

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE CAREER

As we begin our career with a first job, how do we build a career that is sustainable and what is a sustainable career? A career is a series of occupations that an individual holds in his/her lifetime. A sustainable career is one whereby the individual has the flexibility to maintain continuity of occupation; and the key here is that the individual has the flexibility to maintain continuity of occupation.

At different life stages, you may make different life choices with regards to an occupation – you may choose to hone the skills you'd acquired as a result of your education, volunteer for a worthy cause, pursue a hobby to a professional level, start a family or a business. A sustainable career is really to *live your life your way*.

So how does one start?

Set SMART goals

Having a goal in mind helps you to map out the path to get there. And you need to know where you're going, otherwise how will you know when you get there? Set SMART goals to focus your energy into achieving your goals as you organize the resources necessary to help you achieve.

SMART goals are:

- Specific
- Measureable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Timely

For example, a 19 year old may set this goal "To own and drive a MINI Cooper when I am 23"; and the resources needed are:

1. driver's license
2. time and money to get driver's license
3. money to purchase the car

Taking the time available and needed, does this individual have the necessary resources to achieve this goal? To own a car that costs about S\$140k in today's price suggests that the individual has to save almost S\$3000 per month over the next 48 months – is this achievable?

It is achievable when the individual organizes his/her resources and secure a job to earn the amounts needed to save for the goal.

We'll have to add other goals to the equation for a fuller life, some goals should be altruistic and be balanced with your personal values and interests. Some areas you can look at include:

Spiritual/Self Development – a study into the life of a spiritual leader or understanding self for development

Artistic/Physical – such as underwater photography or appreciation of poetry or climb mount Kilimanjaro.

Career/Profession – how do you want your career to progress or the degree of professionalism you want to achieve

Education/Hobby – Acquisition of knowledge and/or skills

Family/Social network – start a family or make new friends.

Financial/Assets – how much you want to earn and what assets you want to accumulate. (note the difference between assets and liabilities – purchasing an item with a bank loan makes the purchase a liability).

Pleasure/Public Service – a holiday or serving the community

Secure your first job

With a clear goal in mind, you'll have to evaluate your own strengths and weaknesses and scour the job market on what's available that will help you achieve your goals. There are different channels for finding a job; these could be:

1. Job advertisements in newspapers, job portals, employer websites, school job boards etc.
2. Discover the hidden employment market through your networks by calling on employers directly or referrals from friends, relatives, ex-employers (from your holiday jobs and internship). Network with headhunters or at industry events to present your credentials.

The steps to securing employment includes a good CV & cover letter, interview and communication skills. It always helps if you can communicate confidently and the easiest way to be confident is to be prepared – study the job, the company and know yourself. Sometimes how you dress impacts how confident you feel – so dress well (even for a phone interview).

Keeping yourself relevant

After you secure the job, work at keeping yourself relevant – be prepared to stretch yourself and work on projects that may seem out of your job scope. As you work on new projects you may find yourself developing into a new arena that will ensure continuity in your employment.

Also keep in tuned with the developments in the industry, political and economical movements and technological advancements. These changes will impact the continuity of your employment – so be aware.

When you set goals, ensure you include goals on personal or career development, so you can move yourself from one job function or industry to the next. As you mature, employers will be looking at the value you bring to the company and all your experiences and ability to do the job adds to or takes away from the value.

Also be thoughtful about changing employers as employers are wary of "job hoppers". If you are seeking a change to your job scope or work environment, you can consider transfer to another department or team within the same company.

Keeping yourself healthy

Our physical and mental health is an area that many neglect or even abuse. Changes in our physical well-being can derail our plans – so maintain a healthy lifestyle with exercise, diet and rest.

There're so much possibilities in life and we can achieve all that we want when we focus our energy and resources to doing it. Then again, life is so much more – so on top of all your plans – plan to enjoy life!

Let me know how helpful this article is to you – email me at eunicechia@pplesearch.com with your feedback, and if there's anything that I can help you with.

