

## Advice for Taking Your Career to the Next Level

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In uncertain times, it can seem like the best course of action is to put your head down and ride out the storm. But resting on your laurels can be dangerous. Now can be a good time to distinguish yourself as a leader in your firm. As companies plan for the economic recovery, they'll need individuals who aren't satisfied with the status quo to help them grow again.

Here is advice for taking your career to the next level:

### **What are your weaknesses?**

A good first step is to conduct a self-assessment and identify skills that you could strengthen. For example, although you may feel you already possess strong communication abilities, you may not be comfortable presenting in front of large groups. As a result, you might aim to improve your public-speaking skills.

Solicit feedback from others when considering areas for improvement. Family, friends and members of your professional network may have suggestions you would not have thought of on your own. Ask for honest feedback and try to remain objective when evaluating the opinions you receive.

### **What are your strengths?**

Keep in mind that an area in which you already excel could be a prime candidate for attention. After all, if you don't continue to hone that skill, you could lose your edge. You might, for instance, take a class to improve your knowledge of a software program you use each day. Even though you are skilled in the application, there may be tools or shortcuts you're unfamiliar with.

### **What is your goal?**

Focus on just one or two skills at a time so you don't spread yourself too thin. It's also a good idea to set a goal so you have something concrete to work toward. If you hope to improve your knowledge of Microsoft Excel, for example, it may be worth trying to earn a Microsoft Certified Applications Specialist designation in that program. Establishing a deadline for reaching your objective will help prevent you from procrastinating.

### **What are your options?**

After setting a goal, look for ways to accomplish it. Start with your employer. Many organizations, especially larger firms, have internal resources dedicated to employee training. Are there any courses or seminars you can take advantage of? Does your employer offer tuition reimbursement or discounts on professional memberships? Joining a local association can be a great way to build your skills because many provide training options, feature guest speakers and offer certification programs specific to your industry.

Also consider volunteering for projects at work. Challenging yourself in this way can help you build new skills and gain the attention of management.

### **What can you teach others?**

One of the best ways to remain sharp is to share your knowledge and experience with others. Often, you can learn as much from another person as he or she can learn from you. Consider volunteering to mentor a junior staff member at your firm or lead the intern program.

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