

## **A CareerView Mirror: Another Perspective on Your Work and Career Planning** **Bill Donovan, OckhamSource™, Cary, North Carolina**

### **ABSTRACT**

Career planning in today's tumultuous job marketplace requires a more rigorous and disciplined approach, which must begin with each individual tracking his or her particular skills and experiences. The ability to organize and inventory your entire career-related experiences is the foundation of a solid career plan. The catalog of your work assignments and functional responsibilities creates a reflection of your efforts in your career to-date. All of this helps to build your *CareerView Mirror*.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this paper is to help you define your CareerView Mirror and provide a set of practical steps and tools to enable you to organize your own career plan. In order to begin, first we need to define the concept of a CareerView Mirror as it relates to this material.

A CareerView Mirror is simply a method of looking at the progression of your work life or chosen profession. It can be used as a structure to group your professional development in the business world. The key elements of a CareerView Mirror would include a detailed résumé (or *Curriculum Vitae*), a list of awards, achievements, publications, and any specialized training (both formal and informal).

### **A CAREERVIEW MIRROR – HOW DO I GET STARTED?**

Before you begin to construct your CareerView Mirror and/or build your specific timeline of career events, it can be very instructive to reflect on how you arrived at your current career. In other words – how did you get to this point in your work world? You may find it useful to capture your thoughts and impressions about the answers to these questions in a journal or notebook. You can continue to dig into your work choices and ask yourself a fundamental question: Was the decision accidental or incidental?

We tend to make work or job choices based on multiple factors such as education, vocational training, a hobby or interest, money, job availability, and often, family and friend influences. This is not an exhaustive list. However, this list can help you uncover the answers to why you have chosen this line of work.

After you have taken the time to document the *why* of your current job, be sure to keep a record of the general flow of historical decisions that have propelled you to this point. The next step is to understand that, in the current world of your career planning, you are the architect! You will need to self-navigate the stormy waters of your career and develop and execute your own plan.

Today, most employers will provide a general outline of job descriptors and roles but rarely a fully developed individualized career plan. The creation of your career plan is up to you and you will need to make adjustments throughout the entire cycle.

Step three in the how-to-get-started phase is to inventory your skills and experiences and update your résumé. The creation of your updated résumé helps form the basis of your value and establishes the framework of your career history. During the creation of your résumé, it is a good idea to seek feedback from colleagues and other professionals in your specific field. You may also consider writing a biographical summary or personal profile to be used in conjunction with your standard résumé.

### **RÉSUMÉ COMPLETED WITH OPTIONAL BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY – NEXT STEP?**

Congratulations! Completing a résumé update with a new twist and updating the biographical summary (and/or personal profile) is a significant step. However, this cannot be done in isolation. Specifically, you will need to understand how your skills, experience, and overall value contribute to the role you are currently working in – that is, within the company where you are employed. You will need to answer the question: Where do I fit into the operating business model? How do my efforts create value to the company and ultimately to the marketplace that the firm serves?

This is a critical set of questions to answer and, if you do not know, then ask your management. The information you receive as answers to these questions can help you shape your actions and decisions on your overall skill

development plan. The emphasis here is focusing your development on skills and training, which translates into value for you and your employer. As you accumulate more valuable skills and experience, more opportunities typically develop both inside your current firm and the wider marketplace.

## **CONCENTRATE AND FOCUS YOUR VALUE IN THESE THREE CORE AREAS**

Now we need to continue on the value-creation theme we started after completing your résumé. We will need to build a solid foundation in three core skill areas:

1. Domain Expertise
2. Business Knowledge
3. Social and Relationship Skills

We will define and expand the meaning of these core skills and ask you to review your current training and development plan for these areas.

*Domain Expertise* is your specific expertise, which can be technical or functional and aligns within the business model. Certain functional examples would be sales, finance or clinical operations. It is imperative to know what your “thing” is beyond your job title. Then where does your particular set of skills fit into the overall scheme of the business? The majority of working professionals can have multiple areas of expertise, yet they usually fall or cluster around a set or domain. For now, try to keep your domain general and not subdivide or splinter your domain expertise. This can be handled after your initial grouping of domain skills.

*Business Knowledge* is simply your understanding of the basic economics of business. Typically, this includes general financial literacy and a thorough grasp of your company-specific work flow and – more important – how it makes money. Of course, knowing the subtleties in a service business and how they can differ from a product-based business can be invaluable in growing your business acumen.

*Social and Relationship Skills* are no longer “extras” or “nice to have” in a global marketplace. The bedrock of these skills is the ability to communicate effectively with co-workers, vendors, management, and all stakeholders in and outside the enterprise. Communication skills include both verbal and written. In addition to communication, you need to be able to work closely with many different types of people – in certain cases from different cultures. The ability to get along with people in the workplace is essential. To create more value, these skills must be developed beyond the basics. They accumulate more value when you lead teams effectively.

As you attempt to develop these core areas, it can be beneficial to set up a team of mentors to guide your development.

## **SET UP A TEAM OF MENTORS**

To help accelerate your development and overall mastery in these three core foundational areas, we suggest a team of mentors. To start building your own team of mentors, first identify the target market or vertical industry segment. Then create a list of “best-fit” companies you admire and respect or have interest in learning more about. After this, identify key leaders in these firms. Contact these individuals and outline your intentions. You can ask whether they would allow you to interview them and request feedback on your skills development plan.

The difficult step is starting the dialogue with people whom you may not know. Therefore, at first, many people pick mentors they know from their place of employment as well as industry groups. The key is to reach outside of your current network to include multiple perspectives on your skills and overall career plan.

The team of mentors is essentially similar to a board of advisors for your career. It can help to have an outside group of professionals to hold you accountable for your development and keep you on task.

## **CREATE AN ONGOING LEARNING SYSTEM**

Learning is a key component of any development and overall career plan. Think of your learning as an ongoing, never-ending effort that can be grouped into two main types:

### **1. FORMAL LEARNING**

These are traditional colleges or universities, certificate courses, seminars, and any distance learning. All are excellent ways to enhance the skills and knowledge you have developed while working in your current role.

## 2. INFORMAL LEARNING

There is no shortage of opportunity in today's Internet-driven world to absorb information and learn in an informal, self-paced manner. The most common types of informal learning include reading, volunteer activities, internships, telephone surveys with key contacts, friends and family feedback. Any opportunity to access and capture solid information that you can integrate into your professional and personal development is in this category of informal learning.

In order for these two learning systems to be effective, you must dedicate time and energy, preferably each week, to your learning system. Many professionals join related associations, user groups and clubs, and attend networking events to help stay on track with their learning system. The best way to start and build up your own learning system is to experiment. Begin the process with a small goal, such as reading an industry trade journal, for example, or subscribing to a professional magazine.

Then integrate a set of activities that may require more time, such as involvement with a user group or series of networking events for professionals in roles similar to your own. Again, the important point is to start and get experience with those learning initiatives that you enjoy and that can be most beneficial to your career.

## SUMMARY

The traditional concept of career planning has changed tremendously over the past 20 years. In order to be successful in growing your career opportunities today, you will need to take ownership of your own career planning. The concept of looking at your accumulated skills, experiences, and work assignments is the first step in creating a career plan. Hopefully, the material, concepts and practical action steps included here will help you. All that is left now is for you to start, build, expand, and execute a working model for your career plan.

## RECOMMENDED READING

- *Welcome to the Career Opportunities in Biotechnology and Drug Development* by Toby Freedman, Ph.D.
- *Doing Great Work* by Michael Bungay Stainer

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