

Your Career – Are you in the driver's seat or sitting in the back going along for the ride?

Rita's Career Corner ...With Rita B. Allen

Is your career on the track you would like it to be? Do you have a vision and mission for your career as well as specific goals and a well thought out plan for execution? If your answer to both of these questions are no, there is definitely a correlation between the two. To truly be empowered to define and take charge of our career, first we need to own it. I believe this quote by Marva Collins says it best, "Success doesn't come to you – you go to it". We all define success differently, however, how we achieve success is dependent on our ability to own and take charge of our careers. As I like to say, it's the difference between sitting in the driver's seat vs. sitting in the back going along for the ride.

Three Commonalities of Successful Professionals:

1. Know their value add – what they have to offer

They know their strengths, contributions, and accomplishments and they leverage them in everything they achieve. In addition, they understand how they can truly make a difference and stand apart from their colleagues, what makes them unique as a person and professional. They focus on results and outcomes and the role they played. They do this through stories – the best way to discuss value is to relay it through story telling. What was the challenge or situation, what actions did they take and what were the results? They are authentic and genuine – they are not boastful or egotistical...but matter of fact regarding how they offer value and contribute. There is a great book I suggest by Peggy Klaus as many people struggle with this piece, "Brag – the Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It".

2. Know what they want – goal-oriented

They know exactly what they want and have a plan to achieve it. Even if they do not have all the specifics identified, they are clear on their options and a plan for how they will pursue and/or investigate each option. Goals are a priority, defining both short term expectations and long term aspirations. Annual goal setting allows them to create plans for execution as well as criteria for accountability. Without goals, we don't have a vision for where we are going – no direction. Goals are made to be reviewed, evaluated and readjusted continuously to ensure we remain open to unexpected opportunities that may come our way. Without a plan, however, we can grow complacent and/or fall into a rut rather than having a plan with clear direction and driving that plan. Another great quote, “In absence of clearly defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily acts of trivia”, author unknown.

3. Know how to ask for it – articulate their value/aspirations effectively

Their delivery is clear, crisp and concise. Not only do they know how to ask for it but they also know who to ask and when to ask. Keep in mind, when you truly know what you have to offer and what you want, you have already empowered yourself with the right tools to ask for it! Building relationships is so important in our careers and it takes years to do this well. It also requires awareness to your surroundings and to others needs and interests. We don't want to be a bull in a china shop or self absorbed. There is a time and place for everything. Assessing timing and circumstances accurately is an important ingredient. Understanding how to effectively influence the key stakeholders in a way that meets mutual needs is where we want to focus our delivery. The important part to remember here is to make sure you ask! Fear, rejection, and/or risk are a few common reasons that hold many people back from asking. The worst thing, however, is to not ask and never know what you could have received and achieved! Get comfortable advocating for yourself and embrace this concept as a requirement to successfully manage your career. Empower yourself, take charge of your career and assure that you are in the driver's seat and not sitting in the back just going along for the ride. Own your career – know what you have to offer, what you want and ask for it!

Ask Rita...

Question: I feel I am ready for the next step of my career which would include progressing to another level in management. I have achieved great success and accomplishments in my current role. Although I have not come out and directly stated my interest, I'm assuming my manager should know that is what I want. I don't want to be pushy but my manager doesn't seem to be indicating that would be in the short term horizon for me. What do I do?

Answer: Many times we make the common mistake of assuming our managers know that we are ready for and desire to move up in our areas of expertise. Don't assume he/she knows that you feel confident in your ability to take on additional responsibility now and indeed desire to do so. Do your homework – what is needed to be successful in the position you want? Prepare yourself by making a list of all that you have accomplished that speak to those needs as well as the skills and competencies you possess to do so. Tell relevant stories of how you have made a difference as well as how you will contribute in the new role and how it will benefit your manager and the organization. Also, be prepared to articulate your goals to your manager – short term and long term. Schedule a meeting at a time when you know he/she will not be distracted with other priorities or demands. Go into that meeting confident, prepared and enthusiastic! You are your best advocate - best of luck!

Send your questions to: [Rita B. Allen](#)

Rita Balian Allen is the President of Rita B. Allen Associates, a provider of career management/talent management consulting and executive coaching services located in Waltham at www.ritaballenassociates.com and the President of ACPI – NE ([Association of Career Professionals International – New England](#))