

Giving Your Career a Physical Examination

By Lion Goodman
President of The Goodman Group

Is your career in good shape? Do you feel invigorated at your job? Do you feel healthy coming to work each day, knowing that your hard work is paying off, improving your prospects for the future? In the same way a long distance runner improves his or her cardiovascular system with each run, a properly exercised career will carry you further than a slothful one. A yearly career check-up will help determine whether your current job is the best one available for you, or whether it's time to flex your employment search muscles. Regardless of title or industry, professionals who take time out on a periodic basis to evaluate and plan their careers will advance faster, earn more money, and stay ahead of their peers in their personal and professional development.

When was the last time you took the pulse on your career? In the midst of the great wave of change in industries such as healthcare and information systems, what part of the wave are you on? Will you ride proudly on the crest, letting the wave carry you forward into your future, or will your career be crushed by the rough waves of change?

There are a number of questions to ask when you give your career a thorough physical examination. It is important to periodically take time and distance to answer these queries objectively and carefully.

Here are some of the important questions to ask when you take a vacation day or a long weekend. Take the time to write down your answers. We suggest starting with a new spiral notebook or blank book. Like any journal process, the more time you put into this exercise, the more you will get out of it. Spend at least five minutes answering each question before going on to the next. A quick mental check will not serve you as well as some deep thought and a long writing session.

1. Are your skills and abilities being well used in your job? Do you feel challenged on a daily basis? Weekly? At all? Do you feel under-utilized?
2. How long have you been in your present position? Are you still learning? Are you making a contribution to your company's growth and profitability? How long have others in similar positions been in their jobs? Have you been passed over for promotions? Are you recognized for your achievements and rewarded for merit?
3. To whom do you report? Is he or she well regarded in your company? Are they spending time with you to further develop your skills? Does your manager perceive you as promotable? If they move up in the organization, will you be promoted as well?
4. Are you listened to? Do your superiors or your co-workers ask for your opinions? Do your honest appraisals or complaints get handled to your satisfaction, or do they fall on deaf ears?
5. How does your compensation or pay compare to your peers within your company, or within similar companies in the area? Have you been given raises each year of

- at least double the rate of inflation? At what salary levels are new employees coming in? Does the company provide benefits such as educational reimbursement, profit sharing, 401-k savings-matching programs, or stock options?
6. Is your company staying on top of the changes in your field? Is it known as an innovator? Does top management communicate with and take input from the rank and file?
 7. Is your organization resting on past performance, or is it actively dedicated to research and development and marketing of new products or services?
 8. Is your company known as customer-service oriented? Is the company vision communicated clearly and regularly within the organization? Are most employees aligned with the company vision statement, or do are they cynical about the company which spouts a philosophy but doesn't live up to it?
 9. Do your existing career options lead to your ultimate career goals? Do you have a clear plan of where you want to go in the organization? Do you (and your boss) have a career progress plan set out for you? Have you examined other career options?

The answers to these questions will help you determine whether your position with your company is a healthy one for your career.

If you are finding your job challenging, are learning new skills and gaining new experiences, and your company is working to stay on the cutting edge of technology and the services provided to your customers, you are in good shape for the future. If you have been promoted at least once every two years, and you are listened to when you express yourself about the company's problems, needs, or direction, and management responds to complaints or problems by fixing what is wrong, you are in an excellent environment which is supporting your future growth.

If you find that most of your answers are negative, it is time for you to examine your goals, write a new resume, and begin looking for alternatives. There are many excellent books in the business section of bookstores which can guide you in your search for a new job. Do your homework, prepare yourself well, and find an opportunity that will get you excited to wake up every morning.