

## **Dream Job: A Comprehensive Approach to Fast-Tracking Your Career**

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### **Getting on the Fast Track**

Not everyone seeks more responsibility or ever-greater challenges. For many, their philosophy is that they “work to live”, not “live to work.” For those of you that strive to overachieve and don’t follow the well worn path of the average person, this session is for you.

Much of the career advice out there is aimed at helping you get employed and stay employed. It is driven by staffing experts and professionals in human resources with a focus on resumes, interview skills, and workplace do’s and don’ts.

If you are to be a fast riser in the SH&E field, you need to start planning very early in your career because time, as the title of this session would indicate, is everything. To climb the corporate ladder faster than the conventional track, you have to be seen as exceptional, different, a prodigy.

Age, for a young high-performer, can seem like a disadvantage. When you are young, it can be a challenge to assert yourself and be seen as a leader to those older and more experienced than you. Take this as an opportunity to shatter the lower expectations they may have of you.

One thing you cannot change is years of experience. That takes time and there is little you can do about that aside from staying on the right path to accrue the right kind of years in the roles that will help you. The rest, however, you can do something about. You must always be career planning, identifying new opportunities and challenges, and endeavoring to achieve your goals as soon as possible and earlier than expected.

When you were growing up, you may have answered the question “what do you want to be when you grow up?” many times. Regardless of how you answered, here you are, all grown up and in a SH&E-related field. So it’s time to get more specific.

## **What is Your Dream Job?**

### **Executive Path**

Do you dream of being the boss, responsible for various specialties, company policy and strategy? If so, every career decision you make brings you closer or moves you farther from this dream. To be an executive in SH&E, you need a broad skill set as a an SH&E generalist combined with a keen business sense, superior communication skills, demonstrated organizational leadership, higher education, top-notch certification, and years of corporate level experience.

### *Get on the Right Track*

Your immediate focus should be on rounding out your work experience to grow and be recognized as a generalist with few weaknesses. Do your previous job roles and job titles include safety, health and environmental? Have you focused too much on a specialty such as industrial hygiene, health and wellness, training, or environmental? Have you focused too much in a given industry such as construction safety, mine safety, maritime safety? While focusing too much on a given specialty or industry do not preclude you from reaching your dream job, they can make you appear less flexible and limit your options

### *Get Qualified*

Next is identifying what qualifications to pursue as part of your 5 year career plan. You should aim to become a Certified Safety Professional, and identify a Masters Degree program that will benefit you most. In order to identify which Masters Degree program is best for you, evaluate the organization you work for, or want to work for, and consider whether they would value a Masters in Business or a Masters in an SH&E related field.

### *Be a Leader, Be Visible*

All of the qualifications and years of experience in the world will not get you to the top unless you are seen as an effective leader. Value your time and how you spend it. Focus on being part of team initiatives or projects and volunteer to lead them. The more high profile the project the better.

Your communication skills become more important the higher you go. Choose your words very carefully, especially in emails, and consider how they may be interpreted. A lot has been written on the subject of a leader’s vocabulary for a reason, it’s essential. An executive, or one that hopes to become one, cannot be a liability with their mouth or their keyboard. Too many gaffs and your ambitions could come to an early halt.

If you are to present in person in front of company leadership or those that can influence your career, prepare thoroughly. Know what the room layout is, if you will have slides, who will

steer the presentation, whether you will be sitting or standing. As they say in sports, practice like you play and you will be ready on game day.

### **Industry Leading Expert**

For some, their dream career is to be seen as the very best there is in a given specialty. They envision serving as an expert witness in trials, consulting for organizations around the world, or teaching at a university. This path is quite different, but also leads to great recognition, prestige and financial success.

#### *Get on the Right Track*

Consider what field or specialty you are most passionate about. If, for example, you want to be the preeminent expert in spill remediation and disaster response in the environmental field, a good strategy would be to identify those who have your dream job and review their work history to devise your plan.

#### *Get Qualified*

Plan to obtain the ideal set of qualifications in the most efficient way possible. If it's Environmental for example, you may consider a Masters Degree program in environmental engineering, which in turn would help fulfill pre-requisites to get your Professional Engineer (PE) in Environmental Engineering. You could take it further becoming certified as a Quality Environmental Professional (QEP) and narrowing your focus on air quality, water quality, waste management. Perhaps you might also become a Licensed Site Professional (LSP) to be in charge of hazardous waste site cleanups.

#### *Be a Leader, Be Visible, Volunteer*

To be an industry leader you must be a key contributor to your industry and be part of the leading edge. Volunteer by joining the related practice specialty or try and start a new branch if necessary. Work your way into the Chair position and lead it successfully.

Being an industry leader takes more volunteerism. You must appeal to many outside your own company or organization. You will need to write articles, contribute to books, and submit proposals to speak at events. Your peers need to know who you are and value your contributions.

## **Climbing the Ladder**

To rise through the ranks it takes careful planning, organizational intelligence and time management. It starts with seeking the right employment and setting yourself up for a "lucky" break and it continues with how to spend your time once you have the job.

#### *Pre-Employment*

"You will never hit a home run sitting on the bench". To land a great job, you have to be looking and you have to give it your best effort when you find it. However, identifying a great job is critical. If your goal is to advance quickly, then your future company must offer that opportunity.

#### *Do They Value SH&E? Will They Value You?*

The organization should value SH&E or they may not value you or your contributions. You can determine the value they place on SH&E by researching OSHA records online, reading company

literature and policy from their website, networking with current or former employees on LinkedIn, and finding out more about their SH&E leadership.

### *Is There Room for Growth?*

Not all companies have an SH&E career path. In fact, many do not. It can be an enormous waste of your time and efforts if a company has no future opportunities for you. One good technique is to scan their job openings frequently and search LinkedIn for SH&E employees to determine if there is a clear structure such as Technician, Specialist, Manager, Regional Manager, Director, and Vice President. The clear and well defined structure in a large company may be an ideal opportunity for growth.

### **Getting Promoted**

#### *Work Two Jobs*

Getting promotions requires that you not only do your current job well, but prove you can do the next job well. Demonstrating this can be challenging; the two jobs may require very different skill sets.

As a technician, you may need to follow instructions closely, work diligently, handle several tasks at once, and work long hours when asked.

As an SH&E manager, you may need to work on cross-functional teams with other managers, handle delicate matters requiring confidentiality, develop strategic plans, and advise the Site Manager on goals and initiatives.

The bottom line is you can be the best technician in the company and make a bad manager. Recognize the skills needed at each level and demonstrate them as your strengths.

#### *Influence Decision Makers*

The saying “it’s not what you know, but who you know” is half true. You can know everything there is to know about your job, but if nobody is aware of it you will stay right where you are. You need to identify who in your organization matters most to your career. It may not always be your supervisor because some SH&E professionals report directly to line management and functionally to a regional SH&E Manager.

If you’re a technician, your goal may be to obtain the SH&E manager position. You must prove very dependable to your current SH&E manager so they provide a great recommendation, or at the very least do not undermine your chances when the day comes. The site manager will likely have the ultimate say and will need to feel secure with you in that role as his primary advisor in SH&E matters and your discretion over what is discussed at managers meetings. Regional or corporate SH&E leadership must be aware of you and your value to the company. Having that ensures their support of your promotion and prevents them from planting another company resource in that manager role when it becomes available.

#### *Be a Champion*

Most companies have newsletters or periodical email announcements from SH&E or operational leadership that mentions goals and initiatives relating to SH&E. Keep your eye out for these, because what matters to them, must matter to you. While you may not always agree that corporate initiatives are the best thing for your site and workforce, there are few better ways to get noticed. Champion these initiatives because you can bet most others will not. Change is difficult and many will think that they know better.

If corporate leadership rolls out a new procedure for incident investigations, begin following it immediately and develop the first and best examples of it done well. If a focus is placed on hand safety, take it a step further and develop some best practices that build on that initiative.

From a corporate perspective, these initiatives are selected strategically for their value. The time spent developing and implementing them in the company is hard work. By championing initiatives you have shown them that you “get it” and are a leader and effective manager of change.

### **Establishing Yourself as Exceptional**

#### *Be a Clutch Performer*

Never admit up front that you can't do something or don't know how. If you want to be seen as a dependable, clutch performer worth investing in, you cannot afford to be a “can't do” person.

Do research, consult with other SH&E professionals outside the company or within the industry, review materials available on the internet, buy and read books. It is likely that your supervisor or whoever else ends up handling the task would have to do the same things to find the answer.

#### *Be a problem solver*

When faced with challenges, think about issues from multiple perspectives:

- What would your boss do? What's his/her desired outcome?
- What are the workforce's opinions on the matter? How can you work them into the solution?

When you learn to think critically and develop solutions that others approve of first time around, you will be given more independence and responsibility; both are critical.

#### *Volunteer to lead*

Coordinate or act as a point of contact for any cross-functional or high-level initiative or project teams. Often times, these wide-spread initiatives don't have a clear cut leader and one must be identified, beat them to it and volunteer. Once you get an opportunity like this, do a phenomenal job. This will win the praise and respect of those that will someday recommend you for promotion.

#### *Everyone counts*

Your reputation is a collection of success, failures and the opinions of everyone you interact with from the front-line workforce to upper management. To succeed in getting promoted as the youngest manager in your company, you need as many people on your side as possible. Workplaces can be incredibly political, so having a good attitude and being a helpful to those you work with will prove most useful.

### **The Importance of a Mentor**

Being a highly successful young professional requires finding solutions yourself and being highly independent and self-educating. However, “you don't know what you don't know”. For some things, like understanding organizational politics and nuances, just take experience.

A mentor is a key resource in helping you to understand and prepare for what things are two steps ahead of you in your career. Every step in the career ladder brings a whole host of new challenges and pitfalls, while you may understand your supervisor's job; do you understand

his/her supervisor's job? Probably not. A mentor can give you keen, high-level insight that will help you develop into a well-rounded professional that understands how SH&E fits in with the organization as a whole.

You may find a mentor at an ASSE PDC, local ASSE chapter event, or within your company at the corporate office.

Having a mentor is not a one-way street. A mentor worth having is likely a very busy, successful person in their own right. For them to see helping you as time well spent, you have to listen and deliver results. Seeing you heed their advice and grow will be their greatest reward. If they advise you to get your CSP within the next 6 months, do it in 4.

## **Clear Expectations**

“It's supposed to be a challenge, it's a shortcut! If it were easy it would just be the way”. As stated at the beginning, this path is not for everyone. It takes sacrifice and commitment. Being young is a precious time in your life and most of your friends and colleagues may appear to be living a more carefree life and be less serious about their career.

You may find yourself studying for your CSP while your favorite team has a game or while your significant other is out with their friends. It may be Friday morning and you're wrapping up your week and looking forward to the weekend when a high-priority, last-minute proposal effort request is sent to your email with a Sunday deadline.

This path is an investment in yourself and your family. An investment to be able enjoy the fruits and security later, while those same friends wake up and realize it's time to get serious about their careers.

As you progress in your career, your company will value and depend on you more. Thus, you may be inconvenienced to be part of high-priority efforts that can spring up during the weekend or over holidays. You may even be asked to move your family for the company. As you become more valued and the company depends on you more, you will be confronted with work/life dilemmas. It is important that you always understand where your line is. As your roles change at work and your family grows at home, that line may shift, but never lose focus of where it is.

Keep in mind that saying “no” is your prerogative, but in doing so, you may fail their test and demonstrate that you are no longer worth investing in or growing. You can bet that many of the leaders in your company have been asked to do things that were not easy for them, but they demonstrated their commitment back by saying yes and making sacrifices. In turn, these decisions are usually rewarded.