

Career Resolutions

by Julie Bauke

So what were your New Years Resolutions? Be kind to everyone you meet? Eat more veggies? Use that treadmill for something other than a clothes hanger? All noble and worthwhile pursuits, to be sure. But may I suggest one that has the potential to have a tremendous impact on your physical and financial health, your relationships, on just about every area of your life? And there's no 1-800 number to call, no credit card needed, just the willingness to take action, to start down the path to gaining or regaining control of the 6 letter word we all have, but spend little time nurturing, developing or in some cases, even thinking about. Career.

How do you feel as the clock creeps toward evening on Sunday, and the inevitability of the end of the weekend is upon you? If you start getting cranky, irritable, checking for flu symptoms with hopeful anticipation, truly dreading the upcoming five days, that's a sign that you may be in a job or company that is not right for you. Really assess what the source of your dread is. If it's just typical melancholy that Monday is next up on the calendar, relax, you're normal. If you've got a tough week or day coming up, one with an atypical amount of hours, pressure, or expectations, again, normal. But if week after week, you find yourself thinking up reasons to NOT be at work, sliding in right at or after the start of the work day, slipping out at every opportunity, playing computer games and just generally trying to put an "x" on another day on the calendar, you can either fix it yourself or wait for your company to fix it for you. And I don't mean by giving you a nice promotion and fat raise.

Our careers are a big piece of our lives. Few would argue that career is more important than the biggies- family, health and spirituality- but, it cannot be overlooked as a major source of the development of our identities, self esteem, and our sense of place in the world. Let's face it, it's also the place we spend the majority of our waking hours. And the people we work with? In some cases, we see them for more time weekly than we see our families.

So, if you recognize yourself in any of this, or have known for some time that you Really Need to Move On from your present work situation, either to another company, or another position within your company, or to some entirely new career, who can you call to fix it for you? The answer to this question is probably the source of the complacency or lack of action on the part of most. It's hard work and it's all in your lap.

Recruiters can't do it for you, neither can career counselors, your mother, or Monster.com. All of those can provide some guidance, information and insight, but the down and dirty work is all yours. On top of your current job and all of your billion other responsibilities, piece of cake, right?

But if you're really unhappy, that will begin to show in the quality of your work, your attitude, your work relationships, and your results....if it already hasn't. (not to mention personal relationships, physical health, and just how you interact with your world.) When your company looks to trim their workforce, guess whose name may surface behind those closed doors? Then you're in a position of having to figure all of this stuff out with the additional pressure of being unemployed.

So, there's no time like the present to at least begin to ask the tough questions that are critical for a fruitful examination of your career. Start with these:

- Can I identify and articulate my skills, traits and experiences to anyone who asks?
- Once identified, do I know how those might be transferable, or of value, to organizations other than my own?
- Am I familiar with what other companies are located inside my target geography and do I know whether they hire people with my skills?
- If my company shut the doors tomorrow, what would I do? Would I stay in my same field, or try something new? What would that be?
- If I could do anything, with no income constraints, what would it be?

Begin to explore your options. If you like your company, but not your job, (or your boss!), start looking around inside. Build relationships with people in departments that catch your interest. Make it a goal to find out about your organization's top priorities for the upcoming year. Figure out how your skills and experiences can be utilized differently in your organization.

If you don't feel like you fit in your company, begin to research what other companies might be a better fit for you. Talk to people you know and trust, check out company websites, start paying attention when people talk about their jobs.

And if you decide that you're just in the wrong career, don't despair. Many people have come to the same conclusion, made big changes, and lived to tell about it. Whatever your dream is, it may not be as out of reach as you think. It may not happen in your next move, but what about the move after that? People are living and working longer, reinventing themselves again and again. Why not you?

Take the first step toward taking control of your career, whatever feels comfortable for you. Write down your goals, talk about them with people who know you. A thousand baby steps can add up to giant leaps. Before you know it, you're starting that new position that you've only dreamed of.

And Sunday becomes just another day on the calendar.