengths, and what has made us successful.

You'll probably have to work harder on the strengths side of the list. To do that, solicit the input of others whose judgement you trust and respect or review previous performance appraisals. Others may be able to see in you what you cannot see in yourself.

One of the insights you'll have from this exercise is that your strengths are a composite of attitudes, skills, and knowledge. Value your attitude and what you know, as much as you value what you can do.

### **Technique #2: Victories**

Think about a major success that you have had in your work environment. Try to recreate that experience in your mind's eye. Who were you with? What were you feeling? What were other people saying to you?

Once you have that experience in clear focus, write down what made the experience so successful? Answer this question: What attitudes, skills, and knowledge did you use to make it a success?

When you make the list, avoid the temptation to minimize your contribution or to attribute your success to fate or luck.

Now think of a second, a third, and a fourth victory and continue making your list.

When the list is complete, look for the patterns and compare what you have with what was generated on the balance sheet. You should now have a reasonable audit of what you have to offer.

### **Technique #3: Enjoyable Work**

The next step is to make a list of what work is enjoyable and to understand why it is enjoyable for you. Identify three times during the last year where you found yourself doing work that was enjoyable. List those situations down the left hand side of the page. Beside each, make some notes about what made it so enjoyable.

Was it the work process that gave you enjoyment ... or the content of the work ... or who you were working with ... or the opportunity to see immediate results ... or the

feeling that you were doing a job that made a difference?

Once you know what the critical factors are, identify at least three jobs where that factor exists and where your attitudes, skills, and knowledge could be useful. When you do this, you must be careful not to get caught in the trap of your vocational training. That is the trap of saying, "I was trained as an engineer, therefore I have to find a job in engineering." You know what you do, but do you know what you don't do?

### **Technique #4: Real-Life Input**

Start talking with people who do work that uses your strengths or have a high component of enjoyment in their work. Gather real-life input on what the job is really like. Ask about the upsides and the downsides, the pros and the cons.

Use their experience to help you assess whether making a career change is wise or not.

### **Technique #5: Invest in Your Development**

There is an old piece of financial wisdom which says, "Pay yourself first and then pay your bills." The wisdom is clear: as much as you need to look after your obligations to others, you also have an obligation to look after yourself.

When it comes to planning your career, the question becomes, "What have I invested in the development of my personal assets and abilities?" And if there has been an investment in development, the next question is, "What has been the focus of the investment strategy?" Does it build on strengths, minimize weaknesses, or encourage enjoyable work?

In practical terms, most of us would find it useful to have a direction for the books we read, the tapes we listen to, the people we have lunch with, and the challenges we seek.

If you don't mind Joe, I'll join you on the journey.

# The Final Check

Your focus is back in perspective. You have started to develop a plan for making those growth and development opportunities available to the people within the organization. You have a myriad of questions.

When developing an education plan, think about the following. In combination, the points listed below will lead to success. The more “yes” options you can check, the greater the chance for plan effectiveness.

Read over the points carefully.

Does my education plan ...	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
1. consider current and emerging goals, values, and strategies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. mesh with the attitudes, skills, and knowledge the organization wants to develop?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. identify all the populations that can benefit from development opportunities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. meet the needs of the target groups as they have been assessed and detailed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. include a variety of learning strategies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. have a set of standards for all the growth and development opportunities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. have a practical focus to decrease the gap between information and application?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. have an overall theme that will link the ideas and build continuity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. contain content and delivery techniques geared to the level of each target group?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. have a built-in evaluation process?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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