Career: The Personal and Interpersonal

by

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Why do people hate writing résumés or creating LinkedIn profiles? As a consultant, I would frequently get asked to help both colleagues and family draft or edit their resumes. The anxiety they felt was palpable, perhaps because it combines two things many people dislike: writing and putting themselves on display. And when you think about it that way, can you really blame them?

A résumé or LinkedIn profile is a cold, hard example of your professional and personal choices, written specifically for others to inspect. It includes what schools you went to, what major you chose, the companies you worked for—even your first job. When we put information about ourselves “out there,” we sometimes fear we will be judged or evaluated by others. When we share our profile, we know we will be judged or evaluated by others.

Career is deeply personal. And at the same time, it’s about everyone else—what they think of you, how they evaluate you, and quite frankly, whether they will hire you or consider you for that next job. It’s this tension, between the personal and the public, self and others, that can be some of the trickiest territory to navigate. But navigating it is essential because career development coalesces in two critical activities: introspection and interconnection.

Career development requires the effective balance of each element. You need to understand yourself and reflect on how you come across to others before you update that résumé or write that profile. And then when you are ready to take action in your career, however you define it, you are going to need others. Career is both an individual sport as well as a team activity.

**Introspection**

Career introspection is the first step, and it is a personal exercise. Taking the time to self-reflect is key. It includes some of the more probing questions. Why are you in your current role? Why have you pursued your current career path? Why are you considering a job change? Asking the “why” helps you get at your values. And getting at your values helps you command your career strategy, from résumé to retirement.

Equally important is to ask “what” questions, which will help you get more specific about the career actions you want to take. What do you enjoy? What do you like to do? What job conditions are important to you? What do you believe about the role your career should play in your life? What are you passionate about? Going deeper, what kind of workplace behaviors do you respect? And what kinds of behaviors trigger you? What kinds of stresses can you easily handle and what kinds trip you up? And what can you change within yourself to minimize any negative impacts on you?

Getting clear on your individual needs, both the “what” and the “why,” is an important step that can’t be skipped. By getting a clear handle on who you are as a professional—your strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities—you’ll be better prepared to match yourself to the right jobs for your career.

So, after spending all this time intensely contemplating your personal career, what’s the first thing you need to do? Go find other people who can help you. And so begins the effort at connection—but not just connection, interconnection.

**Interconnection**

For such a deeply personal facet of your life, it can be hard to wrap your head around how completely dependent your career is on other people. We need to rely on others to help us with our career.

This is more than networking. It’s about trusting everyone from your parents to your spouse to your friends to help you determine if the career decisions you are making feel consistent with whom you are. You need to collaborate with others in order to make progress—however you define that progress—in your career. If introspection in career is packing for a trip, interconnection is getting in the car and moving.

The stakes will always be high when it comes to any activities that impact our career. The goal is to keep a balance between the work you do individually and the work that needs to be done through feedback and relationships with others. But once you have done that work, you’ll be able to approach your career choices—from writing your résumé to switching employers—more consciously, strategically, and satisfactorily than before.

To learn more about career development, keep an eye on this space. In the weeks to come, we’ll be sharing more of our point of view, what our research has told us, and the direction in which we think this important topic is headed. ■