

Julie's Rules For Living Your Career With Intent

1. Understand it's a marathon, not a sprint.

How you define yourself professionally, and the paths you choose to pursue most likely will vary as you go through different stages in your life. What worked for you at 25 and single may not at 35, with three kids under 9, or at 45 with those kids thinking Ivy League.

2. Without a vision, you have no vision.

Develop a vision for your career. Re-visit and revise as necessary. Remember that annoying question you were asked at on-campus interviews - "Where do you want to be in 5, 10 years?" Now is the time to be answering that question. If you can't come up with an answer, how do you ever plan on getting there?

3. Build relationships relentlessly.

Notice I didn't say network? Women are naturally better at reaching out and building relationships, but men seem to be better at it in a work context. Both men and women need to build skills in both arenas. Look for ways to help others get where they want to go and most will respond in kind. (But only if you have developed that vision thing for your own career...see #2!)

4. In the wrong job? Fix it before someone else does.

Hate your job? Guess what...your boss probably knows it. If you get anxious on Sunday nights and find yourself hoping for the flu, it's time to take charge and find the right job. And if you don't, your name may end up at the top of the list when costs need to be cut. If you're not passionate about your work, it shows. We all deserve to feel that passion for the stuff we do during most of our waking hours.

5. Decide where to direct your energy, then do it.

Work Life? Community Life? Spiritual Life? Family Life? Love Life? Self Life? We have a lot of lives, but only have so much time and energy to devote. Decide where you want to focus your energy. What combination gives you that spark? Neglecting one area that is primary for you will cause you to be less than effective in all others. Find that magic, but very personal, mix.

6. Plan, plan, plan... Even if you think it's not possible.

We all know what they say about the best laid plans. So what? Plan anyway. And work toward making those plans a reality on a consistent basis. If you dream of owning a Bed and Breakfast someday, start gathering information, connecting to resources and learning all you can right now.

7. Companies have boards of directors...so should you!

Maybe you already have one. I'm talking about a group of people who are your staunchest allies, your most enthusiastic supporters...but also your most straight talking confidants, people with whom you have mutual respect as well as an unrelenting desire to help each other get where you each want to go. (see #2 again!)

8. Put yourself in positions to succeed.

If numbers aren't your thing, don't volunteer to be the treasurer of the United Way campaign. Only volunteer for situations in which you can shine. And if asked to be treasurer, be confident enough to say no, but follow up with how you can help. (but only if that opportunity fits in with what you've decided in #5)

9. Get used to thinking of yourself as a "product".

Everything you do, everything you know, everything you can do, is all a part of You the Product. Get comfortable with that concept. Develop You the Product relentlessly. If You the Product becomes obsolete because you weren't paying attention, the road back to marketability can be long and hard.

10. Know yourself.

One sign of true professional maturity is your ability and willingness to say "Here I am. Here's what I'm good at, here's what I'm not so good at, here's what I'm better at than anyone you know!" Stand in front of the mirror and try that. I know, feels weird. But remember, if it's true, it ain't braggin'!

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