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KEEPING YOUR CAREER ON TRACK

MARKETING YOUR CAREER BRAND

ASSESSING TIME, CAREER, AND LIFE DIRECTIONS

Community Manager, Career Management
Sue Kaiden

ISBN
978-1-60728-320-1

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KEEPING YOUR CAREER ON TRACK



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WHY DO I NEED A CAREER ROAD MAP? 1

IDENTIFY WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER..... 1

CLARIFY YOUR WORK PREFERENCES 4

REFINE YOUR CAREER ASPIRATIONS 7

EVALUATE YOURSELF 8

DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN 11

CONCLUSION 13

REFERENCES & RESOURCES 14

JOB AIDS

 Preference Grid..... 15

 Gap Analysis 16

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If you were asked, “Where do you see yourself five years from now?” would you be able to answer the question? In today’s rapidly changing environment, it’s difficult to imagine what the world of work will look like in two years, much less five years down the road. In light of this uncertainty, it’s almost tempting to give up on career planning altogether.

But would you embark on an important journey without a destination? Or without any idea what you want to see or do when you arrive? Yet this is precisely how many of us approach our careers. We meander along the back roads without a plan and then wonder why we arrive at a destination that is not to our liking.

Don’t wait until you’re laid off, burned out, or unhappy in your current position before you consider where you want to go on your career journey. By conducting periodic inventories, both of yourself and of the job market, you can keep your career on course, despite any detours or road blocks that you may encounter along the way.

This *TD at Work* will help you to:

- Understand why you need a career road map.
- Identify what you have to offer employers.
- Clarify your preferred skills and work environment.
- Refine your career aspirations.
- Evaluate your strengths and identify any gaps.
- Develop an action plan.

WHY DO I NEED A CAREER ROAD MAP?

“If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll probably end up somewhere else.”

—Yogi Berra

Gone are the days of climbing a career ladder at one company until you get your gold retirement watch. Instead, we face an evolving economy with accelerating technology, globalization, and business model disruptions that can change industries overnight and render occupations obsolete.

In fact, according to recent Department of Labor figures from a longitudinal study, younger Baby Boomers—individuals born from 1957 to 1964—held an average of 11.7 jobs from ages 18 to 48. And the evidence points to greater job mobility for younger workers, with many studies predicting that today’s workers will hold 14 or more jobs in their lifetimes and that more will rely on self-employment as a viable option.

During the past 10 years, many companies have eliminated employee career development programs in favor of a DIY model. While there is some evidence that this trend is reversing as the job market improves, it behooves you to take responsibility for your own career development. Using the tools in this *TD at Work* to map out a plan will help you stay abreast of changes in your field and identify any tune-ups or course corrections that might be necessary.

IDENTIFY WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER

“Take inventory of what you’re good at and extend out from your skills. Or determine what your customers need and work backward, even if it requires learning new skills.”

—Jeff Bezos, CEO, Amazon

Just as merchants need to take an inventory to know what wares they have to offer their customers, as an employee or a job seeker, you need to conduct a periodic inventory to identify what you have to offer employers. We’re not talking about your resume or the jobs you’ve held before, but a complete list of the skills, knowledge, and personality traits that contribute to who you are as a person. Job satisfaction is highest when you utilize your best skills doing something that interests and motivates you in a work environment that suits your personality.

Skills

Skills are the basic building blocks of what you know how to do. Skills are generally learned by doing and will improve over time as you hone your craft. The items that fall under this category should include proficiencies that you have

developed through training and experience that can be transferred from one company or industry to another.

As you develop your skills list, include both work-related and nonwork-related items. At this stage, don't concern yourself with how much you enjoy using these skills—identifying your preferences comes later in this process.

Knowledge

The next category to include in your personal inventory is knowledge. You may have acquired this knowledge at school, in a workshop, or on your own—perhaps, for example, through volunteering or individual study.

The difference between skills and knowledge is that knowledge is a subject that can be learned. You either know it or you don't know it. If you're a history teacher, for example, the skill is teaching and the knowledge is history. Additionally, knowledge can become outdated and need to be refreshed, while skills, if you continue to use them, usually get better with age.

JOB SATISFACTION IS HIGHEST WHEN YOU UTILIZE YOUR BEST SKILLS DOING SOMETHING THAT INTERESTS AND MOTIVATES YOU IN A WORK ENVIRONMENT THAT SUITS YOUR PERSONALITY.

Your knowledge list should contain any specialized technical or industry expertise that you have acquired. If you're a training and development professional, for instance, you might include specific e-learning tools or assessments that you have been trained to administer. Or if you've worked for many years in a specific industry and understand the terminology and issues facing companies in that space, make sure you incorporate that into this inventory. Add credentials under this heading as well, including any professional certifications or academic degrees that you hold, such as ATD's Certified Professional in Learning and Performance.

Finally, if there is a subject that personally fascinates you or a hobby about which you have a wealth of knowledge, include it here. It may not go on your resume, but this inventory should be a compendium of everything you have to offer, no matter how irrelevant it might seem at the moment.

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND PERSONALITY TRAITS: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

The ATD Competency Model defines competencies as higher-level clusters of what someone needs to know and do to be successful. They're composed of measurable or observable skills, knowledge, abilities, and behaviors critical to successful job performance.

For the purpose of the exercises in this *TD at Work*, we are using skills, knowledge, and personality traits as simple categories to describe yourself. Because these exercises are for your personal use, how you categorize items—as skills, knowledge, or traits—is less important than understanding what you bring to the table.

Skills: Proficiencies developed through training or experience. A skill is something you know how to *do*.

Knowledge: Practical or theoretical understanding of a subject.

Personality Traits: Abilities, a natural capacity to perform certain activities, and behaviors; the way in which you act or conduct yourself. These tend to be more innate and not easily learned.

Personality Traits

The final category in a personal inventory involves your personality traits, or the sum of the qualities that describe who you are. These attributes generally are not learned and don't go away—you might find yourself prefacing them with "I am." Items to include in this section might be characteristics such as "detail-oriented," "creative," or "calm under pressure." To identify these traits, think about how your friends or colleagues describe you: "She's incredibly empathetic and kind" or "He's highly imaginative and thinks well on his feet."

If you have taken the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), DiSC, or another personality profile test, you may already have a list of words that you can use to describe yourself.

Table 1 gives an example of a completed personal inventory for a fictitious training and development professional whom we will call Tina Trainor. It lists her skills, knowledge, and personality traits. We will use Tina as an example throughout this *TD at Work* to illustrate how to use the various tools.

As you can see in the table, Tina has six years of experience as a training specialist. She started her career as a nurse and, after a few years on the job, was asked to provide training for the graduate nurses. Tina learned that she loved the role and decided to pursue a position in the training and development department. Last year, she completed the ATD Master Trainer Program to strengthen her skills and training credentials.

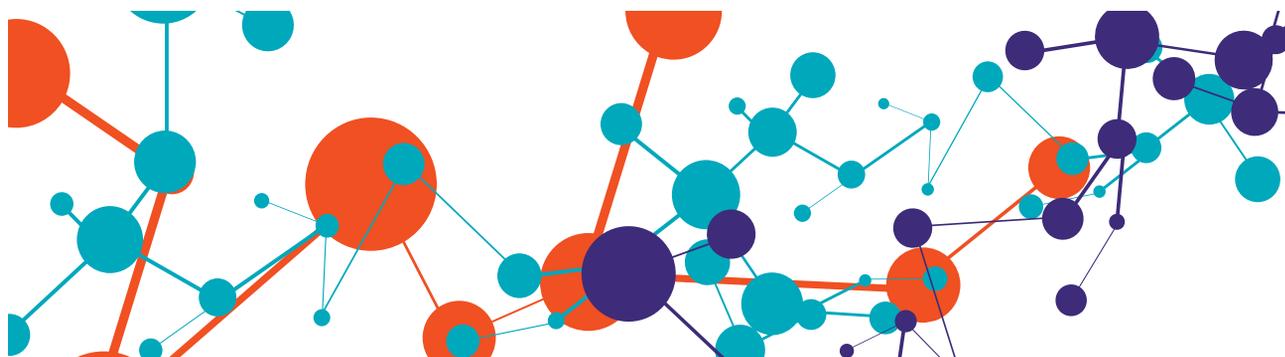
FIGURE 1: IDEAL CAREER



TABLE 1. PERSONAL INVENTORY: TINA TRAINOR

| Skills and Experience | Knowledge and Credentials | Personality Traits |
|---|---|--|
| Examples: Teaching, Writing | Examples: History, Grants | Examples: Introverted, Detail-Oriented |
| <p>Skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching/Instructing Group Facilitation Public Speaking/Presentation Skills Curriculum Development Developing Instructional Materials Needs and Audience Assessment Establishing Rapport and a Positive Classroom Environment Storytelling Role Playing Program Evaluation Networking <p>Experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six Years—Training Specialist Four Years—Nurse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult Learning Principles ADDIE and SAM Learning Models Learner-Centered Instructional Methods Individual Learning Modalities Group Dynamics Leadership Development Healthcare Industry Clinical Knowledge <p>Technical:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WebEx/GoToMeeting PowerPoint Blackboard LMS Social Networks (LinkedIn, Facebook) <p>Degree: BS in Nursing</p> <p>Credential: ATD Master Trainer</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extroverted Creative/Idea Person Enthusiastic/Positive Organized Collaborative Empathetic Good Sense of Humor Enjoy Variety and New Challenges <p>Personality Profiles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MBTI (ENFJ) DiSC (High IS, Fairly High D) |

MARKETING YOUR CAREER BRAND



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- IDENTIFYING YOUR CAREER BRAND 1
- DEVELOPING YOUR MARKETING MESSAGE.....3
- MARKETING YOUR BRAND.....3
- TOP SEVEN SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.....7
- YOUR TOP TOOL: OPTIMIZING LINKEDIN..... 8
- CREATING AND WRITING THE NEW RESUME10
- FEDERAL RESUMES..... 13
- CONCLUSION..... 15

- REFERENCES & RESOURCES 16

JOB AIDS

- Resume Planner: Skills-Based Resume..... 17
- Resume Planner: Accomplishment-Based Resume 18
- LinkedIn Profile Template 19

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Marketing yourself in today's career environment is about more than just having an effective resume. You must understand all the tools at your disposal, both traditional and new social media platforms, and how to integrate them into your desired career brand. Your career brand is a combination of your skills, interests, and the value that you can bring to a potential employer or customer. In the past, your career brand was expressed primarily through a traditional resume. Today, your brand encompasses every way you promote yourself, both in electronic and more traditional formats.

In addition to outlining your assets, you need to identify "customer" needs, and how your brand will address those needs. A customer may be a prospective employer, your current employer, or perhaps a potential client you are trying to lure. We will use the term "customer" throughout this publication to describe the audience who needs to understand and want your career brand.

This *TD at Work* provides the tools and strategies to market your all-important career brand.

This issue will:

- define a career brand, and explain how you can develop yours
- explain how to market your brand, and outline elements of your marketing package
- show how to effectively use social media as a marketing tool
- provide tips on writing the new and improved resume
- show the differences and similarities between a federal and private-industry resume.

IDENTIFYING YOUR CAREER BRAND

The first step in marketing yourself and your career brand is to understand exactly what the brand is that you are promoting. If you are not clear on your brand and what you're all about, your marketing efforts will be unclear and confusing.

Your career brand is composed of everything you want to be known for professionally, including your experience, and your skills and interests. Your brand is not unlike a favorite brand that you purchase as a consumer. Whether the brand is a kind of cookie or a model of car, you return and buy that brand over and over for a number of reasons. What attracts you to the brand is probably the trio of quality, consistency, and value.

- **Quality:** You may have been impressed with the excellence of that particular brand.
- **Consistency:** Perhaps the consistency of knowing what you will be getting appeals to you.
- **Value:** The perceived value you are getting for your money is attractive to you.

The reality is that you probably return to your preferred brand over and over because you appreciate the combination of the quality, consistency, and value that brand provides.

YOUR CAREER BRAND IS COMPOSED OF EVERYTHING YOU WANT TO BE KNOWN FOR PROFESSIONALLY, INCLUDING YOUR EXPERIENCE, AND YOUR SKILLS AND INTERESTS.

The manufacturer of your preferred brand has carefully identified exactly what their brand is all about. They know the "hot buttons" that appeal to their repeat customers and they maximize them. As you determine your career brand, you must also understand exactly what it is that makes you unique and what will appeal to your potential "customers."

Identifying the Skills That Build Your Brand

To build your brand, you must know your strongest assets. You will need to maximize them in your branding in order to appeal to your desired customers. Without understanding the skills you need and want to promote, you cannot establish your niche in the marketplace.

CAREER BRANDING TRENDS

| In | Out |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Contemporary resume formats | Standard chronological resume |
| Using social media effectively | Ignoring social media presence |
| Customizing to customers | One size fits all approach |

To start this process, you will want to do a self-analysis. What do you think are your most pronounced competencies? What specific examples can you identify as to how you have used and displayed these skills in the past? Do you feel comfortable enough to articulate these examples to a potential customer?

WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING THE SKILLS YOU NEED AND WANT TO PROMOTE, YOU CANNOT ESTABLISH YOUR NICHE IN THE MARKETPLACE.

You will also want to consult those around you—your co-workers, your direct reports, and perhaps even your supervisor—for valuable input. They will most likely see things that you do not see about yourself. Be sure to ask them for specific examples of how you used a particular skill so you can truly understand how and when you displayed it.

Finally, you may want to take a skills assessment. Numerous assessments exist, both on paper and online, offered through government and private business. Assessments help you identify your skills. Once again, be sure to think of a particular situation in which you used or displayed a particular competency.

Does Your Brand Complement Your Desired Career Path?

Just because you happen to have a particular skill and can discuss numerous specific instances in which you used it successfully, you may not necessarily be interested in using that skill moving forward. You may be a fantastic technical writer, and you may have written numerous technical reports and publications that won accolades from the readers. If your career interest is not in being a technical writer, however, why would you want to promote those skills with potential customers? You need to identify those assets that complement your desired career path, because those are the skills you will want to use in building your career brand.

If you are unclear about your desired career path, you must first get clarity about where you want to go. You may already have a very clear picture, and you can start to assess which of your skills align with that path. If it's not clear, an interest assessment can be an excellent tool for starting to gain that clarity. A good career coach can help look at your interests and where they cross over with your identified skills. That crossover is the base of building your career brand.

What Are Your Customers Looking For?

Your brand must also meet the needs of your customers. If you are not offering something that your customers need or want, your branding efforts will come to naught. In addition, consider the branding trio: quality, consistency, and value. Can you articulate how your brand addresses each of those attributes?

A famous example of branding that failed can be found in one of the products of a famous automobile manufacturer in the 1970s. During the gasoline shortage at that time, virtually all the major auto manufacturers identified a customer need for high gas mileage in their products. This manufacturer quickly developed and marketed a small car that addressed that requirement. Unfortunately, the car—the Ford Pinto—had a nasty habit of bursting into flames as the gas tank

exploded when involved in a rear-end collision. Quality was obviously lacking. The model flopped and was taken off the market.

You must combine your brand with what the customer wants and needs. At the same time, you must ensure quality, consistency, and value.

DEVELOPING YOUR MARKETING MESSAGE

In order to market your brand, you need to have an effective message. Your message should concisely articulate who you are, what your brand is, and what you have to offer a prospective customer.

One way of conveying your brand concisely is building and using a “one-minute commercial.” Sometimes known as an elevator speech, your one-minute commercial provides an overview of you and your skills and gives specific examples focusing on how you have served your customers. Consider this format for an effective one-minute commercial:

- How do you describe what you are and what you do without using lingo or jargon that sounds trite?
- How do you serve your customers, gearing your message to reflect their needs?
- How are you helping your customers solve their problems?
- What is one recent success story—again, showing concrete examples?

Here is a basic example of a one-minute commercial that uses this format:

I am a software skills trainer. I work with my customers to fully understand their needs, and design customized software training to address those needs. Many of my customers require training for employees with limited computer proficiency, and I make sure that the training I deliver is targeted directly at their skill level. For example, last month a client needed Excel training for a group of administrative assistants who were experienced only with Microsoft Word. I created a module appropriate for their level of knowledge, and adapted the tasks that they needed to learn to perform. The client called me two weeks ago to tell

me that every person I trained is now productively using Excel.

MARKETING YOUR BRAND

You may have a great personal career brand, complete with a clear and concise marketing message. If you are not reaching your customers and potential customers, however, all the work you have put into defining your brand has been wasted. Your customers must receive your marketing message.

SOMETIMES KNOWN AS AN ELEVATOR SPEECH, YOUR ONE-MINUTE COMMERCIAL PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF YOU AND YOUR SKILLS AND GIVES SPECIFIC EXAMPLES FOCUSING ON HOW YOU HAVE SERVED YOUR CUSTOMERS.

With a multitude of new tools at your disposal, marketing your brand has grown much more complex. How do you determine which tools will be most effective in delivering your message and reaching your customers?

One answer to this question is research. You need to determine exactly how your customers need and want to hear about your brand. How do they make other buying decisions and what tools do they regularly use to help them make those decisions? If you can, the ideal approach is to contact some of your current or potential customers and ask those questions. In the absence of the ability to reach out to customers directly, do some general research. If you are job hunting, what tools are today’s recruiters and human resources representatives using to source potential candidates? An online search with appropriate questions will help you find those answers.

Tools for Marketing Your Brand

In general, the tools you use to market your brand are going to be vastly different than those used even 10 years ago. For example, a traditional job

Assessing Time, Career, and Life Directions

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Workplace Issues

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Manage Work, Life | 1 |
| Time for a Change | 1 |
| Actions to Take Charge..... | 3 |
| Assess Your Talents | 7 |
| Deal with Setbacks | 10 |
| Demonstrate Your Value..... | 10 |
| The End as a Beginning | 12 |

| | |
|---|----|
| References & Resources | 13 |
|---|----|

Job Aid

| | |
|--|----|
| Ready, Set, Go: Are You Ready for a Change?..... | 14 |
|--|----|

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Manage Work, Life

In the classic 1960s *Twilight Zone* episode: “Time Enough At Last,” Burgess Meredith plays a bookish bank teller who is always in trouble with his boss for reading on the job. One day, while reading in the bank vault in the basement, a cataclysmic war breaks out and suddenly the sad little bank teller is the last living person on Earth. While he is frightened at first, he is later elated when he stumbles across a vast cache of books strewn on a street from a destroyed library. The little man raises his fists and says, “Time enough at last!” Unfortunately, as the little man leans over to pick up his first book, his extremely thick and heavy glasses fall off his face and smash into pieces. The availability of time is not the main issue any more.

Besides the entertaining irony in the episode, there is an important message. It is a fantasy to think you always will have enough time, and even if you did, you cannot depend on things turning out as planned.

This *Infoline* will not give you a set of foolproof methods to capture and save time (as if that were possible), but it will show you how to manage and harmonize the two most important aspects of your life: your professional life and your personal life. Although some solid time-management techniques are offered here, the key lessons in this issue involve using your time to manage what is more important in your life. To that end, in this issue you will learn

- how to tell when it is time to change
- concrete actions that will enable you to manage your time and career more effectively
- how to assess your talents and use your time wisely to make important changes
- how to deal with setbacks.

Time for a Change

In 1972, time-management scholar Alec Mackenzie wrote in *The Time Trap*: “Time passes at a predetermined rate no matter what we do. It is a question not of managing the clock, but of managing ourselves with respect to the clock.” Mackenzie’s advice holds true today. Time management really is self-management, and a big part of self-management is being able to listen to signals—intuitive, emotional, physical, and intellectual—that it’s time for a change. But that sounds easier than it is. The essential steps to ensure you hear these signals are

- listen to your thoughts
- hear the words you speak
- make small changes
- remember the big picture
- prioritize
- assess your feelings
- take action.

Listen to Your Thoughts

You have 24 hours in your day. In that day, you will have 2,000-3,000 thoughts, which can become, if you’re not careful, what’s known as *busy brain*—too many negative replays of past events. These negative thoughts can eat into your time. Thoughts can be either productive or prohibitive. What are your thoughts about work? What direction do they take as you approach home? What are your thoughts at home? Monitor these thoughts so you can assess how you use them.

This is the first step you can take for better time and life management. As you enter the doorway of home and work, what do you hope for? Is the time spent in each place as you want it to be? Is your time spent building your life to your standards? Awareness always is the first signal for change.

Try to focus your thinking more every day. Gear each day to a bigger picture. Tell yourself the truth.

Make Change Happen: Two Case Studies

Let's assume that you've stopped, looked, and listened to the signals in your life and that you are certain that change is upon you—or at least within you. Now is a good time to prioritize your wants and needs, to read your so-called Happiness Meter, and to take the next steps to making the change happen as you'd like it to happen.

You may find this thrust upon you, like Mary did. Mary was once a vice president of employee development in a large consulting organization when her job was downsized. She spent a year as an intern helping her local ASTD chapter develop a learning program that coordinated more than 30 volunteers. In the process, she met many people and connected to a job in the ISO 9000 field—a longtime interest area of hers. Roots stretch more easily when given space and time. Doubters may say, “Yes, but that took a year.” And Mary will answer, “Yes, but it was time well spent.” And that is what time management is all about—not managing time but experiencing life well.

Or you may need to take initiative and create change for yourself, like Chris did. A store manager for a large fast food company, he decided not to follow the typical career path in store management. Instead, he took time to learn the training and development field and went on to become a regional vice president of training and development, designing sales and management training for stores in one of the nation's largest markets.

Hear the Words You Speak

In addition to monitoring your thoughts, take time to stand outside yourself daily and hear the words you speak. Are phrases like “I would, if I had the time to...” “Someday when I have more time I want to...” “I never did take the time to try...” or “If I have to do that one more time!” creeping into your conversation too often?

As you consider change, begin to use words of commitment—words that focus where you want to focus. For example, “This is important to me, so I will...” “I am committed to finishing...” “Let's get our calendars out right now.”

Make Small Changes

Change that matters often is very small. Seasoned tennis coaches encourage players to take baby steps on the court. Why? The player who takes small steps to reach the ball has a better chance of hitting it. Small changes will help you realistically meet your goal.

Remember the Big Picture

When you're managing the clock, watch what others with similar goals do successfully. The key to watching big-picture signals is to do something about it. The sidebar, *Make Change Happen: Two Case Studies*, provides more information about people who act on their ideas.

Prioritize

When you listen to your mental and verbal signals, what stands out? The following activity will help you prioritize. Divide a sheet of notebook paper into four sections:

1. Work: what I like.
2. Work: what I don't like.
3. Personal Life: what I like.
4. Personal Life: what I don't like.

Take as long as you like and make lists under each section. When you finish:

- Add up the positives and find the section with the most comments. Really look at that section.
- Add up the negatives and find the section where they are greatest, and analyze that section.

This will give you an idea of where you should prioritize your efforts to change.

Assess Your Feelings

As you evaluate your career, take the approach suggested by psychologist Jerry Hiller: Spend more time enjoying your world and less time worrying about how unworthy or untalented you are.

A number of studies have found that a person's happiness level throughout life follows a U-shape with midlife unhappiness resulting primarily from time challenges: time at home vs. work and decisions around both. Life choices like marriage and children bolster happiness to some extent, as do jobs that allow flexible work, a short commute, realistic hours, or a senior position. In fact, simply working makes us happier. A mortality study by the Society of Actuaries shows that men ages 50-70 who work have about half the death rates of men who don't.

Take Action

Whatever your motivation to change, you are ready to take action. Get creative, get out, meet people, expand your horizons, and change! The sidebar, *Seven Tips to Boost Creativity* provides more information about taking these next steps.

Actions to Take Charge

Taking charge of your time—and therefore your life—needs to be a deliberate and calculated effort. The steps include

- assessing your network
- knowing your champions
- stretching your network.

Assess Your Network

Your network encompasses all the people in your life. It is your web of connections.

Make a list of the top 25 people who influence you and are important in your life: your neighbors, customers, family, friends, foes, managers, supporters, stakeholders, and mentors. Connectors are very important in change, and yet, interestingly, in the United States, research shows that networks are shrinking.

A 2006 Duke University study compared data from 1985 and 2004 and found that the number of people with whom U.S. residents can discuss important matters dropped by nearly one-third. Americans' set of ties is becoming smaller and more tightly connected to the nuclear family. The percentage of people who talk only to family members about important matters increased from 57 percent to 80 percent. Why do we have such a tight network? Longer work hours, two-income families, and the Internet all likely contribute to less face-to-face contact and connection.

Resist this trend: Don't be caught without a network when you really need one.

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