



The Punk Edition

Dynamic Designs for Education and Change

Energy. Excellence. Tenacity

"For an effervescent life, keep your thoughts fearless, your emotions constructive and your actions venturesome..."

Creating an Intentional Career

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Creating an Intentional Career: A Strategic Approach to Professional Development

Being strategic about my professional learning has meant that I have viewed my career as a jungle gym (thanks Sheryl Sandberg for that great metaphor!) not a ladder. I have moved up and down. Sideways and diagonally. Always with the view to grow and learn and stretch myself in ways that would mean I would be able to bring more to the people I serve, have more choice in my own career and grow in the areas I value.

Yet I know not everyone feels this way about their professional development. It astounds me how many people take their career or professional learning for granted. I hear, with relative frequency, things like:

- "My agency won't pay for that"
- "I don't have the time"
- "No one has told me what opportunities are available"

When I hear phrases like these, I know I am talking with someone who is not intentional about their development. And when we are not intentional and purposeful, we are reactionary. This means we wait until something is presented to us and we react to it based on how we feel in that moment. We do not connect the opportunity to a larger plan or purpose.

People with a reactionary approach tend to just 'end up' in their roles, have no firm understanding of what they want and tend to allow circumstance to dictate their career moves. This is the 'I just fell into it' approach. Most people with this approach do not feel fulfilled, engaged or excited by their jobs and this is not a thrilling prospect when we consider that we give at least forty years of our life to the workforce!

This article centres on fostering a strategic and intentional approach to our careers and professional development so that we have more choice, purposefully move towards what excites us and hold ourselves accountable to our own development. It explores 4 key aspects to being intentional including creating a big-picture vision, identifying our success factors, making our learning sacrosanct and creating a dynamic learning plan.

1) Adopt an Intentional and Strategic Approach: Know Where you Want To Go!

Professional development opportunities are everywhere and if we are intentional and invest our time and money strategically, we grow and develop our own capacity in a way that propels us forward in the direction of our choosing.

AMAZING
PEOPLE
DO NOT
JUST
HAPPEN.

Image Credit: <http://www.susoutter.com>

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A strategic approach to professional development means that we are intentional about our growth. We plan it. We seek out opportunities. We ensure what we invest in has a direct correlation to where we want to go.

Taking the time to consider your bigger picture, longer term goals helps direct your choices this month, this quarter and this year. Time is going to pass anyway, in a couple of years, you could be in a very different place in your career if you plan and act accordingly.

Ask yourself questions, or get a quality coach to help you craft your vision. Explore things like:

- What do I want my work day to look like?
- What are my strengths? What excites me?
- What kind of people do I want to work with?
- What bigger purpose or area do I want to contribute to?
- What values do I want in the organisation or company I work with?

Let your bigger-picture vision you create for your career be what guides you in making your professional learning choices.

2) Identify the Success Factors that Align to Your Big-Picture Vision: Know What Is Important to You!

When we know our bigger-picture vision, we can then create a few success factors that help us be focussed and intentional as we identify growth opportunities. These factors help us make sure that the opportunity is really aligned with what we want for ourselves and will be a wise investment of our time and money.

As I mentioned previously, when seeking opportunities or when one is presented to me, I ask myself 3 things:

- Will this enhance what I can bring to others? (This relates to my career choice as an Education and Change Designer, Facilitator and Coach)
- Will this give me more choice in my career? (This relates to both choice and power- if I have this 'thing' will I be able to open more doors or have more access to the fields I wish to play in?)
- Do I genuinely value this subject/topic/area/skill? (Do I see a genuine opportunity for development that I will value, enjoy and integrate into my practice?)

These questions are aligned to my vision and what is important to me. Your questions will be different and relate to your big-picture goals.



Image Credit: <http://www.eatrightpro.org/>

Recently I had a coaching session with a woman who is in the process of selling her franchise business with a view to move into consultancy. She listed a range of professional development options and asked me which I thought she should do. It was clear that she was focussed on taking action and she wanted to get busy creating something new. However the reason she couldn't decide which professional learning avenue to take was that she actually hadn't clearly defined where she wanted to go. If she did know her 'end game', the choice on which type of learning to undertake would be easy.

So step one is to get as clear as you can about where you want to go. Simply be as specific as you can now and know that the specificity will grow as you do. And regularly check in with yourself- is this still what I want? Do I need to change, add to or refine this goal?

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Your success factors might include questions such as:

- Will this enhance my leadership capacity?
- Will this allow me more freedom?
- Does this make me excited?
- Will this enhance my capacity for promotion?
- Will this allow me to maintain my skill currency?
- Will I enjoy the way this learning is delivered?

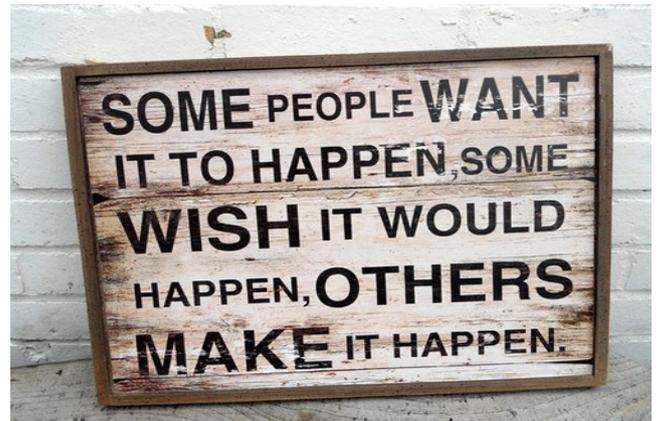


Image Credit: <http://www.susoutter.com>

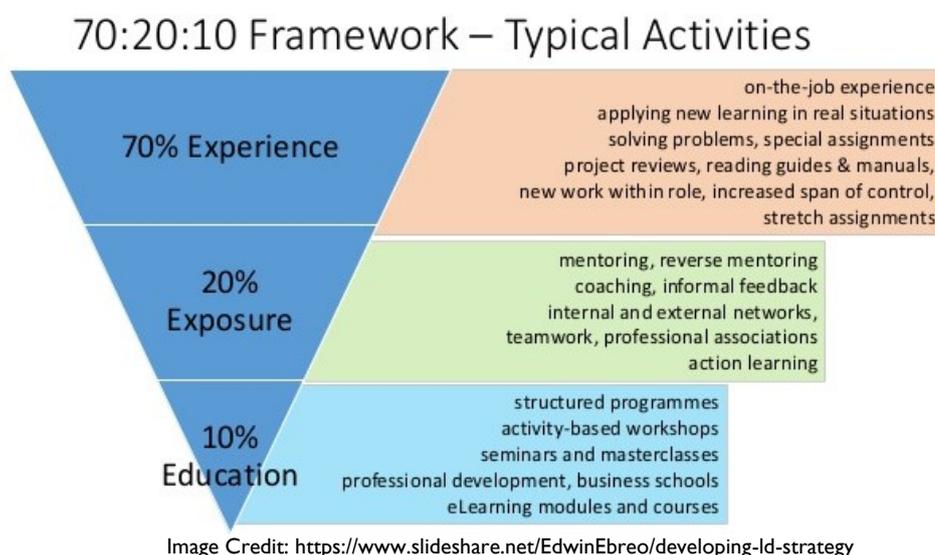
3) Make Your Commitment to Learning Sacrosanct!

One of the easiest traps we can fall into is to allow 'busyness' and the sense of urgency that comes with it to overtake the important but not urgent things in our lives. Things like learning, planning and reflecting. These are the strategic elements of our careers but so often 'busyness' and 'I don't have time' stamp these out of our schedules.

Make your mind up about what is important to you and what you want to invest in and stick to it! Do not allow anything else to creep in and pull you away from your commitment because otherwise 'commitment' happens once or twice and then ceases to exist.

The 70:20:10 learning model, developed by McCall, Lombardo and Eichinger, is great model because it demonstrates the vast scope of what learning and development can include. We often forget the value of 'on the job' learning or do not take full advantage of it. This model is a helpful prompt to think broadly when we consider our learning opportunities.

When you are making your professional learning plan, use this model to generate some ideas and make sure you include not only the 'big ticket' items like courses or formal learning, but the aspects you can make part of your routine, like reading those pesky 'all staff' emails we can tend to delete, shadowing a boss or senior leader, or organising task-teach opportunities with your peers (for example, I'll teach you how to create formulas in a spreadsheet if you show me how to use Prezi).



When we commit to continually growing and expanding in a purposeful way and we make sure nothing gets in the way, we are consistently and incrementally adding to our skill-set and knowledge base and these small 'deposits' pay dividends in the long term. You may choose to devote 2 hours per week to professional reading (say, on a Friday between 3-5). You may commit to meeting with a mentor, or being a mentor yourself, once per month. You may decide to

formally lead 3 meetings per year. You may decide to access professional Coaching fortnightly to really come into your potential. Whatever you choose, make a plan and stick to it!

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To support this plan, attach an annual budget and be willing to contribute to this yourself without expecting your company or organisation to pay for it all as this will severely limit your access to opportunities. Investing in our future, in our skills and capabilities, giving ourselves choices and being in the driver's seat of our own career is invaluable. It makes sense to devote a budget to it.

(To learn more about the 70:20:10 learning model, access this link: <http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/current-publications/talent-management-guide/2-talent-development>)

4) Create Your Own Meaningful Plan and Stick To It!

The best way to make sure you do the things you say you want to do is to make a plan for your learning. I am not talking about the Annual Professional Discussion (APD) process you engage in at work, but your own very rich, multifaceted learning plan. Sure, these work-based processes can be useful, but I often hear people say that they lack depth or credibility.

You can build from your APD's, but create your own personal plan as well. This means you can also include learning in all aspects of your life, for example, learning related to your hobbies (e.g. gardening) or personal relationships (e.g. emotional intelligence for parents).

Any area in which you want to improve in, you can include within your own plan.

On your plan, you may find it helpful to include your big vision and also your success factors to ensure you are aligning your plan with these aspects. Detail your smaller goals, the actions you want to take to get there, the timeline and the budget you can devote. Use the 70:20:10 learning model or another model that you prefer to ensure you are capitalising on all possible opportunities.

Check in with this plan on a regular basis and hold yourself accountable. Better yet, get a friend, partner, mentor or Coach to help you stay on track and stay accountable. Celebrate your wins and reflect on all the experiences you are accumulating and the quality and purposeful learning and growth that is occurring.



Image Credit: <http://www.capital-moments.com/>

In Conclusion:

Being strategic about our own professional development is the key success factor in creating an intentional, purposeful and engaging career. When we move towards what we want, we gain momentum and momentum leads to more opportunities in the direction of our choosing. This intentionality means our choices are on purpose, not by chance or circumstance. After all, "The purpose of life is a life of purpose" — Robert Bryne.



Abby Elizabeth Rees is PunkPDs director, a self-confessed 'education junkie', University Lecturer, Education and Empowerment Writer, Behaviour and Change Specialist, Executive Meta-Coach and artistic thinker.

Energy, Excellence and Tenacity capture Abby's drive and personality.

Thriving on new challenges to design for education and change, Abby leads with a level of energy that earned her the nickname '240' (240 Volt) from her former colleagues. With the tenacity of a Rottweiler, Abby lives and breathes her design projects, providing her clients with a commitment to excellence that is unparalleled. Abby has a lively personal presence, strong interpersonal skills and uses a wide range of innovative and inventive techniques. With rich experience in facilitating diverse groups, Abby has delivered a range of corporate training and developed education, change and communication tools to meet individual needs.

In addition to being recognised with numerous National and International awards for her work, Abby embodies the cliché of 'life-long-learning' and has achieved:

Masters of Educational Leadership

New York Un-School of Disruptive Design

Graduate Certificate in Public Relations

Cert IV in Training and Assessment

HBDI Accredited Practitioner

Sustainable Leadership Fellowship Scholarship

Bachelor of Education: Inclusive Education

Executive Meta-Coach Accreditation (ACMC-P)

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