



Why Are You Still In Your Job?

David Sneesby, Managing Partner

In this article

1. How long is too long?
2. What are the catalysts for change – proactive and reactive?
3. The structural skill-gap
4. A word from the Partners

Why Are You Still In Your Job?

Have you ever taken the time to ask yourself what keeps you in the job you're in? The odds are, based on the interviews we've had with the many people we have targeted for new positions that you probably have not. Have you, in fact, made a career plan for yourself – where do you want to be in five years time? Again the evidence suggests that you won't have done this either. So what have you done in terms of proactive management of your career?

It seems as though, unless you are an exception to the general rule, you will be getting on with your job and giving little time to actively manage your next move, whether this be within or outside your current employer. This is all the more intriguing when we know that most of the businesses we work with have very clear short, medium and long term goals, and the people who are creating these are the very same people who are failing to do the same for themselves. It's not that they don't take their careers seriously either. We know that their career features near the top of their personal priorities.

We also have little doubt that these executives will be preaching that "failing to plan is planning to fail". So why don't they practice this in the context of their careers?

Could it be time constraints? Are they simply too busy to take time out to focus on this? Maybe it's lack of sufficient experience or knowledge? So how do you find your next role and when should you start looking?

How long is too long?

There are some interesting perceptions among the people we approach about new positions. Some feel that the timing of a new opportunity is wrong for them. "How will it look on my CV if I move company after just two years?" "Would this make me appear to be a job hopper and a high risk hire?" But on the other hand there are many employers we speak with who hold the view those candidates who have been at the same company for "some time" is just too long and that, though not moving, they have become institutionalised and stale.

So is there an "ideal" time to be in a company before moving on? Clearly this will depend on the career objective of the individual (if they even have one). There must be some correlation between the degree of impatience of an executive to gain promotion or greater responsibility and their preparedness to wait. The more impatient, the shorter the tenure. Another interesting question - does this tenure vary by function or sector? For example, it is reported that, on average, Marketing Directors have among the shortest of tenures, in the region of just 24 months. So does this mean that when a Marketing Director takes on a new role they might expect it to last for just 2 years? If so, this will have serious implications for what they do and how they achieve it in this concentrated time frame, recognising that they are also inheriting the committed plans of their predecessor which may take half of this period to play through. Whose choice is it then that the Director moves on – theirs or the company? And were the expectations of the deliverables and time frame realistic at the outset?

What are the catalysts for change – proactive and reactive?

It is, in many ways, a sad indictment in terms of senior leaders, that it seems to take a call from a headhunter to catalyse the process of career management – and even then it's invariably a reactive situation. More often than not the people we approach about new positions do not have an up to date CV. They say "to be honest, we haven't really needed one". Why not? Shouldn't you always be receptive and prepared to take a progressive career step? It's not to say that everyone should be constantly looking to move on and take an opportunistic position but not having written or considered writing a CV for the past 5 years wouldn't stack up if the equivalent question were to be asked about the writing and continual update of a business strategy. There is one thing that is certain, not having a career goal will mean that you can't reach it.

So, within your current company have you had the conversation as to your career aspirations and development needs. You can't just expect your line manager to have worked it out for you – the evidence is that they've not even managed to do this for themselves effectively. So if you are getting bored or frustrated and want a change it maybe that this can be achieved within your current business but you will have to make it happen. You will need to have an open discussion at the right level. There is, of course, always the chance of unwelcome news that there maybe nothing for you but at least you'll know and can make plans accordingly. Clearly there is also some risk of upsetting the apple cart which is perhaps why people choose to avoid this proactive approach. If you conclude that your aspirations are unlikely to be met within an acceptable time frame you have to ask what is keeping you in the company when you could be progressing your career more quickly elsewhere. Although clearly important, there's more to life than drawing a salary - we know most of our candidates are motivated by the opportunity to make a real difference of some sort. The recession has certainly forced many, who would otherwise have moved on, to hunker down and tread water, taking the pragmatic stance. But, if honest, they and their employer both know that they have exceeded their sell-by date for the job they are doing and that there are probably limited or no promotional opportunities available for them inside the business. But are they just using the recession as an excuse to stay put, because it's easier and more secure that way?

Planning your career takes time and energy and it's not easy. The line of least resistance is to stay. Does this mean that there are many people who are unsatisfied in their jobs but can't be bothered to do anything about it? Sadly, probably yes.

The structural skill-gap

Another common problem we encounter recruiting at the C-level is the skill and experience gap between the director and the next level down. Often this skill and experience gap is just too great for a succession plan to manage. In a recent example we were asked to take on an assignment to recruit a new Finance Director. The Financial Controller in the organisation, although strong in their position, was considered by the leadership team not to have sufficient experience to be able credibly to step up to this position. So in making an external hire this would effectively block the career path for the Financial Controller for the foreseeable future. Our early considerations regarding this assignment focused on whether discussions had taken place with the Financial Controller and whether they were aware that they were not to be considered. Depending on how this news was to be received by the

Financial Controller would determine whether, in fact, we would be recruiting not only a Finance Director but also a Financial Controller given the likelihood that the Financial Controller would leave the business, disappointed that they had been overlooked. Again good communication and taking a proactive position are key to successful career management.

Career management is also about having the right mind-set. It is about being proactive. For whatever reasons, most people seem to fall in to the reactive category. They are waiting for a call from a headhunter or to spot an interesting role in an advert or for someone in their company to promote them. Making the decision to start proactively managing your career is the first step to getting in control of your destiny. Maybe asking yourself why you are still in your job could flesh out what you are getting and missing in the role. Remember, if your career is not progressing as you would like it to then there is just one person to blame and that's yourself. Think about it.....

A Word from the Partners

We hope you've found this piece interesting and useful, and we'd love to hear your thoughts on this subject. If you would like us to explore this subject in more detail, or if you would like to suggest other topics, please don't hesitate to contact us.

We look forward to working with you.

Best wishes

The Partners

ingoodcompany@snowdontate.com