

Seven Breakthrough Steps to Success

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When I attend a career-related conference or seminar, one of the typical activities is asking each person to consider his or her life's purpose. Then attendees are encouraged to share what they've concluded. As I listen, I'm constantly struck by how often such statements include the words "Help others to succeed in"

I'm always encouraged to find someone has a powerful desire to help others through their careers. It's no wonder that improvements are made in many areas: Cooperation based on a sincere desire to help is a good foundation for making such progress.

Curious about what motivates such desires, I often ask people why they want to help others. Some reflect on times when they received help and how important that had been in their lives. Others comment on the good feelings they experience from contributing to someone else's progress. Still others observe that helping others is part of their values, often based in religious belief.

Let me contrast those heart-felt conversations with what I experience when I interview senior executives about their work and contributions. Rarely do such executives comment on having a desire to help others succeed or report having done so. Instead, they usually complain about how they feel out of sync with what their colleagues are focused on doing. Sometimes executives tell me that they don't like their work very much.

With two such strong sets of different responses, it seems unlikely that people who want a more meaningful career of contribution will be nurtured towards such a career by these unhappy senior executives.

What path can you follow instead to add value to other people's lives? Let me suggest seven breakthrough steps:

1. Find what you like to do.
2. Determine what way of helping others succeed means the most to you.
3. Assess what you need to learn in order to help in that way.
4. Explore ways to add that knowledge and experience.

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6. Relocate to the place where the opportunities are greatest.
7. Ally with those who will nurture and encourage your work.

Let's look at an example of someone who has followed these steps in order to better understand how you can build such a satisfying and rewarding career.

Find What You Like To Do

Barry Plotkin grew up in Scotland where he was fascinated by learning how things work. Building on that interest, he became a mechanical engineer. After earning his degree, Mr. Plotkin took a position in a large marine engineering firm. To his consternation, this job led him to realize that his interest in management was much greater than his interest in technology.

Determine What Way of Helping Others Succeed Means the Most to You

Mr. Plotkin changed jobs and became an installation supervisor for new plants. In this role, his team succeeded in finishing the work ahead of schedule and under budget. He enjoyed what he was doing and realized that improving management was the way he wanted to help others succeed. With more experience, however, he also realized that being more effective to earn more money didn't feel rewarding – particularly when ethical and social needs were ignored in pursuit of more profit.

At first, he tried to help those managers who described themselves as very aggrieved by banking problems, customer difficulties, neglectful authorities, abusive suppliers, and exploitive employees. Unfortunately, Mr. Plotkin learned that these problems were mostly the result of the management's own mistakes. After "helping" them to overcome the difficulties, management would usually revert to its bad habits.

Instead, Mr. Plotkin learned to work with those who accepted responsibility for their own results and wanted to improve, but were being genuinely held back by access to resources like money, know-how, experience, time, or manpower. Working with those individuals, Mr. Plotkin could do better professional work and accomplish more while feeling great about what he was doing.

Assess What You Need to Learn in Order to Help in That Way

Not having prepared for a management career, Mr. Plotkin found he had knowledge and skill gaps to fill. On his own, he learned about methods for improving process efficiency, marketing, public directorships, and accounting. He also realized that to be more successful in helping others he needed to become strong in strategy, organizational management, analysis, data management, and finance skills.

Explore Ways to Add That Knowledge and Experience

Although Mr. Plotkin made great strides in studying on his own, he realized that the knowledge he gained had ragged edges that could be smoothed by going through a more disciplined set of studies. An online MBA program that provided a choice of courses and study-time flexibility seemed like a good solution. After investigating 15 MBA programs, Mr. Plotkin selected the one at Rushmore University because its self-directed study methods left his success largely in his own hands while providing the structure and support he needed.

Add the Knowledge and Experience

Mr. Plotkin accumulated the knowledge that he lacked through applying what he learned from books to practical problems. In developing his answers, he benefited from regular reviews by his professors and editor. Although he was attending a virtual university, he was pleased to report that he had “acquired the confidence and capability to work with, rather than against, the market forces to increase my financial wellbeing without compromising my own set of business values.”

Relocate to the Place Where the Opportunities Are Greatest

After deciding to leave engineering, Mr. Plotkin and his wife had carefully considered where to live. They chose Israel because it seemed to provide them with “a dynamic cauldron of emerging possibilities.” After earning his MBA, Mr. Plotkin realized that Israel was a good location for his career because the gap between management skills there and elsewhere was widening within many companies that had a good technical base for global success. But with limited skills, the many start-ups were having trouble attracting capital and entering external markets.

Ally with Those Who Will Nurture and Encourage Your Work

With his new-found knowledge, Mr. Plotkin realized that Israeli technology start-ups needed a wider range of services than he could provide by himself. A search for partners quickly enabled him to ally with people who shared his values and could assist the start-ups in those other ways.

As time passes, he hopes that success in helping others will permit him more time to explore personal interests and financial success to provide more for his family. With that success already delivering a higher quality of work and personal life, he is optimistic about his prospects.

Where are you in the process of adding more value to your career and that of others? Take the first step today by thinking more about what you like to do.