

Insist on the Best for Your Career

Donald W. Mitchell

I remember looking for a job just before I finished graduate school. I poured over lists of companies that were located where I wanted to live, and I dreamed a lot about what it might be like to work in different industries. I was reminded of when several my friends graduated with MBA degrees the preceding year and the goals they had.

One handsome, tall fellow wanted to become a vice president of an airline. I asked him why, and he told me that you could become a vice president of an airline at an earlier age than in other industries. Smiling, he also mentioned that as a single man he liked that there more unmarried young women working for airlines than could be met in most other industries.

A married couple had more modest ambitions: to get jobs in the same city that would provide opportunities for challenging careers. If the city was a nice place to live, that was an extra benefit. When both gained jobs in Seattle, Washington, they were thrilled.

Another man had spent a lot of time as a sailor on a nuclear submarine before graduate school: Any job that didn't involve working underwater was welcome to him.

All of that career planning sounds pretty reasonable, doesn't it? Little did I know that we were aiming very low.

A recent MBA graduate helped me see that much higher goals can be set. It was quite an eye opener. Let me tell you his story.

Ramesh Venkatraman was born in a beautiful village in a part of southern India that is well known for entrepreneurship in exporting products around the world. Accompanying his father on professional trips expanded his geographic horizons at a young age. His early schooling, college, and graduate studies were undertaken in a semi-urban setting renowned for its textile exports. Having absorbed so many influences, you might think that he entered a career that connected back to those origins, but that was not the case.

After completing a master's degree in science, Mr. Venkatraman was preparing to join a Ph.D. program; however, he joined the Indian space program instead, expanding his perspective on what can be accomplished. You are probably expecting to read that Mr. Venkatraman then became an astronaut . . . but that's not what happened.

Instead, his focus turned earthward and outward: He entered the information technology (IT) industry and began work in the United States, gaining important skills in IT at firms like KPMG, FedEx, Compaq, BvOI, and ABN AMRO Bank. Supremely talented, he quickly rose through the ranks from project manager to program manager to vice president.

In the corporate world, he came across many talented individuals who caused him to raise the bar on his dreams and aspirations, directly and indirectly tapping into his hidden talents.

One fine day, he learned that a highly respected colleague was an MBA and a PhD student at Rushmore University. The colleague shared that he would soon be moving into a strategic management function from a technology management position, and the colleague became head of strategy and planning for a leading financial institution.

Encouraged by that example and wanting to build on his IT success, Mr. Venkatraman decided to earn an MBA degree. He hoped his studies would add the skills and knowledge he would need to become a generous entrepreneur, one who would share any wealth gained with employees and other stakeholders.

He also selected Rushmore, primarily because he would have more freedom there to tailor his studies and courses to meet his personal objectives. The freedom he gained provided lots of motivation to learn, and Mr. Venkatraman graduated a little more than a year later.

Asked just before his graduation what his goals for using his MBA degree were, he reported that he now wanted to found a billion-dollar business in a short amount of time. Wow! What a contrast that goal was with what my friends and I had thought about at the same stage in our business training.

Curious about the shift, I asked Mr. Venkatraman to tell me more about how he decided on this new direction. He responded that the course work at

Rushmore made him realize that greater things were possible than he had considered before. Wanting to help others, he also began to appreciate that the more successful he was as an entrepreneur, the more people he could help as a philanthropist, a role he hadn't thought about playing before.

He now feels confident that he can accomplish that aggressive goal and is working hard to achieve it. He is also considering earning a Ph.D. from Rushmore.

Naturally, few people accomplish the full scale of what they hope to achieve. Often, they accomplish quite a bit less.

Even if Mr. Venkatraman falls far short of his new goals, he will probably accomplish more than he would have by merely fulfilling his pre-MBA goals. By learning the power of thinking carefully about what he wants to accomplish, his education served him better than mine did.

What are the lessons for you?

Are you insisting on the best from your career? If not, why not?

Ask yourself what the best could be for your career if you shoot for the top. Then get busy!

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