

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Making Your Mark

By Douglas E. Welch

There are times, in the day-to-day trials of a high-tech career, when you may begin to wonder what your career is all about. How did you get to this point in your life? You might be questioning your choice of career. You might even be wondering if your work makes any difference in the world around you. While it can be an unsettling feeling to doubt yourself and your work, I can assure you that it is an important part of your life.

To Doubt Is Human

The first point to remember when facing this doubt is that everybody, regardless of their career or level of success, has faced this problem. Very few people are immune to questions of self-doubt, and then it is only through the force of immense will or ego. Most everyone has questions about their lives, so it should not be considered unusual or detrimental in any way.

There are many triggers for introspection, most all relating to a stressful situation. Perhaps your work is feeling tedious and boring. Maybe increasing demands from management or clients are pushing you into fear. In some cases, the mere fact that you are getting older can trigger a level of introspection you have never before experienced. Whatever the case, you must realize that these times of questioning are beneficial. They make you stop and take stock of your life instead of being swallowed by the daily hustle and bustle. Too often, you spend so much time worried about the task at hand that you forget to consider your needs and desires outside your career.

Taking Stock

The best way to engage these periods of career introspection is to detail all the good work you have done recently. It doesn't matter if the work was mundane or tedious, only that you did it well and it has an impact, however unseen, on those around you. I know that your 1,223rd installation of Windows may not seem to be the crowning glory of a high-tech career, but the truth is, it is important to someone. Your good work means that some person will now have the tools she needs to do her own good work. Your work has impact and influence far beyond one person, though. Your work affects everyone with whom this person works, whether in a large corporation, a small company, or an individual endeavor.

In order to see your impact on others, you may wish to draw up a "web of effect" that shows how many people your work affects on a regular basis. Take a few minutes and diagram each person or department where you work. Now, add in those people who work with those people or departments, even though you may not work with them directly. Finally, contemplate the others who work with these people—people you will probably never meet. Even so, you still have an impact on their work. After a little sketching, it should become clear that even the smallest efforts on your part could affect hundreds of people.

Goals

Developing a better understanding of your work can help to adjust your mindset about your work and your career. This then allows you to focus on other, bigger issues—your future goals.

Even when your work is going well, you will still have goals and dreams that you want to accomplish. These goals are important, even if you aren't in the position to act on them right now. Goals give you a direction and allow you to act on opportunities quickly when they present themselves. Opportunities must be acted upon the moment they arise. Your goals are the roadmap that allows you to decide quickly whether an opportunity is worth pursuing or not.

Now that you have examined the impact your work has on others, you can begin to decide where you would like to have more influence. What type of work do you prefer to do? In what totally different directions would you take your career if you had the chance? Nothing is too outrageous.

Goals represent our dreams and, as such, they should be big and not easily achieved. Even when your career seems at a low ebb, you are having an impact on the lives of innumerable people. The work you do is important to someone, no matter how tedious or mundane it may seem to you. It is important that you understand your importance to the world so that you can see beyond the bad days and concentrate on those goals you would most like to accomplish. Your goals and dreams are what can make an average high-tech career amazing. □

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