

TAKING YOUR CAREER BY THE HORNS



BY VANINE GILMORE

Summary

Taking Your Career by the Horns is a short ebook on how to plan your career changes. It looks at the importance of developing your career over a lifetime, ensuring that it fits in with your lifestyle.

Starting with recent advancements in technology and the workplace affecting career development, "Taking Your Career by the Horns" concentrates on altering the way we think about jobs and taking control ourselves. The book encourages you to make decisions and choices, and finally covers planning those career and lifestyle changes.

All the options for making your career changes are discussed in "Taking Your Career by the Horns", with case studies for each option. This is followed with 6 Activities to help you think about your work and lifestyle; and to plan some important changes that will make your career seem more like a hobby than a job.

Reviews

'Taking Your Career by the Horns' is a must for students everywhere, and most definitely, for their parents too. Not only will they be better able to understand current conditions in the workplace and more effectively help their children making important career choices, but they might decide to make their own career changes! Too many people end up in positions that don't really suit them; more than 80% of Americans recently surveyed strongly despise their jobs... The author proposes clear steps to be taken to create one's happy and successful career.

Arne Klingenberg
Beam Publishing
www.beampublishing.com

'This e-book really lives up to the title and I have no doubt that it is a smart investment for anyone who is ready to take their career by the horns. I found the case studies smart and practical and very relatable. The information and recommendations are globally applicable, regardless of where an individual may be in their career path. It is succinct, to the point and simple, and certainly worth the small investment. What price can one put on success?

Andrew Griffiths
The Marketing Professionals
www.andrewgriffith.com.au

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Taking Your Career by the Horns

Technology Globalisation and Jobs

Long gone are the days of working for one employer for the whole of your life. Having just one career seems also to have disappeared from the face of the earth – what is happening here?

The dramatic changes to employment and the job market are largely due to the impact of technology and globalisation of the economy. Today technology has become such a basic part of our lives that we no longer notice it. However, early in the 1900s we thought that the invention of electricity was incredible.

In the 1940s the first modern computer was built and since then the speed of technological advancement has been astounding, especially in the area of computer technology.

When computers were first brought into businesses in the 1960s there was very little impact on the workforce. And then suddenly in the 1980s it was apparent that technology could replace people in the workplace. Employees' jobs were being automated.

As businesses gained more technological savvy, they became less tied to time and place, as well as less reliant on a large permanent workforce. As a consequence the notion of a lifelong job has all but disappeared.

There is still work of course but this has necessitated people to understand, respond to, manage and create value from information. The new Information Economy has created new and different jobs, rather than sustained the traditional industrialised ones.

An easy way of understanding this is looking back to the last great social change when agricultural labourers found their jobs disappearing in the advent of the Industrial Revolution. This situation destroyed some ways of life, but then created other exciting opportunities in new and different skilled jobs in factories.

Let's really put job change into perspective and go back a little further to the beginning of the 1900s. Have you recently seen any of these common jobs of the time: ash collectors, blood dryers, ice merchants, lamplighters, livery stable keepers, farriers, mourning hatband makers, saddlers, starchers, and cane cutters?

To embrace the new Information Economy, organisations have had to dismantle their structures and do things differently. We saw the start of this in the 1990s when many firms, particularly the large ones, reengineered, merged, acquired, and downsized their workforces. An example of this was the closure of many banks in rural areas of Australia.

One of the main reasons necessitating this is that information technology has led to globalisation of the marketplace, mainly through the use of the World Wide Web. Businesses have suddenly found themselves competing with others not only at a local level, but nationally and internationally through the internet.

To stay competitive firms are not only marketing their products globally, but are also moving their production around the world, causing conventional workforces to fragment. Rather than these jobs being performed in house, the firms are developing a network of relationships, mostly with smaller operators all over the world and are outsourcing this work. This has produced more work but fewer jobs of the regular kind.

Distance no longer determines the cost for businesses to communicate electronically. No longer is location a key to most business decisions. The cost of starting a new business is declining, and so more individuals with valuable ideas and skills are establishing operations to fill the outsourcing opportunities.

Changing The Way We Think

It is evident from this that we have to change the way we think about employment and jobs. Many people may have started jobs when they left high school or college with the belief that they would stay with the one firm for their working life. They were told "Do a good job and the company will look after you". Does this sound familiar?

In some countries this belief has continued until very recently. For example workers in Japan were deemed to be wedded to the company they worked for. This model however, has suffered an irreversible breakdown, and employees in Japan are now responsible for their own careers rather than relying on the company they work for.

We will not go back to this situation. This means that we will have a number of employers over our working lifetime, instead of just one. It may also mean that we have several careers, instead of one. It could necessitate us doing several contract or casual jobs at the same time, instead of having one permanent job. It might entail working from home, or that we engage in self employment.

This new fickleness of the workforce necessitates us taking responsibility for our own career development. No longer can we rely on our employer to take us to the next step in the organisation. To advance we have to take control ourselves, plan, and be proactive in job promotion and responsible for our own job satisfaction.

We need to develop our career/s over a lifetime so that we are competitive and attractive to potential employers. Career development is not just something we do when we leave school; it is an ongoing process that continues throughout the span of our working lives.

In this regard learning plays a huge role. It should be something we do continuously throughout our lives. Lifelong learning is critical from two perspectives. Firstly it is the only way to keep pace with the rapidly changing world in which we live, and secondly it is intrinsically linked to career development and the recursive relationship between individuals and their environment. Throughout history learning has been closely related to career decision making.

Taking Control of Your Life

Making decisions starts with you being responsible for your own career. The fact that employers are no longer taking on this responsibility is good because it means that we can take control ourselves - we now have choices.

There is a theory in social psychology called "Locus of Control" where people tend to have either an 'external' locus of control, or an 'internal' one. Internal people see a connection between their own actions and what happens to them in life. The external ones see that what happens to them in life is fateful.

The externals hold outside forces such as luck, fate, the stars, other people's actions, biorhythms, or the government, responsible for whatever their lives have become. There are some happy externals who, have fallen into the right job and are happy to go with the flow. However, there are many who bitch about their lack of progress, sniping at the 'lucky ones' who are promoted, or grumble because work hasn't treated them well.

The internals believe that if something was going to happen, they had better make it happen. Internals seem to be more satisfied with their work because they take a proactive approach in developing their career and doing something about it if they aren't happy. The internals are also the more preferred employees because they have a tendency to take on responsibility.

Naturally there are a lot of things beyond our control such as the weather, natural disasters, a downturn in the economy, changes in the political environment, and changes to legislation are amongst some of them. However, your career is very much within your influence.

If you want to love your work you need to be willing to take control of your working life. This means that you have to make some changes and take action so that things happen. However, loving what you do for work starts with making the decision to take control.

Career Changes and Choices

Change has always existed in the world and will continue to exist in the future. There is nothing we can do to stop it, so we need to embrace change while working to maintain control of our careers and lives.

Change not only creates the opportunity for fresh beginnings but enables us to transform what we perceive to be a dangerous situation into something much better. That, in turn helps us achieve a more enjoyable and fulfilling life. The challenge lies in working with change to create the work/life balance we aspire to.

Once you have taken control there are options. You can make changes in one of the following:

- Workplace
- Job
- Employer
- Attitude

If you decide on the **first option – change your workplace**, you have to be prepared not just to rock the boat but redesign it. This may be a rewarding option for you, particularly if you are happy working for your current employer. It is not an easy option and may take some time to see changes take place.

There might only be one or two changes that are necessary to make your job a happy one. With some careful planning and discussion with your manager, and if you are a valued employee it may be possible to achieve your goals.

Case 1 – Ready Ron

Ron had been in his job as a trainer for about 5 years. He enjoyed his job and wanted to advance with the firm. The company had recently restructured because of rapid growth, however, even though Ron was ready to be promoted, he did not particularly like the positions that had been created.

He was very disappointed with the new positions and felt that the company had not really taken the needs of its employees into consideration. Rather than getting disgruntled with the situation, Ron decided to create a hypothetical position that would suit him and to put a case forward for the change.

The firm was happy with Ron's work and they knew he was ready for promotion, so he was approached by his boss to take on one of the new positions. Ron knew he would be invited to apply, and by that stage he had prepared his case. He took the chance of discussing with his boss the possibility of changing the new job to suit him.

Ron's boss listened, but as it was not his decision alone to redesign the new positions, he had to go back to the management team with Ron's proposal. The end result was not immediate. Ron and the management team negotiated the position several times after this first meeting, and finally an agreement was reached. Ron ended up with the job that he had created with one or two small differences that did not really concern him.

The **second option – change your job**, refers to applying for other jobs, particularly at a higher level, with your current employer. If you are happy with your employer and there are opportunities to advance, I strongly suggest you apply for these, so that you grow personally and can develop your career.

To stay where you are in your present position forever without good reason, is not a healthy situation. Your job will become unchallenging, you won't develop personally, and before you know it you will find yourself in a rut. Eventually everything and everyone will change around you, you will feel that everything is passing you by - and it will be true.

Case 2 – Challenged Jennifer

Jennifer was employed as a business advisor for a large accounting firm. She had been with the firm for 7 years and until recently, enjoyed her job. Over the years there had been a number of opportunities for her to advance within the organisation, but she had not given them a second glance and just continued in the role she had been doing for the last 3 years.

Jennifer suddenly found herself in a rut and she realised that the job no longer held the same challenges as before. As well as this she realised that her peers had moved on and upwards in the firm.

The problem for Jennifer was that she had felt completely comfortable and happy in her position, and thought that things would go on that way forever. Unfortunately, everything and everyone changes; and it took a little while for Jennifer to realise that she had changed as well and wanted something more challenging.

She had not missed the boat, Jennifer spoke to her boss and as she was a valued employee, she was considered for the next suitable job that became available and was promoted.

The **third option – change your employer**, will of course mean that you go further a field to make the changes necessary to achieve happiness in your work. If you are not happy with your present employer, and you cannot see any way in which to improve the situation, then it is time to move on.

You will have a number of choices once you have made this decision, such as do I want to stay in the same industry, do I want one job or several part time ones, do I want self employment in the way of consulting, freelancing, contracting, or maybe I will set up my own small business.

Case 3 – Procrastinating Dianne

Dianne was employed as an administrator. She had been in this job with the same employer for 4 years. In the last 12 months she realised that she was not enjoying the work, and felt she was not suited to having a desk job.

Earlier in the year she had started a course at university in occupational health and safety, and was looking forward to eventually getting into this field. However, in the meantime, Dianne was becoming more and more discontent with her current job to the point where she was stressed. The hours were long and she disliked the regulatory nature of the work she had to do.

Dianne had procrastinated for more than a year over whether she should leave her job or not. She had been applying for other jobs but these were in the occupational health and safety area, and had missed out on them due to her lack of experience.

In the end Dianne's health really started to suffer and she ended up in hospital with a couple of problems. Had they not been treated early these problems would have eventually left her in a more serious condition.

As a result of these health scares Dianne finally left her job shortly after the hospital incident. After the months of procrastination, it only took her 4 weeks to secure the job of her dreams.

The **fourth option – change your attitude**, yourself, and stay in your present job as it is, but change the way you think about yourself and your job. This is not necessarily an easy thing to do because it means admitting that you might be your own worst enemy and that you need to work on yourself.

You have to take a long hard look at yourself and find what it is that's letting you down. Ask family, friends, and work colleagues who will give you honest opinions. And you will need to listen to what they say, then do some hard work to change that particular behaviour and stop yourself reverting to your old habits.

Case 4 - Arrogant Craig

Craig had been feeling a little unhappy in his work as a sales representative. He had only been with the firm for 6 months and was pleased to be working with a large reputable organisation.

He mostly enjoyed the work, particularly the one on one contact with clients. However, he didn't particularly like having to work with some of the other people in his department, and couldn't wait to get out of the office to visit clients. It wasn't that he disliked anyone in particular; he just preferred to work on his own. When he attended meetings with his colleagues he was arrogant, a 'know-it-all', and bordering on rudeness.

When his colleagues started to bypass him, which made it difficult for him to do his job, Craig realised there was a problem. He approached a friend who was very helpful and from this meeting Craig came to the conclusion that he was not used to working in a team environment, because he had previously been self employed.

Not only was this causing his unhappiness but also the rudeness. As Craig wanted to keep his job, his friend suggested he discuss the situation with his boss with the view of doing a teamwork course. As a result his boss agreed to the course and also suggested that the whole department go on team building exercise so that the team would better get to know one another.

Planning Career and Lifestyle Changes

To make the most of all the career choices that face you during your working life, be clear about your goals, alert to opportunities, and quick to make key decisions when necessary. Effective planning will help you be prepared and focused, so that when you need to you can make the right choices.

The most successful career paths have good planning, a sense of direction, and clear milestones along the way. A career path needs to be flexible but should always be structured.

The following are some activities to assist you in making career decisions that will go with your lifestyle and ultimately mean long term happiness. Achieving this, your career will seem more like hobby than work.

Activity 1 – Your Happy Plan

Whatever decision you make, it's a good idea to do some goal setting. Whilst you are doing this, take a close look at what you really want to do in every aspect of your life – not just your career. Your career is only one part and should fit in with your lifestyle, not the other way round.

To start goal setting, choose the following headings to put together 'Your Happy Plan':

Personal
Social/Family
Health and Fitness
Education and Learning
Financial
Career

Then under each of the headings list the things you want to do over the next 12 months.

Your plan should be kept in a place where you can view it on a regular basis. It should also be reviewed every 12 months and changes made to it. It is important to be realistic in this process and not aim too high or have too many goals. Doing so will not achieve anything and you will become unmotivated and disillusioned with the whole thing.

Some people need to have a plan that is more visual than a written one. What seems to work well for visual people are cuttings from magazine pictures, or photographs that represent their particular goals. You might have a scrap book with the headings as mentioned previously. Then under those headings appear your pictures for the various goals. For example, under the Personal heading you might have a picture of a sports car.

You will be amazed at how, once you've identified your goals by putting them on paper, they suddenly materialise.

Activity 2 – Aligning Your Career and Lifestyle

Taking time to assess your career goals and whether they align with your personal life goals can make you aware of what needs to be achieved or modified for personal fulfillment. List 5 things in order of importance to you that you really enjoy doing in your work, and the amount of time you spend on each activity. Then do the same for leisure, listing 5 things and the time you spend on them.

Activity 3 – So What are Your Work Motivators?

Let's now take a closer look at just your career goals. What do you want from work? Write down your aims under the following headings: money, working hours, life balance, location, type of work (contract/casual/long term), promotion.

Activity 4 – Getting Back to Beliefs and Values

Just as important is identifying your beliefs and values when it comes to work, so that you can align these with the employer that has the right culture and same values. To identify your values complete the following:

Think of an ideal job and from the list below write low, medium or high next to each of the items on the list depending on how important it is to have:

Financial Gain – continual increase in pay or salary level.

Prestige – high standing or estimation in the eyes of others.

Status – Position or rank in relation to others.

Recognition – public acknowledgement for achievements.

Autonomy – independence, freedom from direction.

Advancement – opportunity for promotion to positions of more responsibility.

Authority – power to control the work activity of others.

Affiliation – Acceptance as a member of a work group or organisation.

Structure – Availability of clearly defined work requirements and relationships.

Helping Others – performing works as a service to other people.

Variety – frequent changes in work responsibilities or locations.

Challenge – Involvement in work responsibilities or locations.

Fulfillment – satisfying feeling achieved by completing work that contributes to the success of a business activity or the betterment of society.

When you have finished, go back to the beginning of the list, and this time think about your present or most recent job and again write low, medium or high next to each item, indicating values satisfied/not satisfied.

Activity 5 – Pictures Draw a Thousand Words

What about your present employer? Do you like where you work? Do you respect your employer? Do one or both of the following: draw a picture that symbolizes your view of the place where you work; or characterise the firm in words, writing a short story that sums up your current employer in a nutshell.

Activity 6 – Career Opportunities and Threats

There are always opportunities and threats, let's identify them and get the best out of both for your work. Make a list of the 5 worst things that could happen to your career, and develop a strategy for positively tackling each one. Then make a list of 5 things you would like to make happen in your career. Again come up with a strategy for achieving each one.

Getting Help

When you have finished these activities, discuss your plans with your family and friends, or if you want a totally objective view point a good idea may be to visit a career counsellor or career coach to help you plan some changes. The important thing to remember is that your career should be something you enjoy doing and that it should fit into your lifestyle.

Visit the Seadragon website on www.seadragonconsulting.com for further information, links and workshops on Career Management.

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