



7 STEPS TO BECOMING A CAREER MASTER

EASY-TO-EMBRACE STRATEGIES AND HABITS THAT TAKE YOU FROM CAREER DELUSION TO CAREER ACCELERATION

By Abby Locke, Executive Career Marketing Architect

“Bridging the Gap between Talented Executives and Career Mastery”



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The recent economic crisis in the United States has greatly impacted industries, crushed corporate giants and left millions of people without jobs. If you have been a victim of this economic downturn, you know firsthand the challenges of finding a new job in the middle of a widespread recession.

- **Assuming that you have been fortunate enough to land back on your feet, what measures have you put in place to ensure that your next career transition (voluntary and involuntary) would be short lived?**
- **Can you be confident that if you lost your job today that you would be able to move into your next job within 60 to 90 days?**

We no longer live in a society where job longevity is guaranteed regardless of your hard work and commitment to an organization. The true keys to building a recession-proof career comes from planning for the future. Whether you make the effort to develop a 12-month, 3-year or 5-year career master plan, it is very critical to take a proactive approach when it comes to managing your career.

It doesn't matter if you are just starting out in your career/profession, in the middle of your career or looking at retirement in a few years, be prepared and putting appropriate measures in place makes good sense. There is nothing worse than experiencing career setback every time you become a victim to economic changes.

So where do you begin when it comes to building a recession-proof career?

1. Define Your Career Vision & Goals

It is fruitless to have a career master plan if you don't have a clear vision of where you want to be in the future. Wherever your aspirations are taking you – from partner in a law firm, executive director of a large non-profit organization, managerial role in the public sector or CEO of your own company, you will need to develop a career blueprint that guides you every step of the way. Start giving considerable thought to where you want to be in terms of a career instead of just a job.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Where do you want to be in 12 months to three years?
- Are you in the right place for personal growth that aligns with your long-term career goals?
- What will it take in terms of education, experience, advanced training, projects to get you to the next level?
- What type of organization or work environment will best support your career aspirations and nurture your passion?
- What kind of lifestyle do you want to have and how can you facilitate that through your career?
- Who are mentors in your industry or profession that you can start closely following?

Don't just think about where you want to be in your career, establish SMART goals, partner with a career coach or mentor to keep you accountable on your progress.



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2. Create Visibility & Clarify Your Brand

Ultimately career success comes from being able to stand out from your peers and colleagues and through brand reputation. There are things that you do better than anyone else – it is simply the way you are wired – and it translates to incredible value for employers. Having a solid understanding of your value proposition allows you to outcompete for higher paying positions, get access to high-profile projects and be recommended better internal career opportunities.

However, as part of being a career master, your brand needs to be visible and clear throughout your company, resonate among your peers and industry leaders. Think about the following:

- How can you become a trusted source in your industry?
- In what ways are you consistently the answer/solution to pressing issues in your company and/or industry?
- How can you communicate your expertise through online and offline strategies like personal website, blog, articles, and speaking engagements?
- What are the greatest needs within your company for the next six to twelve months and how can you position yourself to be a key source?
- Is your personal appearance, style and business attire consistently in line with the image you want to portray?
- What can you develop as your own personal brand identity system – from business cards, stationery, email templates and voice mail messages?

Don't wait until you are in a career crisis to begin building your personal brand; make yourself well known and visible throughout your company and industry.

3. Get In The Mix: Build A Network & Create A Following

If you have lived and breathed long enough, you will agree that success in today's corporate world requires access to a strong, vibrant and growing personal and professional network. At the end of the day, it's who you know AND what you know that will open doors for you. Being comfortable in your career and loving your company is no excuse for neglecting your network.

- Maintain an open relationship with your supervisor as much as possible and do your best to be available for department meetings, informal talk, and impromptu phone calls or client meetings.
- Volunteer for internal and external company events and contribute to special projects as much as possible.
- Take advantage of opportunities for public speaking and representing the company at conferences, trade show and industry events.
- Join and participate in professional and industry associations to be known outside your company.
- Foster active, ongoing relationships with clients, vendors and strategic partners to have a diverse professional network.



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4. Know Your Value / ROI-Based Proposition

Your industry worth or value is demonstrated in the salaries that you are able to command as you advance in your career. Companies are willing to invest (your salary) in you based on your perceived return on investment (ROI) to them. When it comes to your annual review and performance appraisal, you can fully advocate for raises, bonuses and promotions when you are clear and confident on your ROI.

Use these probing questions to jog your memory about company/career achievements and keep accurate, updated records of your achievements every six months:

- In what ways have you contributed to revenue generation at your current or former employer(s)? If you are able to quantify those results, your ROI proposition is stronger.
- Have you helped your company save money or reduce costs?
- What have you done to help your company gain competitive advantage or increase industry reputation?
- Did you repair relationships with customers or enhance your company's public image?
- Were you instrumental in solving a critical problem or leading a key initiative?
- Have you introduced new processes or procedures that helped save time for your company?

5. Embrace Lifelong Learning & Continuous Training

Stay abreast of industry trends, increase your competitive advantage and expand your knowledge to avoid becoming "obsolete" in your career. Develop and engage in annual training plan either sponsored by your company and make a personal investment in your career growth.

- Identify the key skills, new technologies or current trends most important to your company and industry as a whole.
- Use annual conferences and local networking/business events as avenues for informal educational opportunities
- Get your manager's support and financial commitment to your ongoing training by demonstrating how your increased knowledge will directly benefit the company.
- Research appropriate e-courses, training catalogues for new classes that will benefit your career goals.

6. Become A Consummate Communicator & Team Player

Think about industry experts and business leaders that you most admire – pay close attention to how they carry themselves and more importantly notice the level of excellence that resonates in their written and verbal communications. There is nothing worse than having high expectations of someone, only to be disappointed when he/she is a poor public speaker or falls short in emails, memos and business letters. Always remember that solid communication skills will put you ahead of the pack in your company.



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- Join Toastmasters for safe opportunities to improve your verbal and public speaking skills if necessary.
- Thoroughly review internal and external emails for accuracy in grammar, punctuation, and typos – treat each email as if the president would be reviewing it.
- Show genuine concern and support to your colleagues and coworkers – make every effort to learn people’s names and strive to remember important events in their lives like birthdays and anniversaries.
- Be willing to share information, article, industry news and relevant tips that your colleagues and team members could all benefit from – getting internal allies and contacts can go a long way.
- Initiate celebrations for team contributions and successes; be willing to give others credit and support for their ideas and individual contributions.
- Always, always observe and follow the “chain-of-command” within your company and make sure you are stay aware of your company’s long-term vision, mission and business objectives.

7. Have A Support Team

Talk to any successful business leader and they will tell you that along their road to success, they had plenty of support, encouragement and guidance along the way. Personal support for your career growth can come from many sources including:

- A career coach with whom you have built a solid, trusting relationship with and who can guide you through your career journey, serving as a source of support, encouragement and accountability. Some of the best leaders and even celebrities like Oprah have continued to invest in coaches.
- Mentors who have the right level of experience, personal insight and genuine care for your personal growth and success can be very helpful. Start identifying high profile individuals whom you can closely follow and build relationships with – even consider developing an advisory team of mentors.
- Family and friends who are encouraging and supportive of your career goals—even if they cannot be a source for advice and guidance—can be the comforting shoulders you need to lean on during your climb up the corporate ladder.
- Additional resources on leadership development that can keep you on track include the following:
 - Fortune Magazine
 - Forbes Magazine
 - Harvard Business Review
 - Business Week
 - Center for Creative Leadership (online bookstore)
 - A Whole New Mind by Daniel Pink
 - Dig Your Well Before You’re Thirsty by Harvey Mackay
 - Maximum Success: Changing the 12 Behavior Patterns That Keep You From Getting Ahead by Drs. James Waldroop, PhD and Timothy Butler, PhD.
 - Take Yourself to the Top by Laura Berman Fortgang
 - The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey