

Choose to Succeed

By Kathleen Brady

You have the power to create the career—and the life—you want. It is simply a matter of deciding *what* you want and then *choosing* to invest the necessary time, energy and resources to move you in that direction. You *can* accomplish everything you want and you *can* achieve life/work balance, providing you are willing to do what it takes to achieve your goals.

We all have some idea of what we *want*—a better job, more money, love, a bigger house, a nicer car, etc. Yet we don't often think about what we need to *do*, what actions we need to *take* or what *choices* we need to make to get those things. We get caught up in things that keep us busy but do not contribute to our life's happiness; we confuse activity with accomplishment. We don't pay attention to the choices we are making that may hinder our success.

Everything you do requires a choice. There are the big choices: where to live, what career path to follow, who to share your life with, your faith, etc. Then there are the small choices: what time to wake up each morning; what to eat, what to wear, how to spend the day, how to respond to people and events. The small choices seem inconsequential. Some people would argue they aren't really choices at all, but rather decisions dictated by life's external pressures or requirements.

But they are choices.

You choose to get up at 6 a.m. to catch the 7:09 train to get to work despite the fact you'd rather sleep till noon because you know that the price you would have to pay to sleep till noon is too high to pay. If your goal truly is to sleep till noon each day, you would choose a different job and lifestyle to accommodate that goal. The seemingly small choices you make day in and day out ultimately determine the quality of your life. These decisions reflect your character, your values, and your purpose.

Some people construct a reality out of the world around them where success is impossible because they focus on the obstacles that exist to thwart their efforts rather than the *choices* available to overcome or manage them. They fixate on the problems and assign blame. They tell themselves, "*I can't because...*" They blame their boss, spouse, lack of money, the weather, etc. for their inability to achieve their goals. They can't see the choices available to them to overcome the obstacles. They become paralyzed and get caught in the "loser" cycle.

Successful people on the other hand, focus on solutions to problems. They assume responsibility for future outcomes and take control of their fate. They are able to identify the choices they have, understand the price tags attached and design a course of action to achieve their goals. Their faith in their own abilities is undeniable. Unquestionable.

They succeed simply because they *believe* they can.

But how can you train your mind to believe it is possible to achieve your goals when you really truly in your heart of hearts don't believe it?

You do it by altering your *perspective*. Instead of thinking "*I can't because...*" think "*I can if...*" That change in perspective allows you to see the action steps necessary to achieve your goals. It allows you to focus on what you need to do to make it happen.

The secret to success all boils down to the *choices* you make. The question then becomes, are you willing to pay the price to achieve your goals?

Successful people get where they are by following a strategic plan. Your goals should be an ever present part of your life providing direction and encouragement. The five-step career/life planning process outline described below provides a frame for designing an individualized career/life strategy that will enable you to design a professional life that embraces your personal life.

Career /Life Planning Process

Step 1 Focus on your skills, strengths, assets and talents, not your shortcomings.

The best strategy to direct the course of your career/life is to identify your skills and talents. You must be able to articulate what you can do and what you know. While you want to be aware of any shortcomings you may possess, you do not want them to dictate your path and prevent you from following your dreams. An understated assessment of your abilities will not serve you well. Of course, neither will an exaggerated sense of your abilities.

Realize who you are—what your style and temperament is—and create a life to suit it. Too many people try to alter their temperament to suit their "should" goals. Temperaments are a bit like shoe sizes...they can occasionally be fudged, but the results are uncomfortable! It is important to be true to your authentic self!

Step 2 Know what you TRULY want.

Take some time to think about what is *really* important to you. Do not underestimate the power of passion. The world is filled with examples of people who achieved their goals—against all odds—because of their passion. Consider Neil Parry, the San Jose football player whose right leg was amputated below the knee after a horrific injury in a game during the 2000 season. Hours after his leg was removed, Parry vowed he'd play football again, an unlikely proposition under the circumstances. Yet, in September 2003, Parry was back on the field and fans were hard pressed to notice a difference between his abilities and those of his two-legged teammates. He had the drive and passion to withstand 25 operations and countless hours of rehabilitation and physical therapy to achieve his goal. If you allow yourself to be fueled by your internal drive instead of any external pressures, your shortcomings will have little or no impact on your ability to

succeed. They may present hurdles, but your passion will galvanize your skills, strengths and talents so you can easily clear the bar.

Neil Perry is but one example: With passion, that combination of forces of mind, will, resources and heart, we can move mountains.

Step 3 Do not accept conventional wisdom unconditionally.

There will always be some perfectly logical reason to impede you from achieving your objectives. Anticipate what those reasons might be and decide for yourself if they are, indeed, insurmountable, or merely a hurdle to clear. Remember, conventional wisdom would suggest that amputees cannot play football. Passion is stronger than conventional wisdom; attitude outweighs facts. Do your homework so that you know what the conventional wisdom is and then plan a strategy to deal with it. Always strive to be the exception to the rule.

Step 4 Develop an action plan (SET GOALS).

Think about the direction you'd like your life to take. What do you want to accomplish during your lifetime? During the next five years? The next year? Think about what you need to do to make it happen. **Write it down.** If you were taking a complicated road trip you would write down the directions, yet on the most significant journey of your life, you resist putting a word of the directions on paper! That's just silly. Written goals are concrete, tangible and physically real. They provide a long term vision about the kind of person you want to be and the kind of life you want to lead. They help you stay focused because they enhance your decision-making abilities and heighten your ability to recognize opportunities consistent with your goals. They help you prioritize seemingly competing goals.

If your goals do not move you, if they do not inspire and incite you to action, they are not the right goals. The right goals outweigh any excuses you have to achieve them. You will be amazed at what you can accomplish when you are clear about what you want and have an action plan in place to guide you.

Step 5 Make course corrections when necessary.

Don't run in the wrong directions just because you are near the finish line. Goals have to evolve with you. They may shift as you mature and grow. What moves you to action today may bore you and disillusion you tomorrow. Change should not be seen as a sign of weakness or as a lack of commitment. Change is a strength that allows people to adapt to ever changing circumstances. Every thing we see, hear, touch and experience is judged as good or bad, pleasurable or painful, safe or dangerous. We constantly describe the world to ourselves and every event gets a "label." The event triggers the label which determines our reactions. By dissecting the thought, perhaps we can re-label the event, thereby altering our actions and gaining a new perspective. We can make a better choice. When you learn to respond rather than react your brain is fully engaged and you can make a positive and consistent mental adjustment. A reaction is purely emotional, with no thought of long-range consequences.

Summary

Managing your career/life development is an on-going process that includes planning and strategizing based on information about yourself and the world of work, the match between them and the actions you take. You must make a lifelong commitment to actively manage your career/life and learn to adapt to the inevitable transitions you are destined to encounter. Apply the principles of career development consistently in your day to day life.

Finding the courage to forge your own path and construct a personal definition of success in the face of external obligations and pressures isn't easy. In fact, it is downright scary. Do it anyway. I promise, once you get started you will find the process is more affirming than it is scary. Take a deep breath and take the first step. The rewards will be monumental.

Kathleen Brady is principal of **Kanarek & Brady, LLC**, a career transition firm for lawyers, and ***Brady & Associates Career Planners, LLC*** a career development training company.