

careerwise

get on and get ahead

How to... declutter your career

by Scott Beagrie

Why is it important?

We all need to give ourselves space and time to think about our careers and future goals. All too often, workloads and the sheer pace of life don't allow us to do this, and it is easy to continue on the same path without ever changing what we do or how we do it.

Regularly decluttering your career to re-evaluate your endeavours can help you stay focused, as well as freeing up time to consider how you could be more efficient and add value.

Offloading baggage that impedes performance, disrupts concentration and zaps energy levels can make a huge difference to how you feel about life generally.

"Typically we go to work every day without putting that simple routine in the context of our broader lives," says Kath Reid, business psychologist at talent management consultancy Getfeedback. "Yet many of us are 'at work' more than we do any other single activity, apart from sleeping."

Where do I start?

Think about where you are in your career and where you want to be, and work backwards to figure out how to get there. Remind yourself what you like—or used to like—most about your job and where your motivations lie. Have you strayed so far away from these and your values that work has ceased to be enjoyable?

Also consider more per-

SWAMPED... No space to think.

sonal aspirations, such as achieving a better work-life balance. Your plan of action is likely to include making minor alterations that affect how you work day-to-day and major changes that have a more long-term effect.

The most significant factor, according to Reid, is to be prepared to change. "Many people define themselves in terms of the jobs they do, so any thoughts about changing jobs are likely to mean a change in personal identity," she says.

Know when to let go

Are you chasing unobtainable dreams that are diverting your attention? Maybe it is time to accept that you won't get that overseas posting or a promotion to head office this year, so stop creating false hopes. It doesn't mean giving up or settling for less, but knowing when

to let go is liberating because it allows you to focus on a new challenge.

Freeing time to think may help you see that a sideways move will give you the experience you need for that dream job. One of the purposes of decluttering is to clear the mind and help you become more self-aware.

Audit your time

Look at how you spend your time during the day and examine how much of it is aligned with your business and career goals, and how much of it is spent on more peripheral tasks and work that could be reduced if not eliminated altogether.

Also consider whether you are wasting time and efforts on projects that are close to your heart but going nowhere. If your career action plan includes some personal and professional

development, organise your time to factor this in.

Observe the ripple effect

While there is far more to decluttering than clearing your desk and purging your inbox, it is the minor changes to everyday working life that will help you realise the bigger goals, as they can release time and space to think.

An over-flowing in-tray, bulging in-box and disorganised filing system, for instance, all have the effect of swamping you, so resolve to sort any physical debris that reduces efficiency.

E-mail has made many of us reactive rather than proactive, so manage your inbox rather than let it manage you and resist the temptation to check your e-mail every five minutes.

Set aside time in the day when you are going to catch up on your admin and rou-

tine tasks. Putting a few controls and structures in place will help you reclaim the day to focus on bigger issues.

Mind those around you

Difficult colleagues can have a huge impact on how you work and perform – ranging from the office chatterbox or moaning minnie to a disruptive team member or disorganised boss. The first two can be easily dealt with by polite avoidance, but the second pair demand greater consideration. As a manager, you will be judged on your team's performance and a disruptive influence could obstruct your career path, so confront them immediately.

Many of us accept griping colleagues and hapless bosses as part of office life, but they are time-stealers who dilute your focus, so limiting their negative effect is a vital part of decluttering.

if you only do 5 things

- 1 Give up on unobtainable goals.
- 2 Be prepared to change.
- 3 Audit your time.
- 4 Institute better controls and procedures.
- 5 Sidestep any disruptive elements.

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expert's view... decluttering your career



Kath Reid
Business
psychologist,
Getfeedback

What is the most difficult aspect of decluttering your career?

■ The human consequences. You may realise that to progress your career, you need to move on and say goodbye to the people you currently work with, or

you may need to confront someone who is preventing you from achieving your goals, which could make you feel scared and apprehensive. However, it's important to remember that the fantastic feelings of achievement and being in control once you've made the decision and taken action will by far outweigh any concern or anxiety.

What attributes do you need?

■ Effectively decluttering your career

takes confidence and self-assurance. Openness to change is important as you consider all the different possibilities, weighing up your options to make the right decision, and making those changes even though they appear daunting. Most importantly, be positive: decluttering your career is a great thing to do – it puts you back in control.

Top tips:

■ Step back and reflect before

planning, making sure you place work in the context of your whole life.

■ Take time to really know yourself now, before planning where you are going – focus on the things that really interest and motivate you, not just the pay and benefits.

■ Talk to others about what they love about their jobs – armed with your new-found self-knowledge, you may find something you've never thought about before.