

The Five O'Clock News[®]

from America's Premier Career-Coaching and Outplacement Service

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"One organization with a long record of success in helping people find jobs is The Five O'Clock Club."

FORTUNE

Celebrating 25 years—
America's Premier
Career Coaching and
Outplacement Network for
Professionals, Managers
and Executives

Job Insurance

You Can't Buy It, But You Can Create It Yourself

by Win Sheffield, Certified Five O'Clock Club Career Coach

One of the happiest things about getting a new job is that you don't have to job search anymore! You're finished with tweaking your résumé, networking, answering ads, talking to recruiters, interviewing and negotiating. Once on your new job, you want to work hard, prove yourself and get ahead. You may even be determined never to have to look for work again, and fantasize about what your

next job move would look like: you might run into the CEO of a prestigious firm who will immediately recognize your talents and hire you, with a substantial pay raise to boot.

That might work out for you, but on the off chance that it doesn't, it might be a good idea to plan for what can happen in the real world. The good news is that managing your career does not have to be painful. The things you need to do, to position yourself well for another job move, can fit easily into your routine and will make your next job search much easier (in case the silver platter scenario doesn't come to pass). But no, we're not about to recommend anything nearly as painful as a job search!



Win Sheffield
Five O'Clock Club
Career Coach.



"Just put that in my 'to do' pile."

**Take the time to study
and strategize your career.**

The reality of today's workplace is that your job won't last forever, which doesn't necessarily mean that you'll change employers; you may be able to advance nicely within your new firm. And even if you would like to rely on luck—and just doing a good job—to propel yourself forward, a little planning will improve your prospects immensely. We will

Also in this issue

- ◆ Making the Most of Your Internship
- ◆ Networking with Other Members

focus on a few ideas for doing this in the paragraphs ahead; with minimal extra work you can protect yourself.

Think of It as Insurance

When you buy a new house or a car, you are excited and proud; you take great care of it and it would never occur to you *not* to have insurance. Transfer this thinking to your job. While performing well in your job may seem like good insurance, it's not usually enough. Your job itself will change; bosses and organizations change, and you will change as well (for example, becoming better at what you do). *Anticipating* such changes and *planning* your career are ways of creating job insurance. While car and house insurance cost a lot of money, managing your career will only cost you a little attention and time—which is really not too much to pay. Most of the things we recommend can be incorporated into your routine.

Gone are the days when your employer will look out for your career: today you have to take care of yourself. Whether your focus will be on getting promoted internally or moving on to another organization—and maybe you're not even sure about that—there are a few basic steps that we can recommend. These will help you position yourself well for whatever is coming next. And whether we like it or not, something is coming next. And the basics of job insurance are simple.

Performing well in your job is not enough insurance. You need to anticipate changes and plan your career.

Take the time to study and strategize your career.

You will *always* have urgent tasks to get done, so it is easy to avoid 'thinking career.' If you don't take a small amount of time each week, maybe just 15 minutes, to reflect on what you have done, what you like and what you want, you

will not be managing your career. Your career will happen to you. Identifying those parts of the career planning process that are most interesting will really pay off. When you get in the habit of this kind of strategic thinking, it becomes easy and rewarding.

Know your direction.

Develop a clear idea of where you are heading. When you were job hunting, the Club urged you to write your Fifteen- or Forty-Year Vision. Keep reviewing it, keep rewriting it. If you have two ideas, present them to people who can help you brainstorm. If you have *no* ideas, you're in trouble. Review your Seven Stories Exercise. Think of something. Others can be much more helpful if you can give them some idea of what you're heading *toward*, rather than away from. You may have a million ideas, but pick two or three to explore seriously. You may think that you will be keeping your options open if you portray yourself as being able to do it all, but actually you will just appear to be scattered. Let others see that you are focused.

Keep up with the marketplace.

This can be the marketplace of your company, the broader marketplace of your function or your industry or even the marketplace of a completely new area for you. Keeping current means knowing what is happening, what the trends are and knowing who the key players are. It is also important to *become known*. You may enjoy your job thoroughly. The day-to-day work may be stimulating, and your colleagues and boss are great to deal with. But if you are not keeping up with the wider world and

the prominent players outside your company: on your mark, get set . . . stand still!

If you have *no* ideas about a career direction, you're in trouble. Review your Seven Stories Exercise.

Maintain a positive attitude.

This may sound simple, but many folks are indifferent to their careers. They plod along because it's work ("I'm not supposed to enjoy it—that's why it's called work"). They limit themselves by:

- o Assuming they can't create a better path;
- o Listening to others who say it is not possible;
- o Not really knowing what's out there; and
- o Not focusing on what employers are looking for.

Get help from career professionals.

Don't forget that, when you were job hunting, you worked with a Five O'Clock Club career coach. Get in



"The mirage of all mirages."

touch with the coach and arrange for a session or two to strategize your career. If you were assigned to the Five O’Clock Club as an outplacement client (i.e., your company sent you to the Club when you lost your job), you may have private coaching sessions left over. If so, meet with your coach for some serious career analysis.

Priorities, Perspective and Planning

The point of planning your career is to make sure that your work provides you with satisfaction. So very many people are unhappy in their jobs because they have never put much thought into how their careers should unfold. And the process for doing so should be organized and methodical: figure out the steps to take, make the plan—then carry it out.

Your Priorities: What You Like to Do—and Do Well

Your career consists of work you do either for an employer or for customers who purchase your services directly. Job satisfiers come in many forms. For example, if you don’t like the skills you are exercising day-to-day, you will probably not like your job. If you are an accountant at heart, don’t do a job that keeps you away from numbers. If you think three-dimensionally, find work that rewards that kind of thinking, e.g., in design, architecture or construction.

Who you are working with is also important. For many people, the values of the customers they serve or the organization they join are vital in being happy at work. Ecologically minded people would not fit in well in an industrial firm that does not take its environmental impact seriously. There may be many other factors that are non-negotiable for you.

If you’re not keeping up with the wider world outside your organization: on your mark, get set . . . stand still!

Mining Your Job for Indicators of What Works—or Doesn’t

Being employed has a number of advantages in planning your next step, and your career in general. If you’re working you probably have more confidence when speaking to others about how your career is unfolding. Obviously you also may have an inside track with your current employer. Being on the job also provides a laboratory for you to explore your likes and dislikes.

Here’s your laboratory assignment: every week—or maybe even every day—**write down** (on paper or in a computer document) your accomplishments: anything that you did that was interesting, stimulating and/or satisfying for you to do; also write down what was *not*. As you build these lists, you will get an increasingly refined sense of what is important to you and what you like.

Keeping track of accomplishments as you go along is like accumulating money in the bank. It can serve you in two other important ways. First, having your enjoyable accomplishments at your fingertips will be enormously helpful in interviews, allowing you to convey what you do in vivid, believable detail. It will also serve you in your annual review; you will have built your case already, making a painful process much easier.

Speaking of reviews, your file of previous reviews can be a tremendous source of information about what has worked and what has not. Where did you shine? What problems were repeated? Which problems have you overcome? In what areas are you growing and building your skills? Use all of these insights in formulating a direction for yourself.

If you maintain the discipline of keeping track of your successes (and mistakes), in a relatively short time you will have an impressive list of accomplishments, as well as a full list of dislikes. Will you be able to have your desires totally fulfilled in every job you take? No, probably not. There probably isn’t a job out there that isn’t tedious at times. But *not* knowing yourself and your priorities is a mistake. If you have

picked a job that incorporates most of your priorities, on the whole you will be happier doing it.

“Once the hiring team was confident that he would fit in, they made him an offer.”

Perspective: The Three Things Employers Need

Establishing your priorities is vital, of course. But obviously, it is important to know the marketplace in which your career will unfold. And most employers—no matter the field or environment—look for three things:

- Someone who *can* do the job
- Someone who *fits*
- Someone who *wants* to do the job

Keeping track of accomplishments as you go along is like accumulating money in the bank.

Of course employers want someone who has the skills and abilities to do the job. Every want-ad lists candidate requirements. If you have ever been on the hiring side of the desk, you know that you usually have a list of minimum requirements: the skills and experience that any new hiree must have. But all the right stuff on paper isn’t enough. Every workplace has a culture. There are many ways to get work done; employer and employee styles need to align. Not too long ago one of my clients told me about an interview experience that illustrates *fit*. The interview was going fairly well, but he sensed that something was missing—things weren’t clicking as well as they should. In his research before the meeting, he’d read that the company was a pretty intense place to work. Nobody in the interview had admitted as much, so he started throwing in examples about how he had worked late nights and weekends—and how much he enjoyed that kind of environment.

your future, whether it is holding on to a desirable position or moving on.

When you actively manage your career, you create career insurance for yourself.

Moving to Another Part of the Organization

Depending on company culture and your manager, this can be tricky—and risky. In many cultures, once you have voiced your desire to transfer to another department, you may receive less attention in the department you are leaving. Your boss may have your replacement in mind and you may even be put on a timeline to make your exit—whether it be inside or outside of the organization. Some bosses may even construe your desire to move as disloyalty.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't try to engineer a move within your company, just consider all of the political ramifications. Get a lot of advice discretely from trusted people around you. At least as an insurance policy, you will want to have made yourself more widely known in your professional community, both inside and outside of your company.

You Want the Same Career—Somewhere Else

Although any job search usually requires hard work, career continuation can be an uncomplicated transition. You might test the waters by discretely getting in touch with the appropriate recruiters. If they're thrilled to see you and soon generate interviews, that's a good sign. Be *very careful* about posting your résumé on job sites, because *your* manager may be checking such sites for potential employees!

Remember that only about 15 percent of jobs are filled through ads and agencies. This means that roughly 80 to 85 percent are filled because hiring managers find out about candidates through networking and direct contact. And many jobs are created for people

when the right talent appears. If you are looking to advance in your current career, it's a good idea to get out into your wider professional community. So make the time to attend industry functions and professional association events. Get to know your competitors—and their bosses! You might even get to know some senior managers in your own company in ways that are not usually open to you at the office.

You Want to Do Something Different

Of course it may be time to try something else. Career change may be necessary to achieve job satisfaction. For example, if you like dealing with people and find yourself sitting behind a terminal all day, then you probably aren't happy with your job. But what can you do? Of course this can be difficult to know, unless you are willing to put hard work into assessment. Wishful thinking won't do it, but doing the Seven Stories Exercise can point you in the right direction. See if you can recount one or two stories about satisfying aspects of even the most ghastly job. Almost everyone enjoys *some* part of their work. Build on these, and on accomplishments unrelated to work; develop tentative work targets based on what you learn from the assessment. After a while you can build these into firm targets that you can focus on.

Beyond the 15 Percent

But you may be saying, "Every ad I see says requires 8 to 10 years of experience. I cannot undo my past and I can't afford to take an entry-level job." Again, remember that roughly 15 percent of jobs are advertised—either by companies directly or through agencies. Companies are paying dearly to get candidates with heavy experience. But there's a lot of other hiring going on! To explore that other 85 percent of hiring, you need to talk to people. Through networking and exploratory interviews find out what is needed—and what skills you need to acquire—to be quali-

fied to *do the job*.

In looking for alternatives we sometimes assume we know the market more than we do. Until you have spoken to two or three people who do a job you may have in mind, you probably don't know enough to make a judgment as to whether or not the job is for you. You owe it to yourself to do the research, to dig for information and understanding. You may end up dismissing some kinds of work because you decide that some central component of the job is not for you. Be careful. You may not know.

The Five Percent Solution

I can offer myself as an example here. I concluded early in my career that I was good at consulting. My first job had turned into what was essentially a series of internal consulting assignments. When it came time to look for my next job, the one place I didn't look at was in consulting firms. Why? Because I was clear on one thing: I was not interested in travel.

The last thing I wanted was to get on a plane on Sunday night and head out to a distant city—to be away from everyone I knew for a week; then come back to Manhattan on a Friday night (if I were lucky), to do my laundry on Saturday morning and do the same thing the next week. I knew consulting was impossible for me.

It wasn't until years later, when I spoke to someone who actually knew something about consulting firms, that my assumption was true for 95 percent of consultants. What I had ignored was the other 5 percent. I also learned that some consulting practices were organized by industry. Since my experience was in the investment banking industry, this meant that my commute, instead of being to some distant state, was downtown, to Wall Street, half an hour from my home. This, along with occasional trips to London (not a burden!) was the extent of my travel.

Once you have *done your research* and have ideas about direction, however

tentative, you are ready to take action managing your career—creating job insurance—in the real world.

Make time to attend industry functions and professional association events.

Carrying Out the Plan

Present a consistent message.

You have a lot of control over how you are perceived, and, in managing your career, you are a product to sell, on an on-going basis, to professional colleagues and prospective employers. You want to make sure that, whatever the context, people get the same message. Your marketing tools include your résumé, your Two-Minute Pitch and cover letters. Certainly interviews are a setting for presenting your career objectives, but strategic follow-up letters can be used for this purpose as well. Even informal chats at professional associations can be used to enhance perceptions of where you're headed in your field.

Maintain and Perfect Your Résumé

One more benefit of recording and tracking your accomplishments, as suggested above, is that it will be simple to slip your recent achievements into your résumé. Even if, during your next job search, you intend to head in a completely new direction—and need to change your résumé accordingly—your list of accomplishments will serve you well. It's helpful to review your Seven Stories Exercise (maybe even re-do it) and huddle with your career coach to get clarity on how to present your transferable skills. If you always have your résumé 90 percent ready, in a session or two with your coach, it's relatively quick work to get the résumé ready to aim at specific targets.

Contacting people:

"I'm looking for information."

One key to moving ahead in your

career is to recognize that you will always be dependent on others. Your knowledge of the marketplace spreads geometrically as you reach out to other people and find out what they do, how they do it and how they got to where they are. The most important thing to remember in speaking to other people is that *you need information*. Boosting your knowledge to the next level is one of the primary reasons for meeting and talking to new people. Approaching them with *curiosity* will win them to your side in a way that asking them for a job will never do (or asking them if they *know* of anyone who has an opening). If people decide they like you, they will refer you to others who can be helpful—whether you're actually job hunting or being mindful of your career goals.

Approach information-gathering meetings with curiosity. Don't ask for a job.

Spread a Wide Net and Build Your Contacts

Conferences are a wonderful way to meet people in your industry and the vendors who sell to your industry (a potentially ripe field for both information and employment). The company commonly pays and you have a chance to make connections that will help you. Track the conferences that will help you the most and ask to attend.

Networking events can serve the same purpose. There are industry specific and more general events are available through local organizations, industry groups and Internet portals, like Meetup.com.

Alumni organizations can be a gold mine. They are getting more and more sophisticated in providing information online and in sponsoring local gatherings for their alumni. Take advantage of these opportunities to talk with people with whom you share an important part of your past.

The steps we have reviewed here,

incorporated into your normal routine, will make your transitions in the future much easier to accomplish.

Your long-term career will benefit, and your next job search will not be nearly as agonizing as those in the past. The worst thing you can do is to try a scattershot approach and repeat old errors. With a little thoughtful planning and proactive efforts, you can create your own job insurance. ●

Win Sheffield is a member of The Five O'Clock Club Guild of Career Coaches. He leads one of the weekly strategy groups for job hunters at the Club's Grand Central Branch, and maintains a private practice in Manhattan.

Quotes to inspire you

A year from now you may wish you had started today.
Karen Lamb

Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.
Carl Bard

You may have a fresh start any moment you choose, for this thing we call failure is not the falling down, but the staying down.
Mary Pickford, 1893 - 1979

A study was made of alumni ten years out of Harvard to find out how many were achieving their goals. An astounding 83 percent had no goals at all. Fourteen percent had specific goals, but they were not written down. Their average earnings were three times what those in the 83 percent group were earning. However, the 3 percent who had written goals were earning ten times that of the 83 percent group.
Forrest H. Patton,
Force of Persuasion, as quoted by
Ronald W. Miller, *Planning for Success*