

## Protecting Your Most Important Investment -- YOU

James T. Phillips, C.P.M., A.P.P., Procurement Supervisor  
Utah Department of Transportation, Salt Lake City, UT 84114-8260, 801.965.3836,  
[jamesphillips@utah.gov](mailto:jamesphillips@utah.gov)

**Abstract.** In the face of constant change in today's workplace, an individual must take steps to protect their most important investment -- the time, energy, money and education committed to one's self and their profession. Individuals can make better career plans if they can imagine themselves as 'the boss'. By adopting an entrepreneurial spirit about their work, one will make better choices concerning current and future jobs or assignments. Eleven tips help guide the individual as they make those choices.

**Introduction.** In this fast-paced, ever-changing world, the predictability of employment isn't the sure thing it was a generation ago. Corporations, companies and even governments are reevaluating how they conduct business. This challenge has created such an atmosphere as to demand these organizations operate at peak levels with only a few skilled and knowledgeable individuals.

Additionally, these changes bring opportunity. How prepared to take advantage of these opportunities are you?

"Protecting Your Most Important Investment -- YOU", has been organized to show participants the value of becoming an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur is defined as "...one who organizes, manages and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise." This session is designed as a platform for developing an entrepreneurial spirit for you, your career and life,.....your "*product*." It will help you take responsibility for your career, to develop and manage a self-based security system for your current job or future opportunities.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, professor at the Harvard Business School known for her studies on change, addressed the subject this way, "The new security is not employment security, a guaranteed job no matter what, but employability security -- an increased value in the internal and external markets."

This session discusses eleven concepts that help define a method for managing your career and obtaining *employability security*.

**Don't Rely On Your Boss Or Organization To Define Your Career Path Or Options. Take Charge Of Your Professional Life.** If you don't see the opportunity that's lurking in your work it's because you haven't yet done a good job of exploration; you haven't thought about the job in all of its many ramifications.

A ditch digger is the best person in the world to come up with a better shovel; a carpenter with ideas for better construction, better tools, better products. It's a fact that each of us, every day of our lives, is in the presence of more opportunity than we could properly develop in a lifetime. But we need to start looking at what we do with more creative and interesting eyes. Looking at your work with the eyes of creation can add new interest and enjoyment to your days.

"There are no unimportant jobs, and there are no unimportant people. Whenever the two, a human being and a job, come together, there is the opportunity for greatness."

**Avoid The Victim Mentality.** According to Webster a victim is "...someone harmed by or suffering from some act, condition or circumstance."

Do you know anyone who doesn't fit that description? We're all victimized by something -- crime, discrimination, poverty, a handicap, a broken home, a lousy boss, flyaway hair. But, the only real victim is the person who thinks like one.

Thinking like a victim is easy. It feels so good. You're not responsible for what happens to you. Victims never lack for something to do. They fill idle moments with bittersweet memories of their misfortunes.

When thinking like a victim, you turn yourself from a **cause** into an **effect**. When you blame the world, you lose your power to change it. In the name of what you can't fix, you sacrifice what you can.

It's not what happens to you that counts, its what you choose to do about it. In a very real sense, we are victims of a force beyond our control. The people who get what they want from life are the ones who focus on forces they *can* control. They choose to live as a **cause** instead of an **effect**.

If you want to become a **cause** in your own life, don't think like an **effect**. Instead of feeling sorry for yourself, refuse to settle for less than you want. The world owes you *only* what *you're* willing to collect.

**Raise Your Awareness Of The Choices You Can Make to Improve Your Career and Personal Life.** In a short piece by John W. Garner, entitled *The Things You Learn After You Know It All* a possible idea of how to raise ones awareness is presented. He states, "Most of us, progressively narrow the scope and variety of our lives. We succeed in our field of specialization and then become trapped in it. Nothing surprises us. We lose our sense of wonder and adventure.

"But if you're conscious of these dangers, you can resort to countervailing measures. Reject stagnation. Reject the myth that learning is for young people. It's what you learn after you know it all that counts.

"Learn all your life -- from successes and failures. When you hit a spell of trouble, ask, "What is it trying to teach me?" The lessons aren't always happy ones.

"Among your obligations is an appointment with yourself. Self-knowledge, the beginning of wisdom, is ruled out for most people by the increasingly effective self-deception they practice, as they grow older. By middle age, most of us are accomplished fugitives from ourselves. Yet there's a surprising usefulness in learning not to lie to yourself.

"One of the most valuable things you learn is that ultimately you're the one who's responsible for you. You don't blame others. You don't blame circumstances. *You* take charge. If you're going to keep on learning, your surest allies will be high motivation and enthusiasm."

This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one... instead of being feverish, selfish little clod... complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

George B. Shaw

**Develop A Strategy.** There appears to be four distinct stages in developing and managing one's career. These are integrated and form a method for continuous improvement and growth. This model allows for development in any career for an individual of any age with any level of education or range of experience.

## 1. **SKILLS ASSESSMENT**

**Identification.** This includes skills that come naturally or are developed through education, on the job, paid or volunteer work, extracurricular activities or hobbies. These include functional or transferable skills like critical thinking, problem solving, presentations and organization. Also, self-managed ones such as reliability, common sense, sense of humor, honesty, integrity, discipline. Finally, technical, specialized knowledge or abilities acquired through education or training like qualitative and quantitative research, systems analysis, interviewing or examination.

**Prioritization.** Narrow your skills list. Focus your identified capabilities on the job at hand.

**Grouping.** Fashion this information into groups or packages that represent the best fit for the occasion. Spend time thinking about and putting together combinations of skills (or your product) that you feel you can market.

## 2. **OPPORTUNITIES ASSESSMENT**

Once you've assessed, prioritized and combined your skills, you're ready to begin researching opportunities at which your skills can be applied. Evaluating current assignments and reviewing potential options will help you see how your skills sets, interests, personality and values can fit.

You may also want to take time to develop a Network File. This could consist of contacts with individuals that can provide you with direction and information about additional opportunities.

## 3. **DEVELOP A MARKETING PLAN**

This phase is no different than the marketing for any product. However, the product you'll be marketing is **YOU**. You'll want to be clear about the skills-set you want to market, the values you want to maintain, how you'll be able to make a difference to the organization and what value you can add to the current or new environment.

## 4. **MANAGE CAREER**

Keys to successful career management revolve around self-reliance, continuous education and training, maintaining a current resume, balancing your career with the rest of your life as well as an on-going easement of the workplace.

**Develop Confidence And Self-Esteem.** Every human being has the ability to influence others for good. Life's quest is to become the real you. The process of self-discovery, developing confidence and maintaining a high self-esteem is challenging and time consuming, but the end results are powerful! Once you figure out who you are, determine your personal vision, you can begin giving yourself away. You'll discover the power of interdependence, and will set goals and live a life that is more meaningful. Most importantly you'll enrich the lives of those you serve in life and in your profession.

The following are strategies for feeling good, maintaining confidence and bolstering self-esteem:

1. **Exercise**                Establish a regular schedule of aerobic exercise with a goal of at least 20 minutes 3 times per week.
2. **Diet**                    Eat a variety of foods from the four food groups. Avoid sugars, fats and caffeine and maintain a normal weight.
3. **Attitude**                Your perspective on life and people greatly influences your quality of living.
4. **Laughter**                Laughing does for the emotions what jogging does for the body.
5. **Support Group**        Learn who you can rely on to talk your concerns through with, and learn to become a confidante.
6. **Affirmations**        Improve the way your subconscious voice talks to you.

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| 7. <b>Confrontations</b> | Solve life's problems as they come, one at a time.  |
| 8. <b>Assertiveness</b>  | Learn to say "NO" and mean it. You'll greatly simplify your life.                               |
| 9. <b>Appreciation</b>   | Find good and praise it.  |
| 10. <b>Service</b>       | Get outside yourself. Help others through volunteer community service.                          |
| 11. <b>Intellectual</b>  | Stimulate your cognitive processes by taking a night class, attending a lecture or workshop.    |
| 12. <b>Recreation</b>    | Plan for leisure time activities that recharge your batteries.                                  |
| 13. <b>Escape</b>        | Develop a strategy to get away and do things that make you forget about the pressures you face. |

Develop a personal survival plan by listing each of the points shown above and describing what you would do in each case. For example: 'My daily ATTITUDE strategy is to:...', then fill in what you feel your strategy should be. Do this for all 13 points.

**Explore Your Options. Then Use Your Current Circumstances As A Springboard.** Adding another task to an already full schedule many not seem like the thing you want to do. As you remember, though, we're developing an entrepreneurial spirit about managing a career. In doing so, there are certain files and some ongoing lists you should set up and scrupulously maintain. These records are of the various facets of your work and having them on hand can often make the difference in a variety of situations. For example: misdirected blame, performance reviews, promotion eligibility or just for self-assessment.

Here are some ideas you might want to consider using or adopting for your own particular career management situation.

- **Keep separate copies of everything you initiate.** Whether electronically or hard copy, letters, memo, e-mails or reports you write yourself might be difficult to dig out of some general file somewhere. So, as you create a product, make sure you retain a copy in a "my work" type file.
- **Establish a running diary of special projects.** This could be a file on the computer, in your planner or a file you drop a note into every time you make a day-to-day or week-to-week listing of the non-routine work you do; just a brief description of your contributions to the project, the date, and any special situations that might be important in the future.
- **Keep an up-dated list of your regular responsibilities.** This can be nothing more than a page or two in the back of your "special projects" file, disk or book. Even better would be a semiannual up-date of a Position Review Form. Anything that helps define progress made over time and that will help you recall work and dates.
- **Note your skills semiannually.** Your skills are different from your responsibilities, but should be considered or reviewed on a regular basis for the same reasons. With roles and technology changing almost weekly, you should make note of skills you've developed and are using daily.
- **Create a "recognition" file or folder.** In it should be every scrap of evidence that you're doing a great job. Include all written communication, thank you's, mention of you in in-house or other publications, notations of any awards or certifications received. You may also want to include performance reviews.
- **Use temporary project files.** It's important to keep track of the work-flow on a project, your contribution to it, rough drafts, and notes about the work of the other people involved. Keep all this material in one place until the project is complete. Such files can act as a backup for lost or misplaced documents, as proof of who did what. Ultimately this file will provide the material that goes into your permanent "special projects" file.

**Be Accountable. Act As Though You Own The Business.** Dentsu Advertising Ltd., of Tokyo, Japan, a nearly 80-year-old firm, is recognized as one of the largest ad agencies in the world. They have the following ten standards of conduct for their employees:

1. Work must be created by yourself, not given to you.
2. Take the initiative in developing work. Don't wait for it to come to you.
3. Undertake big jobs. Small ones will make you petty.
4. Undertake difficult jobs. Progress comes from accomplishing them.
5. Never give up until the objective has been reached.
6. Don't let them pull you. The gap between puller and pulled will soon become as big as the difference between heaven and earth.
7. Always have plans. A long-range plan will give you perseverance, resourcefulness and hope, and point your efforts in the right direction.
8. Have confidence. Without confidence, your work will lack power, tenacity and depth.
9. Keep your brain fully active at all times. Observe carefully everything around you. Don't be caught off guard. This should be the posture of those in the service business.
10. Don't be afraid of friction. Friction is the mother of progress and the fertilizer of aggressiveness. If you fear friction, you will become timid and irresolute.

These points are all well worth adopting in the development of your most important product -- you.

**Work To Improve Yourself Continually.** Ortega once wrote: "We cannot live on the human level without ideas. Upon them depends what we do. Living is nothing more or less than doing one thing instead of another. Education is the transmission of ideas which enable us to choose between one thing and another."

"The way in which we experience and interpret the world obviously depends very much indeed on the kind of ideas that fill our minds. If they are mainly small, weak, superficial, and incoherent, life will appear insipid, uninteresting, petty and chaotic. It is difficult to bear the resultant feeling of emptiness and the vacuum of our minds may only too easily be filled by some big, fantastic notion -- political or otherwise -- which suddenly seems to illuminate everything and to give meaning and purpose to our existence. It needs no emphasis that herein lies one of the great dangers of our time."

Presently, information is doubling about every three years. What have you learned lately?

As you seek to increase your knowledge, think about the fine distinction between *training* and *education*. "Training increases skills and competence and teaches the 'how' of a job. Education increases their insight and understanding and teaches the 'why.' Both are important in achieving continuous improvement.

**Develop A Professional Identity Outside Your Current Job.** Expand your knowledge of your profession by becoming involved in a professional organization. Expand your knowledge of how your profession functions outside your company or agency by volunteering with a civic, community or professional group to provide service. Add to your knowledge by sharing ideas with others.

**Seek A Balance. Many Believe The Best Employees Have Healthy Personal Lives.** Balance is what keeps you up in life. Whenever you do too much of anything, even a good thing, you create a life out of balance. Balance is the key to a better, happier you. True effectiveness requires balance and one key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities.

**Develop Affirmations To Sustain You As You Direct Your Future Career Path.** Affirmations are among the silliest actions an adult can perform. Affirmations are downright ridiculous -- but they work.

There are dozens of examples. However, one I'd like to share comes from Jim Carrey, who tells this

story about himself. As a struggling young comedian, late at night, Carrey would drive into the foothills of Hollywood, stare out over the lights below and yell at the top of his lungs: "I will earn ten million dollars a year by 1995." For several years he went through that same ridiculous routine. In 1995 "Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls" starring Jim Carrey was released for which he was paid twenty millions dollars.

Was it his affirmation that made it happen? Who knows? But my guess is, it didn't hurt.

You probably know more about this process than you realize. We send negative affirmations almost every day, like "I'm so clumsy!" "I'm no good at math!" or "I'm a lousy cook!" What if these constant reminders were of what we did well or wanted to do well? Here's a method for having your affirmations come true.

The first step in creating an affirmation is to make certain it supports your values. If you feel it's unethical or undesirable, then it won't work (and you won't want it to). Then here are five more steps that will give your affirmation maximum impact.

1.     **Be specific.**  
The more specific you are about what you want to affirm, the greater the likelihood you'll make your affirmation come true.
2.     **Affirm what you want instead of what you don't want.**  
Instead of saying "I am not afraid", say, "I choose to act bravely."
3.     **Use the present tense.**  
When the past tense or future tense are used it lessens the impact of the message you want to send to your subconscious mind.
4.     **Begin your affirmation with the words "I choose to..."**  
When you say "I choose to...", you remind yourself that you've made a choice to change your life. Once you make a choice, your mind begins to marshal it's resources behind choices you've made.
5.     **Give it intense emotional impact.**  
The real power of an affirmation comes from how deeply you feel it, not from how many times you say it.