

5 Key Building Blocks for Constructing Your Career On Solid Ground

The world of work appears very different today than it did a generation ago – but the truth is that what it takes to succeed hasn't changed. We hear a lot today about following your passion – but that advice is backward. To be successful, you have to put first things first. You can't find your passion until you develop your work ethic. You can't find your purpose until you discover who you are. You can't find your happiness until you find your talent and help others. And you can't find success until you earn it.



Throughout my career in homebuilding, I've learned to appreciate the importance of a good foundation—one that is built on solid ground. It's the same when building a career – you need to return to the fundamentals. The model of success that worked for me has worked for centuries, but which is too often forgotten.

That long-standing model relies on five success drivers – critical skills that will help you reach higher levels of success and, ultimately, approach your potential. Learn these, and you'll be on your way.

Finding Your Talent

In every person, there is a seed of greatness. Understanding your uniqueness, values, natural strengths, and authenticity is vital to finding your success. When you find your talent, you've found your sweet spot. To find your talent, one of the best questions to ask yourself is, "What am I naturally good at, with little or no effort?" Another good question is, "What do I do so well that other people would be happy to pay me to do it for them?"

Your talents will be found in your natural strengths, motivators, behaviors, and skills, so The sooner you know and understand them, the better. It is much easier to improve a natural strength than to try to improve a weakness.

I hear you asking – "but what about following my passion?" The truth is that passions for which you don't have much natural talent can still be great hobbies and enjoyed, but when it comes to reaching your career potential, following your talent is a much better plan. You will always have time outside of work, so that's the place to pursue those passions. Don't give up on them—but if you have A-level talent in one field and B-minus talent in another, make the first one your career and the second one your hobby.

Making Good Decisions

Becoming a good decision-maker is highly underrated as a requirement for success. Ultimately, having good judgment and making good decisions are far more important than just being smart. All of our decisions involve the future, which is uncertain. With uncertainty comes risk, so we need to be prepared to mitigate or manage these risks.

The best way to do this involves taking a step-by-step approach to decision-making. This process should involve clarifying your goals, doing your research, considering alternatives, and then deciding. And whenever possible – sleep on it to make sure you're really committed before acting.

Taking Smart Risks

Risk and rewards go together. To get the rewards, you have to take risks. If we try to play it too safe, we can be sure that our rewards will be small. But if we can grow comfortable taking smart risks and learn how to manage and mitigate them, the rewards will surely follow.

Think of risk-taking as “the art of managing uncertainty to achieve a goal.” We live in a world full of uncertainty, and as much as we want to feel like we are in control of everything, we need to understand the difference between certainty and uncertainty and use it to our advantage.

Once you have a handle on all the uncertain things that might happen, you can then create a plan to deal with the worst-case scenario. What's the worst that can happen if you take this risk and it doesn't work out? If the worst-case scenario is that you are financially ruined, then it's not a risk worth taking. If, on the other hand, the worst-case scenario is that you suffer a tolerable loss but a gain is a much likelier outcome, well, then it might be a risk worth taking. After you've examined worst-case scenarios and assessed their likelihood, the risk doesn't seem so scary. That's how to get comfortable being uncomfortable.

Keeping Your Drive Alive

After you commit to your success, you will find many obstacles on the road to achievement. It takes a lot of energy, persistence, resiliency, ambition, and determination to overcome these obstacles.

To stay motivated, identify your “why.” What is important to you? Why do you get up in the morning? Why do you want to succeed? Knowing your “why” will go a long way to providing you with the motivation to stick with it when times are tough.

Managing Your Career

Many people under-optimize their career potential because they let others make their job decisions, are too slow in changing positions, and don't align their strengths and motivating values with their career paths. Managing your career success requires that you excel at your current job, prioritize learning and personal growth, and use solid judgment when it's time for a change.

Jobs and careers are two different things. A job can be doing anything for any length of time and may or may not lead anywhere. But a career is a series of individual jobs that progressively build on each other, creating more knowledge, experience, and value in the individual. With a 20-year career, you can get 20 years of experience. But with a 20-year series of disconnected jobs, you can get one year of experience 20 times, which is not very valuable for anyone.

As you consider your next move, the key is to sit back and take a hard look at where you are in your career, what you've learned so far, and what experiences or responsibilities you need to get to the next level. Then set some clear goals for what you want from your next job and take the personal initiative to find it.

Because the average mid-career job will last three to five years, it is very important for you to exercise good judgment when selecting your new company, especially your new boss. And remember to emphasize the opportunity to learn and grow when evaluating your options.

Building a Solid Foundation

Too many people fall far short of their potential. To avoid being one of them, find your talent, make good decisions, take smart risks, keep your drive alive, and then prudently manage your career. These five building blocks will give you the foundation you need for success – not only in work but also in life.

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