

Expect Success—At All Levels of Your Career

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Admit it: for every day that you've felt disillusioned at a job, you've also probably felt happy at another job—or even the same one. As you progress through your career—moving up, moving on, or preparing to retire—you have to constantly put your feelings in perspective and manage your expectations. Connections spoke with successful Strayer University alumni and knowledgeable career experts to learn how to prepare for opportunities that can occur throughout your career.

Ask for help.

Don't underestimate the power of networking—and going beyond professional associations and social media (though those are good options). "If you want to move up, you have to look beyond your immediate contacts," advises Dr. Hermann Bayer, dean of the Virginia Beach Campus.

Informational interviews can help expand your circle. "The greatest compliment you can pay someone is to ask them to share their knowledge," says Nereida (Neddy) Perez, vice president of inclusion and diversity at National Grid in New York and a member of the Society for Human Resource Management's Workforce Diversity Panel of Experts.

"Schedule 20 to 30 minute interviews with people you admire who are in the profession or role that you want to be in," adds Perez. In talking with someone who has the position you are working toward, you can confirm which skills you need to acquire and which traits you need to improve.

Informational interviews can also help you identify a mentor, especially if your current manager isn't up to the task. "Having a mentor is a critical must-have, at every level of your career," says Strayer University graduate Reginald Stewart (MBA '05), senior director of talent acquisition for Sodexo in Gaithersburg, Md., adding that advisers both inside and outside your company can be helpful.

Don't just work harder, work better.

Simply putting in long hours won't guarantee a promotion, says Dr. Bayer, as hard work is expected from every employee. "You can, of course, certainly move forward by working harder and working longer," notes Dr. Bayer. "But at a certain point in your career, working harder won't get you to the next level. You have to work differently." That means you shouldn't assume you'll move ahead just because you've kept up with e-mails and attended meetings. You need to be proactive in resolving issues, offering new ideas and getting to know your colleagues.

If you're not strategically participating in office conversations, you can miss opportunities, says Wanda Kiser, a certified career coach and certified resume writer based in Atlanta. "The more time you spend hanging out with your boss, the more opportunities you have to learn about what's going on in company," adds Stewart. "It's not so much about who you know, but that they know you."

Don't give up too soon.

We often hear about entry-level workers feeling underutilized or bored, but those feelings can persist even at the managerial and executive levels. Still, feeling dissatisfied isn't always a reason to leave a job. "Everyone faces difficult situations in their careers: an issue with a coworker or with a boss, or where they're feeling stuck," says Stewart. "But instead of dealing with that situation, they'll leave. And then they'll find themselves in the same situation but in a different job."

Expect to commit at least three years to a job before looking elsewhere, according to Perez. "It takes at least a year to really get on board—by the second year you should be feeling more connected to a company and your job," she explains. "That's when you can start to shape the job to meet both your goals and the organization's objectives." It takes time and patience but your investment will pay off—you'll learn skills and gain experience along the way that will prepare you for future roles.

"Approach your job as a permanent training opportunity," says Dr. Bayer, adding that you can stay motivated by remembering your overall goals and focusing on the meaningful aspects of your work.

At any career stage, it's important to seek growth. "Put in the time, make the investment. Learn. Gain experience," says Stewart. Eventually, he says, "you'll reap the rewards of your hard work." ■