

5 Things You Must Do NOW To Take Control Of Your Career Future

By Dan Burns

With unemployment in the U.S. now approaching 10%, and experts predicting a very tough labor market for the next 12 months, you have every right to be concerned about your job. You can wait around to see what happens, or you can take action today to protect your work life. Here are 5 things you must do now to take control of your career future.

1. Commit yourself to making a great first impression. Just about every person you meet will form some sort of conclusion about you within 60 seconds. Believe it, expect it, and be ready for it. And don't forget that the next person you meet with—whether for the first time or not—just might be the person who provides you with, or leads you to, your next great career opportunity. This person can be a co-worker, neighbor, or someone you meet at a barbeque.

2. Implement the Ten-For-Ten Rule into your career-planning efforts. To be successful in your career, you must always set yourself apart from the competition. How? By going above and beyond what is normally expected in the workplace. That's always been true, and in today's challenging economy, this is especially the case.

A 10% additional investment in your job can put you in the top 10% of your competition. Have a project deadline coming up? Consider what you can do to bring the project in ahead of schedule and do work that is above and beyond the expectation of your boss or customer.

Additionally, say "yes" to additional responsibilities and opportunities that come your way. You will find that most workers are content with their current job responsibilities. Set yourself apart by taking on new challenges and responsibilities as they arise. Look for ways you can help your boss, your team, and the company be more successful. Don't think of it as additional work. Think of it as what you must do to ensure the success of your career.

3. Develop and review your career goals. Any goal you set (or plan you prepare)—no matter how simple, will be more than what just about anyone else has done. That's differentiation! Just make sure to put your goals and plans *in writing*. Prepare a simple and straightforward plan that is easy to follow, update, and manage. Review and update what you've prepared at least once a month.

4. Prospect today for the career and growth opportunities of tomorrow. First, identify and cultivate opportunities in the organization where you now work. If networking externally, focus on activities and opportunities that provide the greatest return on your invested time. Network for success by meeting and interacting in professional and social situations to learn about other people and the opportunities they expose.

5. Start preparing for your next career TODAY. Whether you've just started a new job or are established in your current position, it's essential that you plan for your next career move or position. One ingredient for successful planning is to initiate a regimen of continuous learning. For example, make the commitment to read one additional article from a trade or job related publication every week. At the end of the month, you'll be four times smarter than most of your co-workers.

Focus on small improvements, and build upon each one over time. Learn one new skill this month. Next month, understand one new challenge or objective of your company or customer. Attend a career-related seminar the month after that. At the end of a year, you'll be amazed at how much better you will be.

About the Author

Dan Burns is the author of *The First 60 Seconds: Win the Job Interview Before It Begins*, a comprehensive career guide for anyone currently looking for or considering their next career opportunity. For the past fifteen years, Dan has served as an owner of a national technical and management consulting company, providing consulting and employee placement services to Fortune 500 companies and helping

people successfully obtain their next great career opportunity. Check out his website at www.thefirst60seconds.com.