

## Moves Management for Your Advancement Career

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As the head of a development search firm, I am frequently asked by candidates and association event attendees for career advice. Mostly, these requests come from young professionals who'd like to best position themselves for that next great job opportunity.

I believe all professionals would do well to think *more* about their overall career path and *less* about securing a specific position, title, staff size, or salary level. Let's face it -- all of us have our likes and dislikes, our strengths and our weaknesses. By focusing solely on what sounds like a higher level job, we may lose sight of what we enjoy doing most.

Along with your New Year's resolutions, I encourage you to use the start of a new year as a time to evaluate your career accomplishments of the past 12 months, and with this analysis, conduct a real "gut check" on what you've really loved working on. What are the things that inspire you to get up and go to work in the morning?

I recommend making three lists:

The first, outlining your past year's accomplishments (in detail and with numbers) the second, listing the projects/tasks that have been the most rewarding to you and a third, outlining the skills you'd like to develop over the coming year.

Doing this exercise annually (and by all means save those lists!), will help you in so many ways. Most importantly you'll gain insight into what parts of advancement are most satisfying to you. I see many development professionals in the early part of their careers struggling to define the career path that suits them best. Advancement is a wonderful field because it offers a wealth of opportunities for almost every strength and interest.

Those who are very outgoing, articulate, motivated by goals, and enjoy travel make great major gifts officers. Those who are gregarious, very organized, and enjoy the excitement of events can focus on alumni relations. Those who feel more comfortable championing their institution's mission in writing can find excellent opportunities in donor relations or as a grant writer.

It is infinitely better for your overall career to be true to your strengths than to cast about trying to find your niche in a series of jobs. I know it's tempting -- there are many, many opportunities available. But moving around too much will be a detriment to you when you find that one job you really, really want. In fact, one of the main reasons people get rejected is because they've had too many jobs.

Institutions don't expect you to stay in every job for 10 years, but they do shy away from applicants with a series of two to three year stints. They want committed people who have not only mastered their current job, but have taken their area to the next level of excellence. In addition to technical skills, they are also looking for the positive intangible qualities that accompany exceptional employees and team players. These qualities include the ability to navigate organizational change, handle ambiguity,

work with the demanding personalities that are everywhere, and to take on new responsibilities over time.

So before you jump at an opportunity, carefully evaluate it in terms of your strengths and how it can advance your career. Of course, review the printed information and the institution's web site. Did the job sound wonderful because you were having a particularly bad day? What exactly are the pluses of the new job, aside from salary?

Once you have focused on a career path, make a list of the skills you'll need to develop to advance, and then consider how you'll gain these skills. Join a professional association that serves your specific area, and consider doing this even if your institution can't cover the dues. Association memberships, like CASE, are incredible resources for information, job networking, and career advice.

If you envision yourself ever leading a department (even if that department consists of two people), take some time to learn management skills beyond those you acquire on the job. Being a good manager is a key to advancing in advancement – it is also one of the toughest of all job responsibilities. Take advantage of the wealth of evening courses and books that discuss effective management techniques.

When you are ready to advance to your next dream job, use the lists you've been making over the years to compose a flawless resume that clearly shows you are the best person for the job. Also, prepare for the job interview by carefully planning answers to typical questions. "How has your background prepared you for this job?" "What interests you about this position?" And, "Describe your management style."

Final parting words – take some time to evaluate your career each year and make thoughtful, informed job choices. Create a moves management plan for *yourself* to ensure a more rewarding career!

Best wishes,

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