

Advancing Toward Your Career Goals

Should you change jobs in pursuit of them? Or position yourself in a new way at work?

Is your career unfolding as it should? If not, maybe it is time for a change; either a change of jobs, or a change in your role at your workplace.

Pay attention to the signals of a stalled career. If the status quo at your office bothers you, or if you feel apathetic or nonchalant about your work, you have company. A recent Aon Hewitt poll found that only 63% of employees felt sufficiently engaged on the job. According to a Gallup poll, even fewer Americans truly like what they do for a living: just 32% of employees are “involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace.”¹

If you find yourself dreaming of an escape and doing just enough to avoid getting fired, you have three basic avenues. One, go into business for yourself (a move that is impractical and terribly risky for most people). Two, change jobs. Three, see if you can make yourself more valuable and more engaged where you are.

Should you leave or stay? If your job amounts to a dead end, then leaving is probably your only option. If your workday simply bores you or you have issues with your pay or your role, leaving is also an option; you also may want to talk with your supervisor or boss to see how things can change where you are.

If you consider another job, look beyond the offer. A company may woo you with a terrific compensation package, a better title, and a nicer place to work; you should see these as short-term pluses. Does this new job really represent a long-term career move, or just a change of scenery? What kind of vision do they have for you? Do you get the sense that your vision matters to them? What kind of culture does this company have? Think ahead. Three to six months from now, do you think you will be happy at the new job? Two or three years from now, do you think your career will be progressing as it should thanks to this job change?

If you stay, make the right moves to assert your goals and your value. What position do you want at work, as opposed to the one you have now? What is a reasonable next step? If you work for a larger employer, you might find several opportunities in multiple locations (think about if you want to relocate as a consequence of a promotion).

Schedule a meeting with your boss. Prior to having that conversation, think about the perception you want to create in your boss’s mind. During the conversation, promote it.

Tell your boss that you want to discuss your personal development, how your career can progress and evolve with the company. Share your reasons for bringing all this up; your aspirations, not your complaints. Mention the specific career move you would like to make, and the kind of contribution you could make in that new role. Tell your boss that, as much as you appreciate your current role, your heart tells you that it is time for a new role or a new

challenge. (You might mention that you will be happy to train another employee to take over your old duties.)

This conversation should last at least 15 minutes. In the process, you may learn what kind of expectations your boss has for you, and see how they correspond with yours. (If you do not get a glimpse into that, it is worth bringing up.)

Keep in mind that being really good at your job may not warrant a promotion by itself. Even if you are fully engaged at work, you may be passed over if you fail to fully engage with the people with whom you work. Likeability is a big factor in promotion and career advancement, and networking is not just something you do to land another job, it is also a great idea at your current job.

Financially, a move to another employer might be the best move. Rightly or wrongly, changing jobs is perceived as a path to continually higher pay. In fact, one of the big criticisms of staying put is that your employer may only compensate you more if you insist.

Last year, the core Consumer Price Index advanced 2.1%. Meanwhile, real average hourly wages rose 1.8% according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Moving on to a new employer may help you cope with this kind of economic weakness. Payroll processor ADP, whose research arm tracks such data, notes that the average full-time employee changing jobs in 2015 received 4.5% greater compensation as a result of the move.^{2,3}

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Citations.

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