

Getting Ahead: Advancing Your Career Through Strategic Job Searching

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At the cornerstone of any successful pharmaceutical development program is a well-developed and executed plan. Most pharmaceutical professionals would agree that a proactive approach is a key element to success when dealing with day-to-day development issues. They anticipate potential problems and develop systems ahead of time specifically designed to handle the issues that are bound to surface at some point. Pharmaceutical professionals deal in grey areas on a consistent basis and have to weigh the potential risks in decisions they make every day. With proper planning being such an important part of success, it is bewildering to discover the substantial number of scientific professionals who do not apply the same proactive approach to their most important project...their own career.

In the following paragraphs, we will outline some simple strategies for advancing your career through a continuous process of proactive job searching. Most people think of job searching as posting a CV on the Monster board or submitting resumes to companies via on-line methods. A better approach is much more strategic and involves a career long process which can be broken down into 5 simple steps: (I) establishing an individual development plan; (II) gaining new experience to improve your marketability; (III) creating opportunities within your current company; (IV) establishing and maintaining an active professional network to create external opportunities; and (V) evaluating your progress throughout the process. This might seem like an overwhelming process at first glance but as you will learn, it really involves some simple action items that anyone can follow. Whether your long term career goals involve moving up the company ladder, making lots of money, ensuring your own job stability or a combination of these things, following this process will allow you to attain your goals quicker and will help you to avoid getting stuck in a professional rut.

I. Establishing an individual development plan

The individual development plan is your roadmap to success. It is essentially an outline highlighting your current strengths along with the experience you need to gain in order to attain your long term career objectives. The first step in establishing your development plan is to set personal goals. This task seems obvious, but not many people actually take the time to physically write down their career goals. Where do you want to be in 5 years? How about in 10 years? When your long term career goals are written down in black and white, it is much easier to evaluate what you can do this year to get yourself a step closer to reaching them. You may not achieve that Director or VP title that you desire immediately, but the steps you take now will better position yourself to attain that goal in the future. Another benefit of actually writing down your goals is that it will be much

easier to realize when you are veering slightly off course. When you recognize a deviation early, a slight reorganization of your priorities can usually get you back on track. Conversely, if you are slow to recognize even a small variance from the course, you will end up having to do some major backpedaling.

Once you have established your career goals, the second step in creating your individual development plan is to update your resume. Do not wait until you are applying for a new position in order to do this. You should update your resume at least once per year. Include new certifications and title changes that you have received and significant accomplishments that you have been a part of. Now is the time for some honest self-evaluation. Does your resume look more qualified for that Associate Director role you desire today than it did a year ago? Share your resume with a colleague whom you respect and ask them to evaluate it critically. If you were to apply for a senior position in their organization, what would they say about your experience? Do the same with a recruiter that you trust. Use your own judgment as well as these second and third opinions to identify the experiences that you are lacking. Identifying your career goals and updating your resume allows you to build your individual development plan and begin to monitor your progress. Because you know where you want to go (career goals) and where you are (current resume), you can map out the experience you need to gain and interim positions that must be attained in order to reach your long term objective. Your plan should include any training and coursework needed to gain new skills and projects in your company that can expand your knowledgebase. Write out the actions you intend to take to move along your path to advancement including steps to strengthen the weaknesses you have diagnosed.

II. Gaining new experience to improve your marketability

Your career goals are established, you have identified your weaknesses and outlined a development plan. That plan likely includes gaining exposure to new things. Why is this important? The more experience and responsibility that you can demonstrate on your resume, the more attractive you become to both your current employer as well as other companies. Read the biographies of executives in your field and you will likely see experience in a breadth of areas and within companies both large and small. This is not a coincidence. Dynamic leaders seek new opportunities for growth and hiring managers seek candidates whose resumes demonstrate accomplishments in a variety of settings.

We advise all of our candidates to treat their resume like an investment. Every day that you go to work is a little more time and energy invested into your long-term return. We firmly believe that the experience you gain, especially during the earlier portion of your career, is significantly more important than the wage you are receiving. That is to say, the difference between making \$90K or \$100K this year is insignificant when compared to what you will earn over the course of your career. Of course, all things being equal, everyone would like to make more money today. However, if you are accepting more money to remain in a job with limited growth or learning opportunities, you are hampering your ability to increase your earning potential in the coming years. You should focus on building your resume and expanding your skill set such that you can command more money over a longer period of time. It would be great to earn \$5K or

\$10K more this year but if that money comes with the handicap of allowing your resume to become stagnant than it is certainly not a sound investment decision. Your earning potential over a period of 5, 10, 15 or more years is significantly greater than the extra \$5K or \$10K you would earn this year. The more skills that you can add to your repertoire the more marketable your resume becomes and the greater your future earning potential will be.

III. Creating opportunities within your current company

Now that you have scoped out your individual development plan, evaluate the plan against your current position and the potential to grow internally. Understand how far you can advance within your firm. Think this through ahead of time so that you will anticipate when it is time to move on. Take the initiative to create opportunities for yourself within your current role. These opportunities can range from promotion or transferring into a new group to simply adding additional responsibility to your current tasks or gaining a new skill by working on a particular project. The best managers have development plans for each of their employees. But, the most successful employees make sure that their boss is aware of their goals as well. For instance, discuss your desire to get involved in an upcoming project or to broaden your horizons by taking part in the next CMC preparation. We constantly hear from candidates who are frustrated that they are not being considered for an open position within their company. However, most of these same candidates admit that they have not expressly made their interest in the position known. Make sure that your boss or the senior management team is aware of your desire to be considered for a particular opening or that you would value the chance to work in a different part of the organization. If they do not respond positively about your candidacy, find out what experience you would need to gain in order to be considered for similar positions in the future. Do not rely on your boss to present these opportunities to you. Stand up and create them for yourself. Timing is everything and the right time to take on a new challenge is always now. This is a powerful statement but rings true in most situations. This includes both taking on new responsibilities within your current company and making a move to a new position externally.

IV. Establishing and maintaining an active professional network to create external opportunities

Many employees do not think about searching for a new job until they get passed over for a promotion or their company goes through a restructuring. This is a tragic mistake. The best time to look for a new job is when you are happily entrenched in your current position. It is highly unlikely that the right next career step will present itself at the exact same time that you decide that you want to leave your current company. This is why you should always be actively listening for the right opportunity even though you may not necessarily be looking. The most successful people identify and accept their next position before they ever bump up against a glass ceiling in their current role. The truth of the matter is there is really never a convenient time to change jobs. Professionals on the fast track are always willing to accept a new challenge. You can be sure that the Vice President of Research at your company did not get there by chance. There were strategic career moves and goal oriented time lines set in place that specifically justify their

elevated position. There were likely also times when they chose to strike when the iron was hot rather than to wait because the timing was not convenient. It is important to note that these moves often came along with significant short-term sacrifices to reach their long-term goal. Such sacrifices include relocation to a new city, accepting a lateral salary move or the potential risk of joining a start-up firm or company in transition. These sacrifices can be worthwhile and are often necessary in order to continue advancing on your projected career path.

Maintaining an active professional network is the most obvious way to increase the likelihood that you will hear about interesting opportunities outside of your company. Everybody knows that networking is something that they should be doing but many people are not sure how or why. One of the most common mistakes that people make is to only think about networking when they need something. If you are only touching base with your former colleagues, bosses and professors when you want a new job or need specific answers to a problem you are facing, your network will not bear the fruit you desire. You should keep your network organized in a contact management system to ensure that you have current phone numbers and email addresses and to remind yourself to check in with your peers periodically. Place a call or drop an email when you read news about their company or before heading to a conference. Make them aware of opportunities that exist in your company and they will do the same for you. Networking is a two way street, it cannot be all take and no give. To keep your network growing, it is vital to get out and meet new people. Be active in your local ACS chapter or whichever organizations align closely with your interests. Do more than just attend meetings for the free cocktails. Write a paper or present on a topic. Volunteer to work a show or lead a discussion group. This makes it much easier to meet new and successful people and to get your name out among your peers.

You should also make an effort to establish and maintain relationships with recruiters who specialize in your field. Take their calls and share information when you can. After a conversation or two, it is easy to differentiate between the couple of recruiters who truly know your field and can be a valuable resource to you versus the ones whose messages can be ignored. Bear in mind that this relationship is a two way street as well. A recruiter's livelihood is based entirely on networking. If you share information and leads with them they will certainly return the favor. When recruiters get a new and exciting search assignment, the first people they call are the ones they know and who have been helpful to them in the past.

Monitor the progress of other companies in your locale. Let your colleagues and recruiters know of your interest in a particular firm and you are much more likely to hear about the opportunities that do exist but do not pop up on their website career page. Recruiters really value relationships with candidates and view them as a partnership. They spend a lot of time specifically targeting companies to uncover or create opportunities for candidates based on the information that they share about their interests. More often than not, a good recruiter will have the appropriate contacts to get your resume the desired exposure at companies that intrigue you. Giving them the chance to

make confidential inquiries into specific companies is a fantastic way to create opportunities for yourself. As always, staying proactive is the key to moving forward and achieving your goals.

Another way to create opportunities is to look for reasons to explore a position rather than looking for reasons to ignore it. When considering an opening at a new company, always keep an open mind. Do not rely on what you have heard about a particular employer from others. Just because it was not the right environment for someone you know does not mean it that you will have the same experience. You should always check it out and make your own judgment. Bear in mind that what you see on a job posting is not always the full story. Too many people immediately rule potential positions out based purely on title. What appears on paper to be a standard Head of Process Chemistry role might offer much more for the right candidate. A job description will list the responsibilities but not necessarily the rapid advancement potential that exists. Beyond that, titles and responsibilities can often be adjusted to attract the right candidate. This is especially true with smaller companies whose hierarchy might not be fully developed yet. Invest the time in a telephone interview or a face-to-face meeting even if the position does not appear to be a perfect fit. You may find the role to be more attractive than it appeared at first glance. If not, you have still given yourself exposure to a senior level hiring manager in your area and had the chance to make a positive impression on them. Stay engaged and courteous throughout the interview even if it becomes apparent that the position is not right for you. If you do decide that you are not interested after the meeting, let the manager know with a follow-up phone call or email. Recommend a colleague that may be a more appropriate fit and tell them about your own future interests. This will increase the likelihood that they will think of you for other opportunities that arise in their group. They may even recommend you for a position that they are aware of outside of their department or even outside of their company.

V. Evaluating your progress

Taking the time to evaluate your progress along the way is absolutely crucial. You will already be doing this formally at least once per year when you update your resume. This can also be done as a part of an annual review with your boss. As you review the steps that we have outlined, you will notice a common theme, the need for self-evaluation. In fact, continuously assessing your progress is imperative and is something you should be conscientious of throughout your working life. Did you reach this year's goal? Have you attempted to step outside of your immediate comfort zone at work to get exposed to something new? Did you gain the experience you desired during a particular project? Setting a goal is the first step but is pointless unless you are going to judge your progress against each goal.

Remember that job searching is a career long process that will evolve over time. Your goals will likely change over the course of several years and that is okay. You should be constantly planning your development path, creating opportunities to gain new experience and evaluating your progress to make the necessary adjustments. You are certain to have some missteps along the way, but do not allow these small obstacles to cloud the larger view. One or two short stints or lateral moves on your resume are okay as

long as the bigger picture demonstrates stability and growth. It shows that you are willing to take on challenges and are not afraid to make tough decisions. If you take a proactive approach to developing your career, you will remove chance from the equation and correct any poor choices that you make more efficiently. Your career will likely last 30 or more years. You will not achieve all of your goals this year or next, but you can position yourself for improved upward mobility and significantly greater earning potential during the next phase of your career. In order to do this, you must focus on the experience you are gaining now rather than just the money you are earning. No matter what your long term goals involve, following this simple process will allow you to not only achieve them, but to achieve them more quickly. Your resume will become increasingly marketable and doors will start to open up for you both internally and externally. Before you know it, you will have built a resume that your colleagues will envy and people will be trying to model their career path to mirror your own. Who knows, a recruiter may even be calling you for an exciting Vice President Research position someday soon.