

Be Prepared

By David B. Burns

The famous Boy Scout motto – Be Prepared – is not only a powerful maxim for scouts, but also for adults in the professional world. To be prepared for success in today’s work world you must first be clear about what it means to have a “career.” A career means something very different in today’s world than it did a generation ago.

The present generation of retirees thought of a career as landing a job with a good company, working your way up, and retiring at age sixty-five with a comfortable pension. My father is a classic example. Before I was born in the early 1950s, he went to work at the headquarters of a large grocery chain in the Mid-Atlantic States. Today he is 80-years old, and once a month, when his health permits, he goes to the chain’s retirees’ breakfast. His entire adult life was spent working for one, solid company.

But in today’s workplace, a lifetime career with one company is rare. According to the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, the average baby boomer had 10.5 different jobs from ages 18 through 40, and the average person changes *careers* more than three times during his or her working life. My informal surveys from training audiences across the country bear this out. When I regularly ask groups of forty to fifty participants how many of them plan to be in the same job for the rest of their careers, the usual response is one or two hands – even among those over fifty years old.

I am a classic example that illustrates these statistics. I graduated from college certified to teach biology, worked a few years doing manual labor in the logging and sawmill industry, and started a martial arts, fitness, and personal safety business and grew it for 25 years. I then sold the business and now contract as a speaker, as a corporate trainer, and as a private consultant to small and micro-businesses.

The key to my work transitions, and your future career success, is to be prepared. Work continuously on your professional development. And because of the above career statistics, your development must be not just for your current job, but for your next and future jobs. Think beyond your current situation.

What are you interested in now that you could learn enough about to eventually get paid for doing? Is it another area of your industry? See if you can convince your present employer to give you some experience working the new area on a small scale from your current position. Or do you want to go in another direction

entirely? Check out volunteer opportunities for a low-risk way to get your feet wet. Either way, begin reading everything about it you can get your hands on. Talk to experts in the field. Seek out people who are currently doing the work you want to do and those who used to do it but have stopped. Ask tough questions. Find out the good, the bad, and the ugly.

By being prepared, you will become more successful in your current position. You will also multiply your options and be ready for whatever surprises and opportunities come your way.

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David travels the country working as a business trainer, speaker, and consultant to organizations ranging in size from micro-businesses to Fortune 500 firms. He brings diverse training and knowledge to every presentation, including a degree in Education, advanced degrees in multiple martial arts, and the practical hands-on experience of running his own businesses since 1980. With his trademark optimism and sense of humor, he shares his experience in terms everyone can relate to, put into practice, and benefit from immediately.

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