



## **PILLARS OF CAREER ADVANCEMENT FOR THE SERIOUS PROFESSIONAL**

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In a world of constant change, opportunities come and go. The problem is, how does a successful and busy professional monitor and position him/herself for career advancement, while balancing a professional career, family and other obligations? The purpose of this White Paper is to provide a template for successful career management.

**Personal Inventory.** The most important component of making a professional career change is spending time up front taking a clear-eyed inventory of your present situation. Are you happy with your current company? Is your current income structure compatible with your goals? Is there a natural pattern of progression in your current company? Do you WANT to progress into a more senior or management role, or are you more concerned with optimizing your professional income potential, when considering other opportunities?

**Goals.** After you've made an honest accounting of where you are in relation to where you want to be, the next step is to set goals for yourself. The difficulty with any goal setting exercise is "life is the stuff that happens while you're making other plans". It's the same with career opportunities. Great

career opportunities present themselves on their own timetable and those professionals with a life plan that has them prepared to address those opportunities can position themselves well ahead of those who 'are waiting until June' or some other arbitrary date before seeking a stronger opportunity.

When goal setting, be specific. Someone once said, "A goal isn't real unless it's written down, in black & white." In furthering your personal inventory, write out specifically what you value the most about your current situation, what you would like to improve in your career and the place you'd like to be in one year, five years, etc. Include whether or not you'd relocate for the right opportunity. Sequence in family matters, anything that would play a role in your decision to pursue a particular opportunity. Once done, this goal setting document will be a factor in logically evaluating positions in relation to your personal goals.

Be realistic. While writing a concrete goal of being the National Sales Manager of a Fortune 500 company within 5 years may be a step, it may not be a realistic one. The object of goal setting is to 'reverse engineer' your career backward from where you want to be to where you are currently and drawing a timeline between the two. If your current experience doesn't favorably position you to become a National Sales Manager, you're setting yourself up for failure. If your experience is in a smaller company, if you don't have a Bachelor's or advanced degree or if your experience is in a different industry than your goal, you may have some significant hurdles as short-term goals leading to a major 5 year goal.

Career Pathing. Using where you are currently in your career progression as your baseline, ask yourself hard questions

about where you REALLY want to be in the future. Some sales people use the position as a necessary stepping stone to management. However, many successful sales professionals have no interest in getting 'out of the trenches' and sitting in a sales office. These decisions are personal and will assist you in making sound choices should opportunities present themselves. The average duration of employment with one company in sales is three years. By the seven year mark, you're in danger of the 'Old Ed' syndrome. Old Ed is the guy who's been with the company forever, who's growing cobwebs between his arm and the phone--the guy who's not going anywhere, up, down or laterally in the company. When planning your career in longer terms, the three-to-six year time frame is a reasonable estimate as to when it's most profitable to make a change.

With companies running a flatter management structure, the state of the economy, etc., realistically, there are fewer advancement positions today than there were in the late Nineties and early 2000's. Many professionals are looking to other areas of growth, namely lateral or peripheral growth in their chosen industry or profession, rather than vertical positioning. For example, high technology sales people may want to align themselves with a firm that will allow them to learn a different channel of distribution or market, rather than to seek a regional or national sales management role.

Positioning. We call preparation for and presentation of your unique qualifications for a particular job classification positioning. In the broadest sense, positioning yourself is both a physical preparedness to respond to a job opportunity as well as the mental preparation to respond quickly should an excellent opportunity present itself.

Resume. A current resume, updated with current position/responsibilities/contributions is a must in positioning yourself for career opportunities. This resume should ideally be in both a hard copy version as well as a file that can be transmitted electronically via e-mail.

In addition to a current and compelling resume, it's wise to prepare your references and prepare an earnings history should the need arise. Another popular tool is a 'brag book'. The brag book is a binder or collection of testimonial letters, plaques, trophies, awards or other tangible evidence of superior contributions. The documentation of your successes goes a long way in the positioning process.

Interview preparation. B/E has another White Paper under Candidate Resources on the Web Site entitled 'Pillars of a Successful Interview' which is a narrative explanation of the typical briefing we used to deliver verbally to our candidates. It provides a comprehensive outline of what you can do to optimize the number of offers you receive per number of first interviews you participate in. The keynote in interviews: The skill set we employ in interviews, while similar to a basic sales presentation, is too often overlooked in favor of simply showing up for the interview and 'winging it'. The lack of preparation and strategy has been proven to be the stumbling block of many professionals in their career advancement efforts.

Resources in your search.

Search Firms. Another aspect of positioning is registering with one or more search firms. There's no greater resource for a busy professional than a working relationship with a strong executive search firm, particularly one that is either networked globally or with multiple recruiters/offices for the

widest array of opportunities in your discipline. As 'Career Managers', search firms can be invaluable in making you aware proactively of opportunities as they arise.

Job Boards. The Internet has provided multiple opportunities to expose your resume to a number of companies via their job postings and electronic classifieds. This is a viable source of leads, however, the issue of confidentiality varies from Provider to Provider, so avoid 'spamming' your resume to every career related service if you value your confidentiality. Also, take heed: The Internet is rapidly becoming the 'want ads' of the professional employment world, meaning, many companies are finding the unsolicited resumes on-line as being the same bunch of less-than-qualified candidates they would turn up by running classified advertising in newspapers and trade journals. Avoid becoming part of the perception by screening yourself into opportunities realistically. Simply flying your resume via e-mail in to every company in the universe devalues not only yourself, but the rest of the professionals who also utilize the 'net for their career searches.

The Internet is also an invaluable tool for researching a company you are interviewing with. Preparation via research will assist immensely in positioning you to receive offers.

Networking at Conventions/Trade Shows. Another viable source of career opportunities takes place at every major industry convention and trade show. Once again, discretion and care should be used when speaking with other companies at a show your current employer is participating in. However, the viability of meeting managers from competitor companies is worth investigation.

Direct submission. If you want to stay in your current industry and a) know who you'd like to work for b) have researched the companies in a given market, you can also submit your background directly. However, it's unwise to do a direct submission campaign simultaneously with registering with one or more search firms. Reason? Recruiters will get burned out fast if every time they mention a company they're working with, you've already submitted directly to that company. You won't be able to use the search firm's expertise and relationships to support your candidacy with the companies you've submitted to directly.

To summarize, while registry with a search firm is certainly one powerful adjunct to your overall career advancement strategy, it is only one pillar of success. By setting realistic goals, assessing your current position and creating a time line of where you want to be within certain benchmarks such as one year, five years; by creating a compelling submission package, including resume, documentation or brag book, reference list, salary history; by registering with Beck/Eastwood; by networking at conventions and trade shows; by utilizing the Internet to research prospective companies you gain control of your career. And, most importantly, by realizing that opportunity has its own timetable, you'll be ready when it knocks.