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## How to Jump-Start a Stalled Career

At one time, it may have seemed that your career was continually changing and branching in new directions, but more recently, you feel you are on a fast track to nowhere. Your responsibilities haven't changed in years, and your compensation has remained static. You may also feel like you don't wield as much influence as you once did in the office.

If this scenario describes your professional life, your career may have stalled. Sometimes this happens through no fault of one's own. Maybe you've simply risen as far as you can in your current position, both in terms of salary and responsibilities. But it's also possible that your performance has dropped off or that you've lost enthusiasm for your work, and these underlying factors may be putting the brakes on your professional progress.

Although you may be unsure why your career has hit the skids, here are some tools to give it a jump-start:

***Get out of your cocoon.*** Sometimes professionals fall behind in their careers because they've built an invisible wall around themselves and have quit making the effort to nurture important office relationships. Or maybe they've failed to acknowledge the role of office politics. Although you should never engage in gossip to get ahead, nor is it necessary to be your firm's social butterfly, it's important to remain genuinely interested in the people and activities swirling around you.

Start with your manager. Increase your communication and interaction with him or her, a tactic business literature sometimes refers to as "managing up." When was the last time you had a free-ranging discussion with your supervisor about issues facing your firm? Or, have you been too preoccupied with your day-to-day tasks to tap into your manager's needs and concerns? By becoming more attentive to your boss and demonstrating that you understand the importance of this relationship, you should be able to turn around any erroneous perceptions your boss may have about your level of engagement in your job.

Reach out to others in the office as well, including those who report to you. Make sure they know that you're not too busy to listen to their concerns or suggestions.

***Renew your commitment to ongoing learning.*** If your career is faltering, it could be that you've reached a professional standstill. Ask yourself when you last pursued some form of new learning. Have you taken a continuing education class recently? Become proficient in a new technology? Attended a professional seminar or read a much-discussed business book?

If you've been a no-show on the learning circuit, rededicate yourself to pursuing training and development opportunities that will increase your value as a professional. Anytime you acquire new knowledge, you breathe fresh life into your career.

***Establish your leadership potential.*** Many successful careers hit a plateau not because of a lack of hard work or dedication, but because they take place largely in a vacuum, rather than in creative interaction with others in the legal field. By taking on leadership roles outside your office walls, you can broaden your professional experience and enhance your visibility – and that of your firm's.

Consider joining a professional association if you haven't already. Or, offer to speak at a legal industry event or write an article for a professional publication. Anything you can do to build your reputation and become an active participant in the exchange of ideas will help to recharge your career. Your involvement in outside groups also enables you to bring new ideas and best practices back to your firm, further enhancing your value as a legal administrator.

***Take on something new.*** A sure way to revitalize a languishing career is to add value in your role. This might entail assuming a new responsibility, offering to lead a high-profile project or overhauling a business process.

If you've thought about suggesting improvements along these lines, move forward with a proposal. Even if you've been reluctant to go out on a professional limb before, don't let fear of failure hold you back. Sure, it's a risk to take on something new, but there is nothing but upside if you succeed. Moreover, by actively seeking new challenges, you avoid being viewed as complacent or resistant to change.

***Have a heart-to-heart with your boss.*** In conjunction with these other strategies, engage your manager in a candid discussion about your job performance and your future with the firm. Your perception of how you're performing may differ significantly from your boss's. For instance, you may think you're managing your workload well, but your supervisor may be frustrated by your failure to delegate key tasks that end up being neglected.

By actively seeking your boss's point of view and suggestions, you show that you're receptive to change and improvement. You'll also come away with a better feel for whether or not you've reached your professional potential in your current position.

A sputtering career is always cause for concern, but it's a relatively common occurrence. What's important is not that you've encountered a rough patch, but that you recognize that your career has stalled and react in an assertive and constructive manner. This will send a clear message that you haven't lost your professional drive to succeed.

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