

Section 10

CATEGORY I PANEL DISCUSSION TEMPLATE #4

Career Positioning— Proactively Managing Your Professional Development

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Is It Time for Your Career Checkup?

Since more hours of our life are spent at work than at any other activity, satisfaction with the job and its relationship to other aspects of your life is critically important to not only your happiness, but to your health.

Michael A. Broscio

Since we all realize the importance of our physical and emotional wellbeing, we would never avoid our annual checkup—especially if we are getting signals that something is amiss. We are constantly urged to get a physical, detect disease early, and pursue a lifestyle of wellness and prevention. But when it comes to our careers, we often wait for something bad to happen before we act.

In our outplacement practice, we work with many clients who are not prepared for a wrinkle in their career plan. Some clients might be prepared but fail to take proactive steps to prevent an unexpected career interruption. And others who do not appreciate the need and value of networking until they absolutely need to network. Each vows to never let it happen again.

Reducing Career-Risk Factors

There are steps you can take to reduce career-risk factors. The primary way to gain control of your career path is to be aware of potential risks. What are the signs or symptoms? How can we diagnose and anticipate problems? The following is a checklist that may help you recognize significant career risks.

Diagnostic Checklist

1. Is your organization in a highrisk situation? You can determine whether your organization is in trouble by asking a few vital questions: Is your organization

- performing poorly? Has new technology been embraced that may affect your function or role? Have you recently been acquired or have you just made an acquisition? Has a significant strategy changed?
2. Have key organizational high-risk events occurred? If you have a new boss or new peers with significant influence with your boss, high-risk events may have occurred.
 3. Have there been noticeable changes in communication? Are you all of a sudden out of the loop on important decisions or notice that your boss hasn't spoken to you lately? Were you passed over to take on a lead role?
 4. Do you find yourself at odds with the organization's mission or direction? If you find yourself disagreeing about significant organizational issues or are increasingly frustrated with decisions being made by the higher-ups, you may be facing a potential career risk.
 5. Have you become dependent in your thinking or behaviors? Are you hesitating more when faced with big decisions? Have you stopped learning or developing your skills? Have career plans been delayed or stopped in their tracks?
 6. Are you feeling differently about your work? You know there is a problem when your work is becoming significantly less satisfying, your stress level increases, and you are feeling overwhelmed by job demands and are making more mistakes.
 7. Are your behaviors inconsistent with behaviors required for today's workplace? Are your behaviors potentially causing problems on the job? Have you failed to improve adapting, time-management, or prioritizing skills? Do you try to over-control your staff?

If you are unsure about the risks, get a second opinion. Seek out advice from appropriate colleagues or mentors. You may even think about forming a personal "Board of Advisors." This might include a mentor, a long-time work associate, a professional association colleague, or consultants you've worked with.

Career Management: Your Preventive Medicine

Self-Diagnosis

Conducting a broader self-assessment on a regular basis is an important part of effective career management. Start by exploring your individual needs. Ask yourself some key questions. What is important to me at this point in my life? What do I really enjoy doing? Evaluate your personal characteristics, values, and preferences.

You'll also want to explore what you have to offer to both your current employer and others in the marketplace. Take an honest look at your talents and capabilities. How well do your skills stack up? Review your accomplishments on an annual basis and even take time to update your resume. If you haven't received any performance feedback, seek it out, not only from superiors but from peers or subordinates.

Conduct Research

Another key step is to be in touch with the market. Internally, this would include understanding what your employer needs and expects from you. How well does your skill

set match with your organization's current needs? Have there been changes in expectations? Again, when in doubt-ask!

Externally, stay in touch with current and future trends in the industry. Establish what skills are needed for success now and in the future. Attending and networking at conferences and industry events can be the best way to stay connected.

Implement a Development Plan

After looking at what you offer and evaluating your organization or marketplace needs, you can begin to ascertain where there are gaps and determine what is needed to minimize them. You can begin by pursuing additional training or certifications and attending educational events, but you can also look for opportunities at your current job. Are there additional responsibilities you can tackle or a committee/task force to join? Is there a leadership role you can assume in a professional group, such as an ACHE local chapter, to add to your experience?

Be Adaptable

Be sure to re-evaluate your employer's and marketplace needs every few months. Be prepared to adjust your plan accordingly when faced with personal changes like a new addition to your family or a financial setback. Look at organizational changes, such as a new boss, a new strategy, or a merger and acquisition as a challenge and opportunity. Your ability to roll with the punches and make change a part of your thinking will increase the chances of reaching your career goals.

A Healthy Career Means a Healthier Life

Since more hours of our life are spent at work than at any other activity, satisfaction with the job and its relationship to other aspects of your life is critically important to not only your happiness, but to your health. An unhappy or unsatisfying situation often results in stress which may eventually impact your productivity and health. According to BlueCross BlueShield, five out of six workers feel job stress plays a major role in their illnesses.

Issues related to work/life balance are often a source of problems with job satisfaction and stress. The problem is particularly difficult for women, who often carry the brunt of child care concerns. What can you do to provide more balance and reduce stress? Check with your employer about flexible work hours or work-from-home options. Also find out if the organization offers a health and wellness plan, employee assistance programs, on-site day care, or a health club.

You may feel like you can do it all, but sometimes we need to seek professional help. The use of an executive or career coach can provide sound advice on many areas of your career. Because coaches come from a variety of backgrounds, finding one that can relate to you and deliver results is important. But be aware of inexperienced coaches—don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions and get references. ACHE has already done a lot of this work for affiliates; access an executive coach directory in the Affiliates Career Resource

Center on **ache.org**. Many people have found that relying on and developing a lasting relationship with a coach is the best thing they can do for their careers.

Whether you follow a self-help plan or seek advice from others, use that checkup and begin your journey on the road to good career health!

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