UNDERSTANDING THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Note: This is the fourth of a four-part article.

Although different versions exist, the following four steps are the basic foundation for the career development process:

1. Understand yourself
2. Explore options
3. Make decisions
4. Take action

Previous articles addressed the first three steps, and this article will discuss the fourth step: Take action.

Action Breeds Confidence and Courage

Self-improvement master Dale Carnegie once said, “Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy.”

After deciding on a career direction, sometimes people fail to act on that decision. They return to it, analyzing it over and over again, wanting to make sure they are making the best decision. Why is this?

Achieve Your Dream with SMART Goals

One reason that people don’t act on their decisions is that they don’t set clear goals. They may have a “dream,” but they haven’t established a plan for achieving it. Dreams are important, but to achieve those dreams, we need to set goals. Studies suggest that people who write down their goals are more likely to achieve them. The goal-setting strategy most experts recommend is called SMART goals, so type or write your answers to the following:

S—Specific: What is your specific goal? Be as precise as possible. Answer the journalism questions of who, what, when, where, and why.

M—Measurable: How do you measure success? How will you know when you have reached your goal? Your measurement needs to be precise and answer the question of “how many” or “how often.”
A—Achievable: Make sure your goal is attainable and realistic. If it isn’t, it will always remain only a dream. While setting high standards is important, if the standards are unrealistic, then they probably will not be achieved.

R—Relevant: Does your goal align with your other goals and your values? If it conflicts with your vision of yourself or your short- or long-term plans, then you should reassess the goal.

T—Time-Based: Set a deadline for achieving your goal. If your goal includes steps or milestones, make a timeframe for them as well. Again, be precise. If your deadline is a vague “some time in the future,” then your goal may always remain only a dream.

Since career development is a process, it should consist of several short- and long-term SMART goals: self-assessment, skill development, occupational research, networking, job-search materials, interview preparation, and experience gained through internships, volunteering, and other involvement.

Conquer Fear
Sometimes people’s fears—fear of failure or fear of success—prevent them from moving forward. According to psychologist Susanne Babbel, for some individuals, the emotions surrounding success—the feeling of excitement—may actually feel similar to anxiety (https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/somatic-psychology/201101/fear-success).

Fear of failure may correlate to our level of confidence. We want to avoid the possibility of being embarrassed or having our pride damaged. Sometimes we define success as the lack of failure. However, history shows that successful people experience failure—and usually more than once. See “Top 10 Success Stories of People Who Overcame Failure”: http://www.careeraddict.com/12322/top-10-success-stories-of-people-who-overcame-failure

Get Busy
Fear and anxiety of the unknown are normal human reactions. Feeling fear is okay. What is not okay is when that fear paralyzes you and prevents you from reaching your goals. Here are four tips for overcoming fear:

1. Face it. Acknowledge you’re afraid and explore the details of that fear. What exactly are you afraid of? What is the worst thing that could happen?
2. Throw away perfectionism. While excellence is a worthy state to achieve, perfectionism is more likely to result in defeat. People make mistakes—that is the nature of being human. We can’t run before we learn to walk, and that principle applies throughout our lives. Although we shouldn’t set out to make mistakes intentionally, those mistakes we make help us learn, grow, and become stronger. Mistakes can move us closer to our goals.
3. Take small steps. With all of the goals we need to accomplish in order to succeed in our careers, the career development process can feel overwhelming. Break these goals into smaller goals. What can you achieve this week or this month? Achieving
smaller goals will give you a sense of accomplishment and move you closer to your big goal.

4. Act now. Sometimes the best antidote for fear paralysis is just to do something. What can you do today to move you closer to your goal? What can you do this week? This month? Once you start moving forward, you'll find it easier to continue moving forward.