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Rev up Your Career in 2009

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As you plan your New Year's resolutions for 2009, don't neglect career management! Now is the ideal time to reflect on your professional life and set a few challenging, yet attainable, goals to rev up your career. Even if last year's resolution to "lose 10 pounds" or to "go to the gym every day" didn't last a week into the New Year, you can create an effective career plan and achieve your goals in 2009.

How do you turn the goals you jot down on paper into an action plan? When it comes to career satisfaction and success, remember that you are in the driver's seat. Take the time to think through your goals and create an annual plan. An annual plan gives context and purpose to your daily tasks. Instead of just going through the motions, you are working toward attaining your goals. Follow the steps outlined below to create and utilize an annual plan that sets the stage for your success throughout the year.

Put your annual plan in writing. You are more likely to commit to your plan if it is in writing. Additionally, this will allow you to share your goals with your family, friends, mentors and co-workers. They may be able to help you achieve your goals, but only if they know what they are.

Break down major goals into smaller, more achievable tasks. Make your goals reasonable; don't set yourself up for failure. Of course we would all love to tackle the "things to accomplish in a lifetime" laundry list this year; but no matter how hard you work, it is unlikely you'll attain all those goals at once. If you plan to tackle one large goal this year, be sure to break it up into smaller, more manageable goals. "By the end of 2009, complete four courses toward earning a master's" is a much more achievable goal than "start and complete a master's degree this year."

Ensure that your annual plan is in sync with that of the organization. Does your company have an annual plan? Did they announce corporate goals

for the year? If so, review your annual plan to make sure it is parallel with the direction of the organization as a whole. Demonstrate that you are a team player; make sure that completion of your goals will directly or indirectly aid the organization in the achievement of its goals.

Discuss your annual plan with your supervisor. Set up a meeting with the sole purpose of discussing your annual plan. Your boss will be able to add insight into ways you can realize your goals, as well as the feasibility of your goals based on the organizational or departmental direction. This is also an excellent opportunity to find out what he/she expects from you and any goals he/she would like to see you accomplish in the coming year.

Focus on what is important. Set daily priorities to move closer to achieving your goals. Annual goals should be broken down into monthly goals; monthly goals should be broken down into weekly ones; and weekly into daily tasks. Smaller pieces of a larger project are easier to bite off and accomplish successfully.

Stay on task. If you have blocked out time to work on a specific item, make sure you are dedicating all of your energy to that one task. This does not mean you must sit down with the intent of starting and finishing a five-hour project. Instead, commit yourself to that project for a predetermined, uninterrupted amount of time before moving on to another task. When you are working on a project, work on it. Shut your door, turn off your instant messenger and silence your phone. If someone does drop in, don't feel guilty saying that you are busy at the moment!

Set aside time to realign your goals on a monthly basis.

- Have you accomplished any goals since last month? If so, check them off your list and add new goals in their places.
- Have any of your goals changed due to new requirements or developments in your field?

- Has anything happened at work or in your personal life that may cause you to rethink your career direction?

Do a full-fledged personal and professional assessment on an annual basis.

- Did you accomplish your goals? Did they lead into new goals for 2010?

- Realign your career goals as appropriate.

As you transfer birthdays, anniversaries and other dates to your calendar, mark off one night per month for career management. Dedicating specific time slots to your goals will ensure that you travel along your career path quicker and to more fulfilling destinations in 2009. ●