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Take charge of your career: How to be your own CEO

It is not unusual to open the newspaper and read about another company whose employee pensions are in jeopardy. Over time, benefits like these



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have started to disappear — but so has the loyal employee who puts in 30 years of service with a single company. From baby boomers to GenXers, we're changing jobs more frequently than ever before. In fact, many of us will work for eight to 10 companies or more in our lifetimes. So in a job market permeated by change and uncertainty, how can we find career security?

Fear not, career security still exists — although not in its traditional form. In today's job market, security comes through experience and knowledge, not through any one corporation or organization. The knowledge you have accumulated since entering the work force is what will propel you forward in your career. If, in your current situation, you are not learning new skill sets, increasing your income, or advancing your career, you may be losing precious time.

The first thing to realize is that regardless of the level of success you have achieved, job security is never guaranteed. Successful organizations protect their interests and those of their stockholders. They devise complex strategic plans that lay out specific goals and objectives that act as a road map for the future. They have a plan. So should you.

The key to designing your own career plan is to view yourself as a business — and you've just been appointed

CEO. Before you begin to develop your own personalized blueprint for the future, you need to ask yourself some basic questions: Am I growing intellectually? Am I meeting my revenue projections? What are my greatest assets and skill sets? Where do I add value?

Only you can accurately assess your professional development to this point. Though it may be daunting, a critical part of your new job description as chief executive officer is to take an honest look at yourself and inventory your professional strengths and weaknesses. This personal analysis will help you determine your future career viability.

The next step in achieving career security is to educate yourself about your industry. You can certainly do this yourself; the Web is an undeniably convenient tool. Another option is to align yourself with a professional who can help you understand the latest market trends, identify key industry players and pinpoint opportunities that will help grow your career.

A common misconception is that people initiate a job search only when they are dissatisfied with their current

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situations. But this isn't always so. According to U.S. Labor Bureau statistics, 30 percent to 35 percent of the work force is job hunting at any given time. On average, 20 percent to 25 percent of all U.S. workers change jobs each year. Even if you are relatively content in your present role, it may be an optimal time to make a change.

The best time to be looking for a job is when you're at the top of your game. It is when you're most productive and successful that you maximize your marketability. Coming from this position of strength, you can leverage your track record to negotiate the best salary or career opportunity. Alternatively, waiting until you are unhappy to explore new prospects can be time consuming (the average job search takes 3.8 months) and can result in hasty decisions that are fueled by emotion instead of logic. When emotions drive business decisions, the likelihood of making poor choices increases.

And finally, know your professional worth. Interviewing with different companies can serve as an effective barometer for your career search. If you come to discover that your market value and potential is greater than it is in your current situation, you have greater impetus to make a change.

In today's rapidly evolving job market, anything can happen. Achieving security — financial or otherwise — requires us to run our careers like we would a business. Chances are, at some point in your career, whether you realized it or not, marketing was part of your job description. Now, as CEO, you're about to embark on the most important marketing mission of your professional life: promoting yourself. So take charge. Be empowered. Align yourself with resources that will help you remain educated. By doing so, you will significantly reduce the risks inherent to living in this pension-less world.

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