

# MANAGE YOUR CAREER

BY DAVID R. LEWIS

**W**hether you are working for a public agency, private firm, utility company, financial institution or as an independent contractor, it is essential to manage your career by identifying where you can improve your effectiveness. Why is managing your career important? That depends on how you view your profession and aspirations. A more fundamental question is do you want to be effective?

To be effective you must analyze your expectations in relation to your knowledge, skills and abilities. This is a self-assessment process – where you analyze where you came from, where you are now and where you want to go.

Goal setting determines where you want to go. Your goals must be in harmony with your knowledge, skills and abilities to be effective at managing your career and your personal life.

You need to be aware of your strengths and weaknesses. Without that knowledge you cannot address your weaknesses as you proceed to make your future.

Managing your career effectively is about planning your future by setting specific goals. Your goals must not only be in harmony with your knowledge, skills and abilities – they must also be consistent with your routines. To achieve desired results, it is essential to plan ahead and decide what you need to do. Such accomplishments cannot be done at random. You must develop a routine. Routines are not New Year resolutions that often fail for a lack of follow through. Rather, they are things that you do frequently and consistently in your career path.

A fully-effective career path includes a healthy dose of self-awareness through personal reflection and systematic study, or asking knowledgeable individuals for constructive assessment. This could be similar to an annual employment evaluation. Having a mentor or mentors is an excellent way to help manage your career path and development. You will further aid your goals as you gain experience developing your professional network.

Professional learning occurs routinely in the course of our relationships at work. Such relationships can be in the form of coaching and/or sharing professional competencies, and can be reciprocal in nature – a common sharing of our knowledge. Sharing experiences and how problems and situations are solved are significant educational personal development events. Although most of us do not have a formal coach/mentor, it is possible to find a temporary or situational coach/mentor who has a specific competency. Being part of a professional organization such as the IRWA, American Society of Appraisers (ASA) or the Appraisal Institute (AI) provide such opportunities. Chapter meetings, lunch appointments and routine telephone calls/e-mails provide a basis for support and collective advice and learning. What I found to be more effective is to become an officer or a committee member in a chapter. Typically, those who are or have served in leadership roles or are active in an organization are more committed to their profession.

The Right of Way profession includes a variety of competencies. To obtain the Senior Member, International Right of Way Association (SR/WA) designation, the candidate must obtain a specific level of education and experience. A comprehensive exam must be taken and passed in negotiation, appraisal, engineering and legal aspects of real estate. Individuals often excel in one or more of the competencies. For example, appraising requires certain analytical skills while negotiation requires interpersonal skills. Nonetheless, it is essential for right of way professionals

to have a comprehensive understanding of the profession.

The following are suggestions for managing your career:

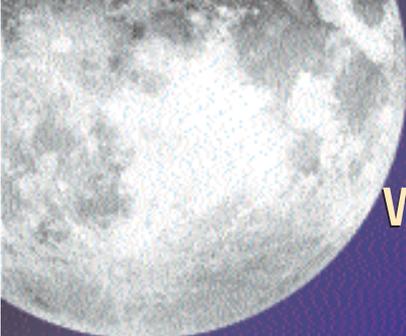
- If you have not achieved your SR/WA designation, establish a schedule to do so. The IRWA establishes clear and specific directions to plot your desired course of achievement. If you want to focus on appraisal skills, a dual designation with the American Society of Appraisers (ASA) and/or Appraisal Institute (MAI) will also assist in improving your career.
- Create a routine of taking classes on a planned schedule. Such classes should be of both professional and personal interests. Classes related to your profession improve your competencies and classes of personal interest help you grow as an individual. The SR/WA designation requires the candidate to take specific courses. Your routine must focus on the educational requirements. I suggest taking classes of personal interest because education in general makes you a more rounded person and therefore, by definition, more effective.
- Take classes that address specific problems you need to work on. For example, if you need to improve your writing skills, take writing classes, find a mentor and obtain self-help books. Also, you should take every opportunity to practice writing and read well-written reports.
- Routinely read professional journals such as *right of way Magazine*, *Professional Surveyor Magazine*, or *APWA Reporter* to help keep you abreast of the issues and trends of your industry. To be a professional requires a constant effort to keep current.
- Find opportunities for public speaking to improve your presentation skills. Toastmasters is an excellent forum to practice presentation skills and get positive feedback in a supportive environment. Enroll in classes and read literature on how to present yourself through body language, personal appearance and personal charisma.
- Improve your behavior to improve your interpersonal competencies. Behavior, whether positive or negative, is a difficult subject considering the complexity of the human species. Find a role model that exemplifies those competencies you need to improve. Ask successful people how they achieved their competency. You can learn positive behavioral traits from successful people.
- Be willing to take on special assignments at work. Readings in public

administration often suggest how taking on high profile and/or difficult assignments can lead to future promotions.

- Avoid burning bridges. Right of way professionals should adopt a behavior pattern that is consistent with good social skills based on the training required by the IRWA for the SR/WA designation. This includes a degree of empathy and the cultivation of rapport with others. Use effective social skills such as persuasion, teamwork, interacting effectively, amicable dispute resolution and cooperative abilities. Learning how to read social situations and understanding the perspective of others helps avoid difficult situations that can cause a bridge-burning event.
- Practice emotional and interpersonal skills. There will be times when there are differing opinions on how to do the job. I find it effective to take the position you can best defend.
- Recognize the need to work at being out of your comfort zone. Nothing of importance can occur without being out of your comfort zone. While this sounds somewhat extreme, people typically do not change or progress without an incentive. Even the Uniform Standards of Professional Practice (USPAP) addresses this issue. USPAP says that if you are not competent in a given area you need to explain how you became competent.
- Be more involved in your local IRWA or organization's chapter by becoming an officer or participating in a committee. The work you do helps others, and you will associate with those professionals that are committed to the profession.
- Focus on what you like to do. You will be more passionate in what you do. Be open and willing to change.

Right of way work is rich with the values of service to the communities in which we practice our profession. While stressful at times, there is satisfaction in a job well done. Right of way has an ethic connected to the values and goals we individually and collectively pursue. Sometimes our profession is about hard choices and decisions when controversies present themselves. Nonetheless, to be ultimately effective we must do the right thing, the right way, and for the right reason. ❖

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