Taking the initiative: investing in your career development

When we enter the work world, we often have dreams and ambitions of growth and advancement in our chosen field.  These may be goals that you go in with initially – dreams that take form during education – or those that come more slowly as you get acquainted with a company and see what paths and positions are available. Whatever way your aspirations took shape, most of us have had them at some point, but it can be easy to lose sight of them once you have achieved a stable position; it can be difficult to pursue better job opportunities when you are so busy with the job you have. The daily tasks that make up the contemporary working world are many, and when you are also striving to balance work with a healthy home life, thinking about how to move forward can seem like the invisible summit of a very high mountain.

Another reason you may lose sight of these early dreams is that you are quite comfortable in the job you have: you know how to do it and you do it well, and the unknown territory of what might be out there is too vast and overwhelming. However, in order to stay mentally engaged and find greater job satisfaction, investing energy in career development can be an enriching aspect of your work life.

1. **Write it down.** If your ideas about where you would like to be are not fully formed, taking out a pen and a sheet of paper is a great place to start. Make a mind map**,** jotting down keywords, images, and even names of people whose careers you admire. Once you have a general idea of where you would like to go, your pen-to-paper work can begin to take the form of lists: write down steps you need to take to get you where you would like to be. Keep returning to your career plan and fine-tuning it until you can see a concrete path that you can set off on.

2. **Speak about it.** Once you have a clear image of what you would like to aim for, begin to tell people. Tell people close to you like your friends, partner or family about your goals. Speaking about what you are dreaming of out loud actualizes it, bringing it out of the realm of fantasy and into the real world. Telling people close to you also means you will have their encouragement and support, as well as the extra push that comes with wanting to follow through on what you say.

3. **Invest in continuing education.** If you feel that your skills and experiences do not yet add up to what you need for your dream position, take a course to get you closer to where you want to be. This might be something offered through your workplace, a weekend seminar as part of a conference, or even a more formal training institution like a college or university. If balancing work and education seems daunting, take a look at these tips for staying on top of both commitments.

4. **Talk to those in charge.** When you feel confident in your abilities and ambitions, it can be a great idea to speak with your supervisor(s). Articulating your goals to the people you report to is a demonstration of your

commitment to your work. Furthermore, they will be aware that you are interested in advancement, and are more likely to think of you when positions open up.

There are a lot of reasons we push thinking about career development to the back burner. Perhaps most obviously, it can feel risky to put yourself out there and become vulnerable to rejection or feeling like you are in over your head. Keep in mind that challenges make our work rewarding, and seeking out opportunities for advancement can be an adventure that leads to deeper satisfaction both professionally and personally.