

Taming the careers tiger - how to achieve your career goals



In HR, there are many challenges for the year ahead. Many companies are going through change, and managing that is likely to be part of the role of your department. What's more, in the current economic climate, you are likely to be called upon to demonstrate your ability to be strategic and how the role of HR fits into the bigger picture of the business.

While the turmoil continues and in a time where redundancies are being faced by many companies, there can be a tendency to want to stay put, keep your head down and not 'rock the boat'. That's certainly one option, but another is to turn that situation on its head. If now is challenging, then it will be those that rise to the challenge who are noticed – be that within your current company or a potential new one, businesses are looking for people who can achieve against the odds like never before, now might just be the time to really see what you're capable of.

If you've made any New Year career resolutions for the year ahead, they can generally fail for two reasons. First, the resolution is often created out of New Year guilt rather than driven by an inspiring outcome that we want to aim for – and guilt is rarely a strong enough reason to keep going when obstacles emerge. Second, fear gets in the way of action, so we give way to a voice telling us we can't do it, it's too hard or it's not worth it.

If that sounds familiar, you have met your Tiger. We all have a Tiger: it's the inner voice that roars at us to hold back whenever we consider doing something risky. It offers us excuses for staying in the safe realms of 'what we know' and right now it could be stopping you from pursuing the career you deserve. The Tiger compiles and then reads from our personal 'Rulebook': the way we choose to see the world and the list of unproven reasons, born out of fear, for why we believe we wouldn't get that job, wouldn't fit in at that company or wouldn't get past the interview for that role.

But your Rulebook is not set in stone. When I developed The Ten Rules for Taming Tigers, I deliberately set out for them to be proven in the world of business, to offer a simple system for rewriting your personal Rulebook and silencing your Tiger so that you can move decisively towards your goals. And proven they have been; I have seen many people in the corporate world take these rules and grab hold of an opportunity they had previously found reasons to walk away from.

The Ten Rules are:

1. Act boldly today – time is limited
2. Rewrite your Rulebook – challenge it hourly
3. Head in the direction of where you want to arrive, every day
4. It's all in the mind
5. The tools for Taming Tigers are all around you

6. There is no safety in numbers
7. Do something scary every day
8. Understand and control your time to create change
9. Create disciplines – do the basics brilliantly
10. Never, never give up

And we have consistently demonstrated that these rules, when applied to career aims can be very effective.

The first step towards your successful career aims is to make a commitment. In fact, you are not truly committed until you make a bold move that cuts off your escape routes into inaction, and that's where rule one comes in: act boldly today. Taking a bold action doesn't have to mean handing in your notice or putting in a transfer request. It might mean booking a day's annual leave to send out your CV to the top ten companies in your sector, or it could involve making an appointment with your manager to discuss your future in the company.

The point is, as soon as you take that action, as soon as you hit send on your email or pick up the phone, you are committed. Your whole world has changed because you can no longer put your career aims off – employers will call you for interviews, your boss will call you in for a chat and things will start to happen.

After the high of that first bold action, it is still possible to heed the Tiger's roars and shrink back to inaction. And once you slip, it can be harder than ever to get back on track and easier to give up. It is here where I find rule six – there is no safety in numbers – particularly helpful. Keeping momentum behind your career aims means thinking differently about your relationships with others.

Move away from the safety of the pack, from those people who reinforce your rulebook of excuses and towards people who can help you. Simply telling others about your goals can be an excellent incentive to keep going, but, more importantly, getting others involved can help you achieve your goals – remember rule five; the tools for Taming Tigers are all around you. Think about who could really help you reach your goal – it doesn't matter if you don't even know them yet. Picking up the phone and making a connection could be the bold action that propels you towards achieving that goal.

Another vital tool in keeping you moving is planning. It is the Tiger who tells us very convincingly that we don't have time to go after our career goals, so it is vital that you take control of your time and make plans by following rule eight: understand and control your time to create change. Allow yourself 30 minutes a week to sit down with your diary and schedule the vital actions that will keep things moving. Ideally, aim to do something bold every single day to keep you on track.

It's important to remember, unless you are very lucky, that your journey won't stop when you take that first, second or even third bold action and it won't stop when you put your plans on paper. To get that promotion, career change or recognition, you will need to keep pushing forward every day until you achieve your goal. So if deep down you absolutely know what you want to do, and you believe that, with a little luck and a lot of hard work, it might be possible, then it's vital that you hold on tight to rule ten; never, never give up. All too many of us fall at the first hurdle. But if you jump that, and then the next, and so on, the prize is just sitting waiting for you to claim it.

Employee assistance programmes

Offering employee assistance programmes such as counselling services can help to avoid stress, helping make employees happier which in turn protects businesses against expensive lawsuits brought by employees for stress or stress related illness. Private medical insurance programmes mean that non-urgent medical procedures can be scheduled into the companies' less busy periods, therefore minimising disruption.

Absence management programmes

Companies, usually the HR department, can use absence records across the company in order to measure the success of health schemes and their worth to the company. In addition to internal monitoring, companies can join external absence management programmes which use a range of technology to help monitor and therefore control absence levels. The advantage of programmes like this are that they are able to monitor absence patterns and highlight any unusual trends, either among individual employees, certain departments or across the company as a whole. And if absences can be reduced or managed, and employees are leading happier, healthier lives, the results will show in staff productivity and ultimately in company profits.

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