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# Be aware of your weaknesses for a successful career

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Everyone wants a great career but a number of candidates make sub-optimal career choices with the result being that neither their true potential is realised nor do they attain their dreams. It is sad when you notice a great career destroyed merely because a candidate did inadequate homework or accepted a job that was not suitable to him/her. To attain your dreams and potential it would really help, if you are strategic about building your career. Attaining your career goals is akin to playing a chess game where every move needs to be strategised and thought through. Also, your career moves must lead you to your ultimate goal — they should be a part of the larger scheme of things. They should not be ad hoc taking you in circles with no larger intent in mind. It may surprise many of us but taking a step back can still be beneficial if it has the potential to take you four steps ahead.

My endeavour will be to give a few tips on what I've learned from over 500 placements in a variety of industries and roles, and meeting more than 5,000 great candidates. Believe me, every candidate meeting is a huge learning, as is every placement, irrespective of the outcome. The reason is one can learn what worked for the candidates and what did not. Also, what were the mistakes and what career moves became a game changer.

Have a goal: One of my favourite questions to a candidate is what are his/her life and career goals. Very often the goals are not clear. How can one score a goal when it is not clear where the goalpost is. It is, therefore, imperative that we have clarity about our goals. For instance, talking to your spouse brings clarity, and he/she may know you better than you know yourself. Think what is important to you in life and ideally prioritise them. Life is a trade-off where you need to sacrifice something for attaining something else. There are no free lunches in either life or your career.

Find a mentor: It is prudent to have an experienced mentor or coach who can help you get clarity. You might be confused. So finding a great mentor where you have a formal relationship, and periodical chats are important. Corporate life today is like running on a treadmill where we have little time to think deeply, introspect and course correct. A monthly or minimum a bi-monthly meeting is helpful to keep your focus alive on not only having clarity of goals but also ensuring you are doing all you should to be on target. However, do take care in finding the right mentor as it is always good that you go to the right doctor as both the diagnosis as well as the treatment is important.

Be self aware: It is important to know your strengths and weaknesses. Strengths are the tools that help you erect a building of your choice. It is important to get into roles or accept responsibilities that play to your strengths. Supposing one can do everything equally well is neither prudent nor realistic. There will always be things you are great at, good at, as well as not so good at. However, there is far more awareness of strengths than of weaknesses. Being aware of weaknesses helps you to make the correct career choices. If you know what you can't do, you will avoid getting into roles or positions that do not suit you. Today, the corporate world is performance-oriented. So to flourish you need to perform.

Make career choices that lead you to your goal: Every career move you make should be a prudent choice leading to your ultimate goal. If your goal is to be a CFO or CHRO of a large organisation, your move needs to be different than if you desire to be a CEO.

If you want to be a CEO, make career moves that will get you to the coveted position faster and surely. Look at your moves as a part of a larger objective instead of in isolation.

In a word, customise your career choices as they will determine your future. Keep in mind what works for you rather than what your colleagues did or think is prudent. The right career choices will take you into a new orbit just as wrong one's can push your career back.

The author is MD, Executive Access (India). Views are personal