



Charting your Professional Career

By Chanon Collins

Summer is upon us and vacations are under way. If you are like the majority of business owners, you will use the spare time on your vacations to catch up on your leisure reading. With so many marvelous authors producing texts, the selections are vast and offering something for everyone. When I am gifted with leisure time, I usually fall into a classic or the current work of Patterson, Cornwell, or Hoag. Recently, I have taken a side road and found an author that every single person, concerned with her or his professional career, should add to the list of must reads. This author is David Maister.

David Maister is touted as the guru of professionalism and the theories which drive this behavior. Maister has penned four thought-provoking texts focusing on the modes of professionalism found in organizations. The writing style is assessable to all – there is no condescension that is stereotypical of Harvard professors. Maister has a clear sense of his audience and he speaks directly to each person who reads his work.

The most intriguing aspect of Maister’s texts is that they present those questions of which most people are afraid to answer. In his book, True Professionalism, Maister spends time making the reader focus on her or his personal career path. People are continually concerned with making their mark on the world and achieving success in their work. Maister forces people to examine their work from a different perspective – Maister believes that “success comes from doing what you enjoy. If you don’t enjoy it, how can it be called success?”

Just because you do something well, does not mean that you will be happy doing this activity for the next three years. Maister urges people to examine their past to find out what they would enjoy doing for the future. He suggests listing every assignment and project completed in the last three years and then analyze each assignment for the value and fulfillment it offered. Those items which brought great joy and satisfaction to your life should be the cornerstone for your personal strategic plan.

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As you develop your personal strategic plan, Maister suggests examining the type of people with whom you enjoy working. Life is too short to have your beloved work spoiled by those around you. After you develop your model co-worker, you must spend some time in reflecting upon your “evil secrets.” Maister identifies “evil secrets” as those things that we don’t like to admit about ourselves but are fundamental to our personality. Perhaps one of your evil secrets is that you don’t like working with people. Fine, look for a career which offers solitude from the masses. If you thrive on the attention from others, look for a position which has the potential to place you in the spotlight.

Maister makes the point that developing a personal strategic plan should not dictate your entire professional career. Plans are made to serve as a guide – just as vacation plans are made, detours are inevitable. Personal strategic plans are intended as guides for your immediate future – they focus on what you want to accomplish in the next three years. Very few people graduated from college with a degree in the major they declared as a freshman. Life is full of unexplored and unexpected opportunities. Developing a strategic plan will help you chart your undiscovered territory.

Developing your personal strategic plan is just one exercise in a multitude of activities found in Maister’s texts. So, as you pack your bags for the beach, be sure to make room for a book from your new collection.

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