

What's Your Next Move? You Must Own Your Career!



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These are turbulent times. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average U.S. worker stays with the same employer for four to five years. That suggests eight to 10 employers over a lifetime. Any single employer will witness just one of several episodes in your career. Only you will witness all the episodes. You *must* take ownership of your career. Nobody else can do that for you.

What, though, does owning your career involve? It means persistently monitoring your career situation, asking good questions, and looking out for your next opportunity. It means never, under any circumstances, ceding control over your career to your employer. That does not mean having a low-trust relationship with your company or your immediate boss. However, it does

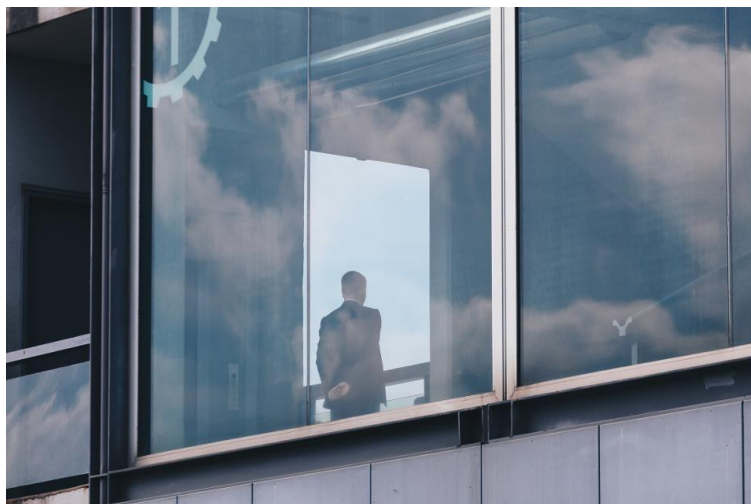


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mean trust can only come through the kind of conversation that many employers avoid. Let us consider some critical topics that may not get your employer's full attention.

Innovation: Having a job at the cutting edge of innovation can be fun, and you can also learn a lot. However, you need to understand that innovation is a risky business, promoting short-term rather than long-term employment. That may be fine with you, but it does mean you need to

continually monitor your experiences. What is their potential value for future innovation assignments? What about relationships with others in your field of expertise, both within and beyond your current employer? Are you “wired” to hear about future opportunities in that field?

Talent Management: Many employers practice what is commonly called talent management, and many employees feel flattered to be included in such programs. However, let us be absolutely clear. The only client for a typical talent management program is your employer. You are included in the program because your employer believes you can perform and learn in a way that will contribute to its future success. There is little or no concern for *your* success, except as it directly serves your employer’s agenda. You must ask, where is that agenda taking you?

Getting Stuck: Growing up after World War II, the baby boom generation gladly accepted a principle of lifetime employment and the related idea of job seniority. This meant you were more secure in your present job than you would be if you were to leave for a new job. Often pension entitlements were back-loaded, too, so that changing jobs meant losing some or all of your hard-earned retirement money. Another way of getting stuck is by channeling your social life through your work. In any or all of these, the outcome can be to delegate ownership of your career to your employer, rather than keeping it to yourself.

Seeing Jobs, Not Projects: Look around you: at the shingles outside law offices, at nearby building sites, at new product development, advertising, information technology and many more lines of work. The shingle outside the lawyer’s office disguises the reality that legal work takes place one project (that is, one case) at a time. The wider truth is that most work is project-based, or if it’s not you can usefully create a project of your own. Seeing your work as projects will also make you more concerned about your reputation and your network, and their role in helping you find your next “gig.”

Procrastination: Suppose you’re a busy person, seeking to accommodate any or all of a partner, a family, a hobby, a volunteer commitment and whatever else alongside your working hours. Moreover, you want to succeed at work in your present assignment. So the temptation is to procrastinate, to put off taking ownership of your career until you’ll have more time. Guess what? That extra time will never come. You’ll simply go further and further down a road that someone else has paved for you. In turn, you are likely to be laid off when you don’t expect it, and to have trouble establishing a future job search.

Do any of the above paragraphs apply to you? If so, you can do better! Do you have further preferences about where you work (at home or in the office) what hours you work (to accommodate your family) or what you want to learn (for example about AI)? If so, make sure to take ownership of these preferences as well. Taking ownership of your career will involve some short-term effort, but it will quickly lead to increased employability and greater career success on your own terms.

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