

Strategic Planning for the Soul: A Creative Approach to Career Planning

By applying what you know and do professionally for your own benefit, you are in a position to truly live out your career ambitions.

SHSMD members represent two professions that are well positioned to use their talents to create and execute a strategic plan for their careers. Strategic planners excel at creating effective strategic plans for their organizations. Marketing professionals excel at taking an idea and formulating a creative marketing strategy that involves positioning and promotion. Ironically, however, few strategic planners and marketers take a strategic approach to their careers.

Why have a career plan? “A career plan can help you focus your time and energy and help you lead a more organized attack on meeting goals. It can even help you define those goals. ‘A plan leads to accomplishment, achievement and success in any area, but especially when it comes to your career.’” (Jansen 2004). Here’s how to get started:

1. Assess Your Current Job/Career

“The truth of a thing is the feel of it, not the think of it.”
— Stanley Kubrick

Similar to conducting an internal environmental assessment, it is important to understand the current state of your job or career. This is less a fact-finding expedition than it is a soul-searching step that creates a snapshot of how satisfied you are with your current situation. Figure 1 offers a career assessment tool you can use to gauge your level of satisfaction on eight key attributes of

your job or career. Once you identify your priority attributes, you can use them as selection criteria for future job/career opportunities.

You can augment your assessment by asking yourself the following questions:

- What are my peak work experiences; when am I at my best professionally?
- What do I like most about what I do, and what do I like least?
- What are my unique skills and talents, and do I enjoy using them?
- If I were unemployed tomorrow, would I take my current job again?
- What motivates me?
- What is the legacy I’d like to create for my work?

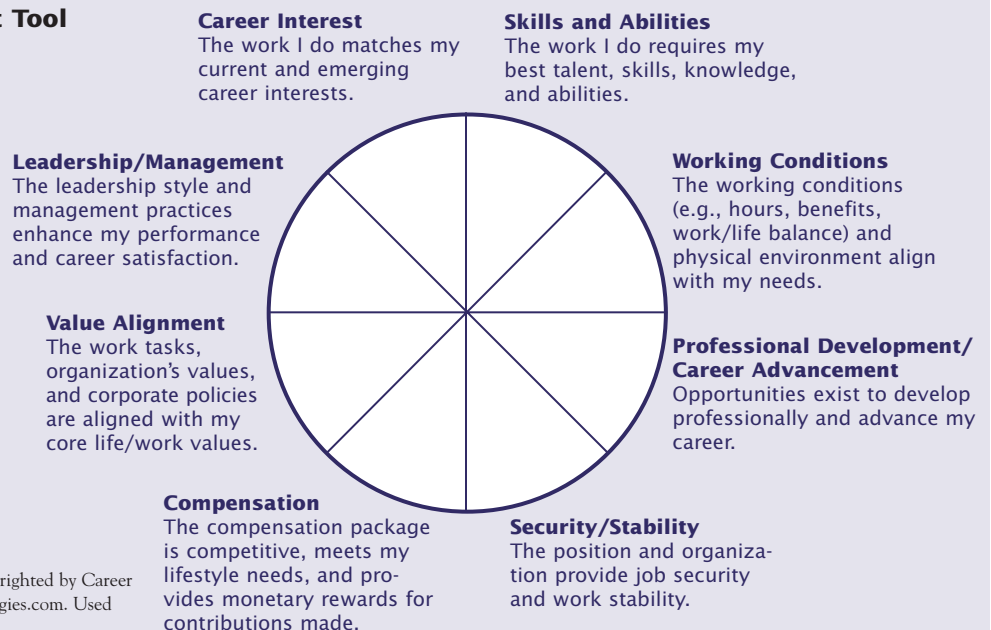
Being aware of the perspective you hold on your current job or career is important for determining your current mindset. What are the words and messages that continue to show up for you? Some possibilities may include: “I like my job but feel a disconnect with the company’s culture”; “My work is completely fulfilling”; or “There’s something else I should be doing professionally, but I don’t know what it is.” Each statement is revealing and subconsciously affects the way you interact with others and approach your daily work.

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Figure 1. A Career Assessment Tool

Directions: The eight sections in the Career Wheel represent key attributes of a job and career choice. If the center of the wheel is zero and the outer edges are ten, rank your current level of satisfaction with each area by drawing a curved line to create a new outer edge. The new perimeter represents your career wheel. How balanced are the attributes in your current job? Which attributes are priorities, and which would you most like to change?

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2. Create a Vision for Your Career

“Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.”
— Carl Jung

This is the step where you get to create a world of possibilities. You can use the attributes in the career assessment tool to create your career vision. First, review the results of your current assessment to identify your priority attributes. Second, describe what your ideal situation would be within each attribute. Third, consider the gaps that exist between your current and ideal states. What is missing? Where are you less satisfied? Table 1 suggests other techniques for creating a vision for your career. Once you

have a broader vision, you can begin to create specific goals.

As you engage in strategic career planning, it is important to identify your core values. Just as strategic plan goals, strategies, and tactics need to align with an organization’s vision and values, so, too, do the components of your career plan. What is most important to you about your career and your life? As key words or phrases enter your mind, ask what each of them means to you. For example, you may feel it’s important to work as a team, so ask what “team” means for you. This process will help you distinguish between means values and ends values. When you are clear on what matters most to you, you will be in a better position to make value-based decisions not only for your career, but for your life as well.

Table 1. Techniques for Creating a Career Vision

Directions: Pick a minimum of two techniques and identify key themes or patterns.

Technique	Description/Exercise
Career assessment tool (Figure 1)	Describe what each of the eight attributes would look/feel like if they were rated a 10.
Creative career vision questions	Answer the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is my dream job? • What has heart and meaning to me? • It’s 12 months from now; what do I want my work life to look like? • If my career were a piece of music, how would it sound? • How would a six-year-old describe my vision? <i>Remember, this is your vision, not someone else’s vision for you.</i>
Contrast exercise	Divide a page in half vertically. Use the left side to answer “What I don’t want in my job/career.” Write out everything that comes to you. Then use the right side to contrast each statement. Use the attributes in the career assessment tool (Figure 1) to guide you.
Journal	Use free-association writing to describe what your ideal work life would be like in one year. Do not edit or judge what is written.
Identify key strengths, talents, and opportunities for growth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider past accomplishments (not necessarily work-related) and the skills/attributes that applied to those situations. 2. Create a personal advisory board and obtain objective feedback from personal/professional people whom you trust and who support you unconditionally. 3. Obtain a 360° evaluation, and include both personal and professional contributors.
Create a physical reminder of vision	Find a structure that embodies the essence of your vision. It should be something you can see, hear, or touch on a daily basis that will be a constant reminder for you (e.g., a favorite quote, song, picture).

Table 2. A Checklist for Executing Your Career Plan

Component	Description
Goal setting	Break vision down into smaller goals.
Action steps	Create specific action steps for each goal area.
Commitments	Make commitments each day or week to tackle action steps.
Barriers	Identify potential barriers; determine what you need to say no to.
Supportive environment	Create a physical and emotional environment.
Accountability	Identify an accountability partner.
Monitor	Celebrate successes; evaluate what’s working/not working; adjust.

3. Create and Execute a Career Plan

"Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare." — Japanese proverb

Once you are clear on where you want to go and what your priorities are, it's time to create a career plan that offers focus and flexibility. Begin by breaking down the bigger vision into smaller, obtainable goals that are specific and measurable. Then, for each goal area, develop a set of action steps that move you in small steps from where you are today to where you would like to be.

Your first step may be to simply reframe a perspective you hold about your current job. For example, if you feel your skills are not being leveraged in your organization, shift your focus and consider the possibilities. "Look around for the unmet needs and work that needs doing in your company...; find the biggest problem your employer...faces for which your desires, abilities, temperament and assets [are] the solution. Stop thinking like an employee...and start thinking like an opportunity-minded vendor, scanning the market for work that needs doing" (Lorenz 2005).

With priority action steps in place, make one or two commitments to steps you will accomplish in the coming week. Even if they are small (e.g., asking someone to review your resume or registering for a networking program), you will create momentum you can build on. Action begets action. As you make commitments, you will need to consider what you need to say no to. As you focus your energy and attention on executing a career plan, you will find that you will need to let go of something else.


During this step, you will need to anticipate and reduce barriers. Ask yourself, what might hold me back from getting and staying in action? Being in a position to say no to certain activities requires a supportive environment. Create a physical and emotional environment that allows you to effectively put your career plan in place. This can mean minimizing contact with people who may not support your professional desires, reconfiguring a home or office space, or working on time management skills.

When executing your career plan, have an accountability

partner with whom you can check in on action steps. Choose someone who is fully supportive of your professional ambitions. A professional mentor could be an excellent accountability partner.

As professional strategists know, an important element in mastering a strategic plan is to monitor results against goals. Celebrate your accomplishments, and don't be overly critical if you do not meet certain goals. Evaluate what happened, consider what is working and what isn't, determine if priorities have shifted, and adjust as necessary. As you see yourself making progress, you will gain confidence and momentum. (See Table 2 for a summary of career plan execution.)

As your career plan unfolds, you may find it useful to employ a strategic marketing approach. You will not only create the product — that is, your attributes, talents, and motivators — but will also position yourself by finding a market or organization that needs your product. You then will promote yourself in a manner that allows this market to see you as a problem solver, not a job candidate.

Strategic planners and marketers both have the skill sets to be highly effective in mastering strategic career plans. By applying what you know and do professionally for your own benefit and doing it with focus and commitment, you will be in a position to truly live out your career ambitions. 

References

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SHSMD's New Brand Promise: Putting You First

Notice something different about this issue of *Spectrum*? SHSMD has a fresh new look — a new logo, a new color palette, and, most important, a new brand promise to you, our members.

Since SHSMD's formation ten years ago, your support has made the Society the largest and most prominent voice and resource for healthcare marketers, communicators, and strategic planners. More than 3,900 healthcare strategy professionals have chosen to become members of SHSMD, reflecting our singular status in the field.

In the ten years since SHSMD was formed, the healthcare environment has changed dramatically, and the pressures on you have increased exponentially. Last year the SHSMD team launched a comprehensive branding effort to make sure we were giving you optimal value during these challenging times. We asked you to tell us how we can serve you better and help you juggle the myriad demands on your time. We



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Healthcare Strategy & Market Development™
of the American Hospital Association

examined our organization inside out and outside in.

Through this dialogue with you, we clarified who we are and where we need to go as an organization. You spoke and we listened.

SHSMD's new brand promise reflects a renewed commitment to you, our members. By launching new resources — such as online special interest groups, back-to-basics workshops, and expanded benchmarking and best-practice studies — while retaining the best of the resources you depend on, we intend to redouble our efforts to provide the help you need, when you need it.

We're excited to share our new look and, more important, our vision for moving forward. Read more about it at www.shsmd.org. Then, e-mail the SHSMD team at shsmd@aha.org to tell us what you think and how we can raise the bar even higher over the next ten years.