



5 Lessons from Cooking to Boost Your Career

The majority of clients we work with complain about their employees' frustration in choosing a perfect career path and, therefore, remain demotivated and discouraged. We assure them the opportunities are endless, but they need to first convey the message to their employees that they should not just wait for the perfect match of job skills and position. To determine which career path to choose is no easy task; it takes enormous self-reflection, validation, strategic oversight, and disciplined actions. Even having taken all those steps, there is no guarantee that one can always advance as planned. After all, if your plans resulted in expected outcomes, the world be a very boring place. Surprise, unexpected outcome, success, and failure are all part of everyone's life. However, your chances of being successful and developing your career are much higher when you have a plan and a validated strategy.

Progression in one's career is a journey, not a destination. People who think of their careers as destinations—and there are quite a lot of them—end up with greater frustration down the road. This result is actually worse than if they had felt that way earlier in their careers.

Those individuals who lose their motivation and energy for action and hunger for learning in any age group (without exception) because they think they have arrived at their destinations are destined to fade away.

In a world where average life expectancy is constantly increasing thanks to astonishing progress in technology and social awareness, we all need to think in a radically different way about career life span and progression. At times, it becomes even ridiculous to think about traditional retirement plans. People who plan and wish to depend on these traditional plans should sincerely consider their perspectives about career progression in the long run.

Lessons from Cooking School

When you think about it, career progression is very similar to cooking. The more you practice and explore new ingredients, the better you will be in preparing the best dishes for your own taste and others. A good chef constantly seeks new combinations of good taste. Without exploring and trying new options, a good chef would not have the ability to innovate and bring new tastes to customers and remain at the top of the culinary game.



As in all fields of expertise, some chefs fail, while others become very successful. Not all chefs excel either because they fail to carefully consider all the elements of becoming a good chef or they lose the commitment to become one. If you want to progress in your career - become a good chef of your career—consider the following critical lessons.

Lesson 1. Develop Technical and Soft Skills

Without acquiring technical and soft skills needed for your dream career, you cannot master your craft. Career progression (as in cooking) does not happen by chance. You must have the technical knowledge to balance the right assortment of expertise-related ingredients and be able to determine what amount of ingredient works with another. If you use one ingredient too heavily, you can easily jeopardise the end result and serve a very unbalanced dish. For example, you may wish to eventually become head of Information Technology (IT). Of course, you then keep up-to-date on all the latest software, hardware, research, and so on. But then you forget the importance of learning to be a good manager. So, you attend a basic course on supervising and, perhaps, budgeting, before turning your attention back to what really interests you: IT. The end result is that you may become a technological super star, but your lack of

managerial skills will prove detrimental down the road.

Lesson 2. Constantly Explore New Opportunities

Being purposefully open to opportunities is not the same thing as just bumping into them by chance. One must be open to becoming involved in new projects or initiatives, which will boost the chance of meeting new people, learning from them, and exchanging ideas. As you move outward, new opportunities are more likely to present themselves. You must be always alert to the possibilities of new skill ingredients and techniques. Without the infusion of new ideas and opportunities to broaden your expertise, your career will stagnate. Going back to the IT career, anyone who wishes to excel in the field must always stay abreast of new developments, new programmes, and new research. If you fall behind in your knowledge and skill, your career in IT will be as short-lived as your laptop, which so quickly becomes obsolete.

Lesson 3. Cultivate End-to-End Thinking

You simply cannot progress in your career if you view things through a single lens. Therefore, you need to develop an end-to-end view of your career. Consider a good chef,

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who is not only good in the kitchen but also cares about how the restaurant looks, what plates to use, how to position the restaurant in relation to the competition, and so on.

In other words, such an expansive way of thinking about your career, say, in IT, implies you need to market yourself. Developing an optimal career requires an IT expert to understand how the job fits into the overall organisation, what specific skills to offer to what particular department or company, how to position your entirety of knowledge and skills vs. that of your competitors, and so on.

Lesson 4. Possess Customer Focus

Somehow, many people forget that it is actually customers who pay their salaries regardless of the function in which they operate in the organisation. Good chefs care only about customers and how they can please them so that they come back over and over again to taste their cuisine. As an IT expert, for example, you may forget or dismiss the effect your job performance may have on the organisation's customers or clients. If, say, you are developing a software programme that will more efficiently distribute the company products to the market, perhaps you need to be aware of the geographic regions that best suit your customer base and

learn about those customers' needs.

Lesson 5. Be Visible to the Right People Who Support You

No matter how good you are at what you do and no matter how hard you work for it, without the right exposure, you will be unable to advance in your career in this "super noisy" environment. We all experience an overload of noise, with everyone screaming to get attention and everybody talking at the same time, even when the words are meaningless. In such a noisy atmosphere, it is very difficult for people who have something serious and purposeful to be heard. Chefs face the same problem of getting exposure—and standing out from the crowd—when there is a restaurant on every corner.

Having leadership support, for example, is essential to moving up the ladder or into attractive lateral positions. Just don't believe in fairy tales that say, "if you do what you like and work hard, you will get where you want to go." Although, with luck, that may happen, reality is such that without leadership support and exposure, a person will not go very far. So, it is critical that you select and only work for organisations in which leadership support or exposure is not a "special promotional event" but part of very normal daily



business. Those companies that are run by leaders who are able to provide real career opportunities rather than very vague and unfocused career development programmes are the only working environments you should participate in for successful career progression.

So, as an IT professional, make sure that your managers recognise your expertise, your commitment to ongoing self-development and learning experiences, opportunities to expand your knowledge base through participation in diverse IT projects and initiatives. Make a name for yourself, in a positive way, so that leadership is aware of what you can –and will–contribute to results.

The Bottom Line

The ingredients for a successful career are simple: technical and soft skills, openness to new ideas, seeing the “big picture,” customer-centricity, and exposure to leadership. These ingredients, when blended together with expert care and know-how, will boost your chances to succeed on whatever career path you decide to follow.

About the Author:

Ali Kursun is a Managing Partner at sparkChief & Co., a consulting firm that helps clients develop competitive strategic workforce planning, talent management, career, and rewards solutions.

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sparkChief & Co.

25 Route de Lullier
1254 Jussy, GE, Switzerland

Tel +41 22 346 24 05
inquire@sparkchief.com
www.sparkchief.com

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