

## Career Mobility Where You Work

Success in today's work sectors requires a thorough awareness of your employment environment. To this knowledge you need to add a self-honest but not too modest assessment of your skills, expertise, interpersonal abilities and what factors make up job satisfaction for you. As you journey through life your characteristics change—sometimes in a large way, sometimes in a small but important way. Hence you need to undertake this assessment many times in your life, particularly when you are considering a career action step move or where your work changes. In fact, it never ceases to alter. It's an important ingredient for the continued existence of your employer.

Your workplace expects career self-reliant behaviours so that you know, and practise, much more than you used to need to about personal career management. You are expected to initiate proposals for work assignments, desired new learning, transfers, promotions, etc. not wait until they are offered as in the past.

This demands that you are constantly making choices. You can make better choices when you examine your options in detail, by weighing each one against the other(s) and exploring how each could benefit you and those you care about who will be affected by your decision. If you know why you are taking a particular course of action in your career, you are more likely to achieve your aims. When considering a job role change you need to:

- **REVIEW** what it is you really want in your next career action step
- **EXPLORE** and gather information about options that suit your needs
- **ASSESS** and decide on your job move target
- **DESIGN** an application that contains your transferable skills and knowledge relating to your target
- **SUBMIT** your application for what you seek and believe you merit
- **PLUS** — Upgrade your performance in current job to win respect for your application

**What career action is really right for you?** You start with ten career action options. Then comes the hard task of evaluating each option and selecting one. Here are some thoughts to consider as you evaluate what is right for you.

### **Option 1: Remain in Current Role**

Here your judgement is that your current role provides you with your desired level of challenge and development at the moment. You may have personal circumstances where you do not want to take on a more demanding work situation. You may prefer to maintain a good performance record at what you do now and re-evaluate a change at a later date.

### **Option 2: Enrichment**

Here you consider what job tasks you wish to do more of in your current role and negotiate with others to take over those which no longer motivate you. It's also about strengthening the behavioural qualities that you have which go beyond your job-related knowledge and abilities. Seek out tasks or learning events where you can increase your teamwork competencies and interpersonal skills, be assertive rather than aggressive or passive and show your ability to deal effectively with unusual circumstances and your awareness of the business issues facing your employer.



### **Option 3: Vertical**

Seek promotion when you want increased responsibilities, perhaps higher pay, status and the ability to further influence others. But promotion brings a higher risk and a consequential increase in performance expectations. It may also extend the hours you need to apply to your work life in order to accomplish these. Pursuit of advancement is not always better for our lives. This option needs thorough research and deep consideration before you select it.

### **Option 4: Exploration**

The purpose of this option is to test out how you like it. It's a reality test before you commit to a particular job move. It can be achieved by seeking project work, a secondment or deputising in another job function. You can assess your skill capability, motivation for the tasks and its suitability to your work life agenda. Also, by good performance, you are earning recognition of your capabilities which will help your application if you apply formally for a move to this role.

### **Option 5: Lateral**

Here you decide to move to a similar level of job task difficulty and benefits that you now have but with different job content. This could rejuvenate your enthusiasm for work, achieve an addition to your portfolio of capabilities, acquire skills and knowledge useful to a later vertical move, and enjoy the new learning. It could be the way to a new career path stream.

### **Option 6: Realignment**

Moving down. This option was full of misinterpretation under the 'old' world of work rules. Now it is realistic to downshift to less responsibility for a short- or long-term period either to relieve stress or accommodate new or urgent agendas in your personal life. It's still wise to share your reasons with your employer so there is no lessening of their confidence in your motivation.

### **Option 7: Relocation**

Deciding that work of a nature different from your current business unit is more appropriate for your career future. It may contain work which demands more of the skills you prefer using, new learning opportunities, perhaps a higher level or different nature of responsibilities. You may consider such a move for strategic reasons to extend your employability with and, hence your value to, your employer.

### **Option 8: Redirection**

This option involves significant change in the career stream or field of work with your current employer and requires very thorough research before applying. It will need to be a good match for your personal profile of transferable skills, motivated interests and be part of a well-reasoned career plan.

### **Option 9: Proposal**

Here is an option that is the biggest challenge of them all. It requires first identifying, then submitting a thorough proposal for a new job role which would create business advantages for your employer that are not currently being addressed.



**Research! research! and more research.** When you have selected an option from the 9 choices you need to thoroughly research before concluding it is the right one and then proceeding to submitting an application. It is important to remind yourself that career opportunities where you work are dependent on meeting your employer's operational needs rather than being created for meeting the preferences of employees. Your most desired job role may not be available at the time you want to apply to move to it. So always research more than one option so that your personal career management is less likely to be frustrated.

Rarely is something of significance achieved entirely alone. Exploring what may suit you, meet your needs and those of your employer necessitates gathering reliable information. Your work colleagues, staff in other departments, people who have experience at career transitions where you work—all have information which could be useful to your decision making about your work life.

It's commonsense to recruit the help of others as you explore opportunities and gather information that contributes to your making a sound decision. Such people do not walk around your workplace with a sign saying 'This is how I can help!' So you need to consider which people where you work appear to meet your requirements for help. Approach them courteously and state your need. Then the person can clarify whether or not they are the right helper for you or guide you to another who could be.

Go in person. Do not use the telephone or email. Only as a last resort, use the telephone or email to gather this information. Experience shows that during a face-to-face discussion:

- the positive and negative aspects of a job role are more detailed and exposed than during a telephone discussion
- information shared about the nature of the job and the interpersonal relationships within the work unit is much more significant
- the likely 'satisfiers' in this kind of work make more sense to you

Before you request help from others where you work, it pays to prepare and rehearse your style of approach. After all, they are busy too.

**Prepare the questions to ask.** For example:

1. How did you get to do this kind of work?  
This question pleases your information provider because it demonstrates that you are interested in him or her. Each person thinks their work experiences are special and people like to talk about themselves
2. What do you like most about this work? This will help you verify if the job role really interests you.
3. What do you like least about this work? You assure yourself that you will or will not be able to cope with the inherent difficulties of this job role. You will benefit from this information. The reality emerges about what the job role demands.



4. What are the performance standards required from your tasks? Make a list of the talents, competencies, knowledge and behaviours necessary to carry out these tasks successfully.
5. What skills are needed to complete these tasks successfully? For each task, define the specific skills, transferable skills from other work experiences and behaviour traits needed. This information will be useful later when you select data about yourself for your application.

The people you are approaching to be your information providers can answer questions about their fields of expertise, but not about how it relates to you. So avoid asking questions that expect others to make judgements about you and your career decision-making.

**Prepare your application:** When you have gathered information and decided on your preferred career action step, your writing skills will be challenged. Why? Because organisations function on written communications. You need to demonstrate your ability to communicate in writing what you seek and why you merit it keeping in mind that no manager is interested in what you want, until interest is created in what you can offer their work unit. Avoid using words that are unclear or ambiguous, descriptions that are lacklustre or information that is not related to your ability to carry out the job role you are targeting.

Audit your application before it is submitted. Have you written examples that convey you are a time-saver, a conscientious user of resources, an applicant who knows how to save time, effort and money? Have you written examples that convey you are an initiator, a problem solver, who is creative, makes recommendations for improvement? Have you written examples that convey you are a good 'people person' who works well in a team, has effective communication skills?

**Don't wait and see.** So, you have deeply considered your needs, selected an option, researched it thoroughly, prepared with great effort and care your application for what you seek, submitted it with a feeling of pride and satisfaction from your hard work to reach this stage. Now is not the time to wait for the results of your application.

Why? Because employers reward only those who consistently deliver the performance their operation needs. Also, employers have their problems too! What you seek may not be immediately available or circumstances may affect the time and manner in which your employer will respond to your application.

One thing is for sure. Those who have the authority to approve your application and facilitate your transition into your objective will look for evidence of your contribution in your present job role. You cannot expect their approval unless you are meeting performance standards in your existing responsibilities. Consistently performing at a level which meets or exceeds the expected standards will certainly be a contribution to the success of your application.

Have you checked recently what these expected standards are? Have they changed in ways you have not caught up with? Are you focusing your day-to-day activities on the right tasks? Not only will checking on these factors lead to a positive contribution to the success of your application, your actions will further increase your employability where you work. So don't wait and see.



**Enhance your eligibility for a successful application:** Consider the following to identify where you can improve and so enhance your eligibility for a successful application.

**Develop a reputation for timeliness:** Complete your tasks on time so that the person supervising your work rates your accomplishment well.

**Know what the boss wants:** Priorities and task objectives change—sometimes with bewildering frequency. Check with your boss to ensure you are giving the proper scheduling emphasis to your range of tasks.

**Be cheerful:** People like optimistic and cheerful work colleagues. Your feelings are picked up by others so look for opportunities to express good things about your work and the environment where you do it.

**Know what your employer is about:** Keep up-to-date. Search out information about the overall objectives and strategy plans for your work unit, your division, the organisation. Attend briefing meetings, pay particular attention to the relationships between departments and divisions.

*When your application is approved and you have achieved what you set out to do make sure that you thank the people who assisted you along the way.*

## **Author**

*Paul Stevens, B.Bus., founded The Centre for Worklife Counselling in Sydney in 1979 following a 21 year career in Human Resources Management and The Worklife Network - a national and international affiliation of adult career specialists - in 1986. He wrote his first published contribution to adult career development in 1981, *Win That Job!*, closely followed by *Stop Postponing the Rest of Your Life*. Over 35 further titles, booklets and career assessment instruments have been published since, the latest being *A Passion for Work: Our Lifelong Affair* and *My Third Age: Work & Life Choices*. Paul Stevens is a regular contributor and author for Six Figures [www.sixfigures.com.au](http://www.sixfigures.com.au) the executive site for jobs, news and services.*