

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Benign Neglect

By Douglas E. Welch

Visitors to my home often make note of the gardens, which replace lawns on my property. While I can take some credit for the gardens, I must confess that my theory of gardening mainly consists of benign neglect. If a plant can't survive on its own, then it doesn't belong in my garden. I provide regular water and a little fertilizer, but I only address issues as they arise and sometimes, even that is long delayed. Unfortunately, I have seen that many high-tech workers apply the same benign neglect to their career. They worry about their career only in the middle of a crisis. If you want to develop a career you love, you need to actively engage your career and your life.

Constant Attention

The best method of building your high-tech career involves actively engaging your current job and your career as a whole on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. Only through this constant attention will you be able to develop a career that matches your dreams.

The first step in developing your career is to discover exactly what you want. What do you want personally? What do you want professionally? What do you want for your family? (Not necessarily in that order.) All of these areas need to be considered. If you haven't thought deeply about this, you may need to take an afternoon, a day or more to get away from your daily troubles and think. Don't discount this step. Sometimes you can get so busy with your life that you don't take a moment to see where you are headed.

Family

If you are young and single you might not mind working long hours, but someone older might need to balance the needs of spouse, children and their aging parents. If you don't consider the needs of your family, you are setting yourself up for trouble. You might find a great job, but if it becomes the focus of your life, or takes you away from home for extended periods of time, both you and your family are going to suffer. Family is one of the main pillars of support in most people's lives. You will need to develop your career with input from your family. Talk to them, informally, formally, constantly. They will be quick

to tell you when the balance between work and home is faltering. Listen to their feelings now, and you will avoid major problems later.

You and Yourself

Next, you need to really dig deep to discover what you want out of your career. Do you want to be a millionaire? Do you want to run your own business? Do you want to invent new technologies? Do you want to manage other people? Make a list of those career goals you would most like to achieve.

If you want to start your own business, does your current job give you time to develop that business? If not, you may need to find a job that does. Are you gaining knowledge you will need later? Do you want to make more money? Perhaps that means a move into management and out of the technical trenches. Do you see a path to management in your current position? If not, start looking for a new position in your company that sets your feet on the management track. Do you want to continue working in a technical field? Find a way to develop your responsibility and become an in-house expert, guru, mentor, whatever.

Every Day

Finally, once you have discovered a direction in your career, create a list that helps you review your progress in that direction. Sometimes we choose to ignore those things that are confusing or painful. If you feel stuck in your current job, you might not want to think about how to make it better. As you can see, this is self-destructive and the exact opposite of what you need to do. Sometimes the only way out of a bad situation is through it. Review this list monthly, weekly and even daily. It will become your roadmap to a better career . . . a career that more closely matches what you really want out of life and work. □

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