

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR CAREER

by Marshall A. Brown

10 Ways to Survive in Today's Work World by Finding Satisfaction—on Your Own Terms. //

“The days of the mammoth corporations are coming to an end. People are going to have to create their own lives, their own careers, and their own successes. Some people may go kicking and screaming into this new world, but there is only one message there. You're now in business for yourself.”

Robert Schaen, former controller,
Ameritech

If you don't know it yet, the world of work is very different than when you were growing up. The days of retiring after 30 years with one company are over. The days of employer (and for that matter employee) loyalty no longer exist. In the past, as long as you did your job and met expectations, you were paid. According to William Bridges, author of *Creating You and Co* and *Jobshift*, “Jobs were slots, boxes, and pigeonholes. Jobs demanded performance in a script that was already written.”

Today's work world is full of uncertainty. Every day we hear about another corporation or organization going out of business, downsizing, rightsizing, and on and on. In order to prepare yourself for these uncertain times, you must take charge of your own career.

Another factor that is affecting today's changing world of work is that more and more individuals are looking to find meaning in their work in new ways. People realize how short life can be and want to be doing what is important to them. They want to feel passion in their work, a commitment to their values, and personal mission statements. Individuals want to make a difference. They want to say to themselves, “I am good at work, my work is important, and my work fits with my values.”

The hard reality is that your stake in your work satisfaction is greater than

your employer's. You cannot rely on your employer to provide satisfaction in your job. In the highly competitive global economy, you need to look out for your own best interests. You must take responsibility and manage your own career. It is no longer an option to wait for your employer to manage it for you. Whether you are in a job search now or thinking about making a career change in the near future, it's time to discover what makes work satisfying for you.

So, how do you do that? Here are a few tips to help you survive in today's changing world of work:

1 Be self-managing. Think of yourself as working for yourself. You are the person in control of your own career and have to manage it. No one else can do it for you. Put a marketing plan together for *you* and just do it!

2 Know what you have to offer. It is imperative in today's competitive job market to know yourself. Know what you have to offer, and then market yourself as the person with that information. This will help to separate you from your competition. Your marketability will depend on your ability to demonstrate, on paper and

verbally, your skills (even if within the same organization). Today, whether you are working in a for- or not-for-profit organization, employers pay for results and what you can produce for them. And those that are succeeding are the ones that know what they have to offer and what they are capable of doing better than some of their competition. What do you bring to the table in the way of assets, strengths, and values?

3 Keep on learning. Look beyond your current skill set and look at developing additional benefits of “marketing you.” By asking yourself the following questions (and discussing with your peers, friends, family and/or “board of advisors”), you should be able to come up with specific ways you might want to work on improving your product—you—in the next six months.

- I am known among my peers or co-workers for these projects or skills.
- My current project is challenging and provocative to me in these ways.
- In the past three months, I have learned the following new things that will help me to move forward.
- Three important people that I have added to my Rolodex in the last three months.
- By next year at this time, I would like to be known for these skills or projects.

Consider studying and sitting for a professional certification designation. This will not only provide you with additional information about the training and development profession, but also reveals a commitment to your profession.

4 Understand business trends. Read industry papers, keep track of the fast, changing economic and social landscape and

understand your competition. Stay current in your field(s). Consider one of the many certificate programs available in the marketplace.

5 Prepare yourself for areas of competence, not jobs. Focus on developing core competencies that the learning and performance industry is likely to require in the future. Define yourself by what you do and how to get it done, not by your job title.

6 Find a mentor. Find someone who will provide honest and effective feedback to you—someone who takes an interest in your development and will support you in your career progression.

7 Build financial independence. When your finances are in good shape, you can make career (and life) decisions based on what is really important to you. You won't feel like “I really have to take this job because I need the money.” To manage your career effectively, you must also be able to manage your personal finances.

8 Network, network, network! Even if you are not looking for a new job or career right now, develop your network. Now is the time to do it, not when you decide to look (or have to look). Join ASTD and other associations and networking groups, and get involved. Don't just be a checkbook member. Get involved at the local chapter level and/or national level.

Develop your network by meeting with people on a regular basis. Make it part of your schedule to meet with one new person every month. Get to know people who are doing what you are doing—or want to be doing. I encourage my clients to spend at least 85 percent

of their job search time networking. If you can only devote two hours a month, fine. Then spend 85 percent of the two hours meeting with “like-minded people.”

9 Keep your résumé up-to-date. Don't wait until you get a call asking for your résumé right away. That is the worst time to develop it. You will be anxious, stressed, and might not be able to remember some of your significant accomplishments. Add your new expertise, skills, and memberships as you have accomplished them and do it on a regular basis.

10 Create a vision. Picture yourself doing what you would like to be doing. Think, and verbalize it in “I am” statements. “I am a training and development professional. I am going to get my CPLP designation.” Envision what you want to be doing and put it out there! What do you have to lose?

The old ways of thinking about how and why you work are no longer useful. In order to survive in today's world of work, you must know what you have to offer, realize your potential, and take charge of your own career. As stated in the Talmud, “If not now, when?”

Wishing you much happiness and success!

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