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Introduction - The Life Cycle of a Job

Every job experience unfolds through its own “life cycle.” The life cycle revolves around and through four basic phases of our work experience:

- (a) **Learning.** There are natural phases throughout our work experience where we need to clarify and pursue a steep learning curve. These learning curves exist at the beginning of new jobs, when we are given a new stretch assignment or role, and when our expertise begins to lose its luster.
- (b) **Expertise.** We can each achieve a stage of expertise, where the work we are doing is a benchmark within our field. Expertise does not continue to grow and strengthen itself accidentally; it requires continuous learning and networking.
- (c) **Losing Interest in Your Expertise.** Nothing good lasts forever. After reaching high levels of expertise, we usually find our way to a point where a new role or different kind of expertise is of interest to us and/or we realize that we are losing interest in continuing in the same roles.
- (d) **Crashing.** If we do not take action when change in jobs and roles is desirable for us, and we let the situation go, we may find ourselves crashing into a phase of disappointment and/or even depression about our work.

The importance of understanding and becoming aware of these phases in our work is that each phase suggests particular career management actions and initiatives each of us can take to keep our work life energized, headed toward long-term success, and satisfaction.

In the model that follows, some of the initiatives at each stage are noted. If you recognize your presence in any of these four life cycle phases, you will find valuable help at the Career Development Resource Center.

Call for an appointment at 202-663-3042.

Career Management Through the Life Cycle of Your Work

Steep Learning Curve

Be clear about what you need to learn to ensure success and satisfaction in your work.

Clarify the work interests that you would like to express in your work.

Clarify what the organization needs from you and how it can enable you to express your interests.

Learn everything you can about the Department's mission and how it is constantly changing, and seek to understand where you can contribute something satisfying to you and of importance to the mission.

Established Expertise

Maintain as large active network of other experts related to your work as possible. Include internal and external experts.

Build alliances to leverage expertise and share results throughout the Department and across both internal and external organizations.

Expand your expertise through continuous learning and exploring of related skills and knowledge.

Crashing

Seek assistance in managing the disappointment associated with crashing.

A career counselor will help you assess your interests and changing goals leading to a period of self-examination and a new career life.

Organize a professional support group or "Board of Directors" to guide you in this serious career change experience.

Losing Interest and Slipping Performance

Learn to recognize slipping interests and performance.

Re-energize your work through taking on new challenges and exploring new interests.

Initiate a change of jobs or assignments to find new challenges to conquer.

Find new ways to engineer continuous growth and development.



I. In a Steep Learning Curve

In this phase of the job cycle you are challenged to discover and master what may seem like an unmanageable body of skills, competencies, and knowledge at a very rapid pace. This may be exhilarating to some but creates feelings of uncertainty, incompetence, and disappointment in others. These mixed feelings are normal to this phase and generally accompany experiences like adapting to a new job, role, or challenge.

Key Career Issues

- Clarification of what it is you need to explore, discover, and learn for the job you are doing.
- Clarification of your own professional interests and how you want to use them at work.
- Clarification of what your organization needs of you technically, professionally, and personally.
- Building a framework of knowledge, hands-on know-how, and experience.

Learning Tasks To Consider

- Identify what energizes you personally and professionally, then explore how you can build those energizing forces into your work day and responsibilities.
- Discuss with your supervisor and others in the organization what the organization needs from you and what opportunities it will provide you in your work.
- Discuss with others -- perhaps a career counselor -- what you want to get out of your job.
- Work with a career counselor to assess your strengths and interests for the job you have. Assessments are available to help you and your counselor carry out this clarification.
- Go to presentations and talk with others who can help you figure out what all the rest of the Department does and how their mission fits into the larger Department of State mission. You need to understand the whole organization and its mission.
- Discuss with your supervisor and others how your work fits into the mission of the organization. How can you make a difference?
- Develop a manageable Individual Development Plan (IDP) that combines on the job training with technical skill development through formal training.
- Align development goals on your IDP with the needs of the organization through discussion with your supervisor.

II. When You Have Established Expertise

At some point, most people become expert at what they do. Expertise in this case means a combination of critical experience, knowledge, and technical know-how that result in an ability to “think on your feet” in face of any issue related to your work, challenge or new development in your field. In this phase, you have confidence in yourself and are perhaps the best at what you do.

Key Career Issues

- Developing and expanding your expertise through constant updating and expanding the envelope of knowledge, experience, and resources at your disposal.
- Building and sustaining an internal and external network of others with know-how and experience relevant to your expertise, and regularly tapping and contributing to that network.
- Engaging others in accomplishing your mission and goals so that you serve as an expert to pass along intellectual and experience capital and develop those who work with you.
- Increasing the complexity and relevance of your area of expertise through new knowledge across disciplines.

Relevant Career Tasks

- Stretch your expertise through continuous learning and investigating every possible approach to the issues with which you deal.
- Review the conditions and work forces that have kept you energized in your work with co-workers periodically, work with your co-workers to create a climate driven and fully engaged by those same energizing forces.
- Stay abreast of the main stakeholders in your expertise, their interests in your work, and the possible alliances they represent to further the influence of your work.
- Consider joining or forming a “Community of Practice” around your areas of interest and professional practice.
- Engage in continuous learning and development. Use a yearly Individual Development Plan (IDP) to organize this learning.
- Routinely plan how you can “position your work” for increased visibility, include your team members, and work with others to increase the influence of your work on the Department’s mission.

III. Your Interests Begin To Change

The feeling that you have “been there and done that” may increase in this phase of the job cycle. Feelings of dissatisfaction sneak up on you without being immediately apparent, and things start to go wrong. You may find it hard to read your changing interests, because of your success and accomplishments. Eventually you will realize that you need a change, a new challenge, a role that will stretch your competence and know-how, or a new area of expertise. This phase in the life cycle of a job is perhaps the ideal time to move on to new challenges.

Key Career Issues

- Learning when it is time to make some changes by recognizing your own waning interests in what you have been doing in your work.
- Learning how to interpret changing signs of success and satisfaction in your work.
- Planning carefully the succession of work roles desirable to your changing career interests.
- Deciding to change roles, jobs, assignments, or challenges for reasons that will position you for continued success and satisfaction. What will revitalize your engagement with work?
- Assessing the new you through taking stock of your changing work values, through documenting and examining your experience, and through a reassessment of your strengths and weaknesses.
- Using your professional network to uncover hidden work opportunities.

Relevant Career Tasks

- Look for new professional challenges to energize your full engagement with your work and explore new or unfulfilled areas of interest.
- Tap your professional network for new challenges that will stretch who you are professionally.
- Clarify the areas of interest you would like to engage in your next work commitment.
- Work with a career counselor to identify the career movement you want to accomplish, and develop a strategy and action plan for achieving those interests.
- Consider finding a Mentor for this phase of the work life cycle, using the mentoring experience to expand your perception of possibilities and to develop your vision and visibility.
- Form a “Board of Directors” to support you in engineering the movement and career challenges you most desire. Meet with them regularly and let them influence how you position yourself for future opportunities.
- Be honest with yourself, with others, and seek to fulfill the next iteration of your career path.

IV. It Feels Like Crashing

You may not have lost your job but you no longer feel much of a sense of purpose, inclusion, or other internal rewards that jobs normally give. Results of not managing your career restlessness early could include termination, being kicked out of the way, moved on, ignored, or just left to rot in inactivity. This hurts, but it is not hopeless. Full-scale renewal and resilience are possible for anyone, even when the person is in the pits of job despair.

Key Career Issues

- Recognizing that you need help and support in this phase of the work life cycle.
- Getting help from both friends and a career counselor who knows how to help you retool your career.
- Cocooning. This phase requires that you reconsider what you are doing and what you really want to do with the rest of your career. You need to withdraw into a new consideration of your interests, values, motives, and goals. You need a career counselor to help with this.
- Letting Go! Giving up your attachment to old things and consider how you can uniquely re-energize your life and career.
- Accepting the support of other colleagues, family, and counselors.
- Creating a whole new career dream and path to that dream.

Relevant Career Tasks

- Get help! If you feel like your career is in serious trouble, you cannot work your way out of the disappointments and sense of loss alone. Begin with a career counselor.
- Build a support group of others who understand and want to help you make the career changes you want and need to make. Use this group to focus on the forces that have fully engaged your work energy and commitments in the past and let them help you let go of all the resentments and disappointments you feel.
- Take your attention away from external rewards and concentrate on internal commitments and fulfillment.
- Start all over with your motivations, drives, and goals. Wipe the slate clean, see a new youth ahead of you, and expect to find a new beginning.
- Invest personal resources and energy in finding added meaning and purpose in your work. This is your opportunity to rebuild part of your life.
- Listen to the words of Alexis de Tocqueville: “Change seems to bring miracles all about us.”
- A new day is coming.

Guide To Writing a Federal Resumé

What is a Resumé?

The resumé is a marketing summary of your skills, accomplishments, experiences, and education designed to capture a prospective employer's interest. It also provides the information that will justify how you have rated yourself on an electronic assessment questionnaire. Your resumé can become a self-awareness experience that will reframe how you see yourself at work and raise your level of confidence.

What is the Difference Between a Private Sector Resumé and a Federal Resumé?

A federal resumé requires a minimum of 5 pieces of information that are not included in a private sector resumé:

- The Job Announcement Number, Title, Series, and Grade
- Social Security Number
- Veteran's Preference (Yes + number of points; or None)
- Citizenship
- Highest Federal Salary Earned (may be placed at the Job Title of most recent Federal job)

There are many other details that most Federal job announcements ask for, but we have discovered that the 5 pieces of information above will be enough.

Elements of the Resumé:

- Personal Information
- Required Federal Information (see above)
- Experience (both paid and voluntary)
- Name and phone number of Supervisor for most recent jobs and whether or not they have your permission to contact them ("Yes, you may contact." "Please do not contact.")
- Education and Training
- Special Job Qualifications

The resumé format that the CDRC encourages is suggested by research that has looked at how hiring officials read resumés and how the eye tracks. We use this research to lay out information in the most readable format possible. Remember the formula is based on solid research. Compared to traditional resumés, there are two unusual characteristics of the resumés we propose you put together:

- Your resumé will begin with a "Summary" of the value you bring to the job for which you are applying. This summary is a marketing statement and should be written to provoke the reader's interests.
- For each job you have had, a set of 1 to 4 "accomplishment statements" will be presented individually and separated from the body of your description of what you did. (See the section on writing accomplishment statements in this guide.)

Targeting Your Resumé

Carefully read and make sure you understand all the sections of the announcement. Getting the assistance of a Career counselor like those available in the CDRC to help with this process will help you make a more effective resumé. Determine how you are best qualified for the position and plan how you will make that "good fit" apparent in your resumé. Think about what accomplishments you want to present to convince the hiring official you are the best qualified applicant in the applicant pool.

Guide To Writing a Federal Resumé

Guide for Writing a Summary Statement

1. How Do You Want Your Reader To Perceive You Professionally?

Begin your summary with a title or professional designation that instantly gives you professional recognition, e.g., “Senior Federal Financial Management professional” with. . . ; “Office Management Professional to Senior Staff,” with. . . ; “Award-winning Project Manager,” with. . . .

2. Thumbnail Sketch of Where Your Experience Has Been

Attached to the professional designation with which you began, you might add a thumbnail list of your experience sectors. Here you are trying to give an instant picture of the breadth of experience you have had. In deciding what to couple with your professional designation ask yourself the question, “What picture of my experience do I want to paint?”

3. Your Most Notable Track Record

Where have you accomplished the most? Your track record may be highly different fields, industries, skill sets, or kinds of accomplishments for which you are best known. Give serious thought to what your target job is looking for and the track record that best matches what they want and need.

4. Strongest Abilities

What knowledge, skills, and abilities have been demonstrated through your experience? Look at the prospective job description and questionnaire or ranking factors; what are they looking for? Can you name those as your strongest skills?

5. Work Attributes and Performance Habits

Do not sell yourself short, but remember to mention only those attributes for which you can offer some real examples from your experience.

6. Special Credentials or Certifications, Languages, Designations

Your Security Clearance specified in bold print at the end of your summary is highly effective. What level of facility do you have with what languages? Are you certified at something in demand, e.g., A+ Computer Certification, Network Administrator, Federal Budget Management, Mediation, etc.

Guide To Writing a Federal Resumé

Sample Resumé Format

Phone	Name Address Email Address	Phone
Job Announcement No., Title, Series, Grade		SSN xxx-xx-xxxx
Veteran's Preference: (Yes + number of points; None)		U.S. Citizen

SUMMARY

This section will contain a marketing summary of your best qualifications for your target job, stated so that it provokes the reader's interest in your qualifications.

EXPERIENCE

Job Title, Current Series and Grade	Dates of Employment
Employing Organization and Agency	City and State Location

Supervisor: Name and Phone Number (You may contact or Please do not contact.)

This section will include a brief description of your major job responsibilities, place in order of their relevance to the target job. Use as many words as you can legitimately include from the job description and questionnaire.

- Accomplishment Statement.
- Accomplishment Statement.

Job Title	Dates of Employment
Employment Organization and Specific Agency	Location

(continue)

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

B.S., Liberal Arts, 1999
Central University, Hometown, Virginia

High School Diploma, 1994
Senior High School, Washington, DC

Guide To Writing a Federal Resumé

Resumé Checklist

- Craft your marketing summary so that it provokes interest. Almost all hiring officials will take this statement seriously, and you will see evidence of that in an interview. The summary creates more interest than the rest of your resumé.
- In writing your accomplishment statements, do not forget to specify the results or outcome and how it made a difference in your organization or in your work. Use the Situation-Action-Results formula described in the Accomplishment Statement worksheet in this guide.
- After you have written your base document, review the job announcement. Make a “key words and phrases” from the Job Description in the announcement and from the Ranking Factors or the Self-Rating Questionnaire. Be sure your resumé employs the use of their language instead of equivalent language you may have used. You want your job descriptions and Ranking Factors to sound like their job.
- Have you used “key words and phrases” in your resumé. Equivalent terms to those terms that are used in the Job Announcement are not as powerful as using their exact terminology and phrases.
- Follow up on your application, and if you get an interview and have been required to use an electronic resumé format, try to provide the actual hiring panel or official with your full marketing resumé in hard copy prior to the interview.
- Make a checklist of the documents required for each application package. Double check to make sure you have not left out a required document, otherwise your application will be rejected.

Writing Effective Accomplishment Statements

What is an Accomplishment Statement?

An accomplishment statement is a summary statement about a special situation you handled or helped to handle that resulted in something that made a difference to the work you are assigned to do or to the mission you serve. The situation could be a challenge you accepted (with or without others), a problem you resolved, an opportunity you seized and brought to fruition, and/or a situation in which your actions (with or without others) energized the performance and success of a mission team. They are interpreted by others as examples of what you can “get done” when you put your mind to it and the value you add to a mission team. Accomplishments are a better illustration of your performance and value to an organization than faithfully performing all of your assigned tasks and roles.

How To Use Accomplishment Statements

Resumé.

In your resumé, accomplishment statements are set apart for each job you have held to demonstrate the difference you made in that job. They are the key elements of a resumé that helps hiring managers trying to decide whom they will hire.

KSA, Ranking Factors, Written Interviews, and SEQ Writing.

The format presented in what follows is the same format preferred in Knowledge, Skills and Abilities, Ranking Factors and Written Interview statements. They are the only acceptable formats for reporting Senior Executive Qualifications for SES candidacy.

Performance Reviews.

Accomplishment statements prepared by an employee prior to a performance review and provided to the review manager may make as much as a full higher grade difference in performance evaluations.

Maintaining Self-Awareness.

Keeping a professional journal of accomplishment statements as you achieve accomplishments on the job will provide you with a personal/professional review that reminds you of your value to the organization in which you work, increases your awareness of your performance and its effects on others with whom you work. A carefully crafted journal of accomplishment statements may lift your self-esteem and energize your work.

Thinking Differently About Your Work.

The habit of keeping a journal of accomplishments throughout your work experience has the effect of increasing your focus on results, a focus highly prized by conscientious managers.

None of the above advantages will become a reality, unless you follow the essential format for writing the statements.

Writing Effective Accomplishment Statements

Format of Accomplishment Statements: 3 Essential Elements – Situation, Action, Results (STAR)

SITUATION:

Describe a **specific situation** (problem, challenge, opportunity, goal) and its significance to the mission you served.

- Describe enough of the situation with which you were dealing to give the reader an idea of what the importance of the situation was to the organization or team. What kind of problem, challenge, situation, or goal were you dealing with?
- What was the significance of the situation? What was at stake or what was its importance to the organization or to you?
- Talk about the individuals and groups you worked with and/or the environment in which you worked at the time, e.g., customers, co-workers, stakeholders, shrinking budget, low morale, etc.

ACTION:

Discuss the actions you took that led to notable results. Strike a balance between telling enough of what you did that it gives a flavor for how you work, but do not tell them everything. Invite questions about what you did.

- Everyone will understand that you may have acted as a part of a team or with the assistance of others. Describe what your contribution was and assume it was as important to the outcome as anything anyone did.
- Do not describe everything you did. Describe the parts of what you did that will invite the reader to ask questions. Describe the part of what you did that clearly was instrumental in the outcome that made a difference.
- Was there anything of significance about the conditions that made your actions special or unusual? Was there something of importance that required your actions?

RESULTS:

Give specific examples of the results of your actions to demonstrate the quality and effectiveness of your work. If possible, quantify/qualify your results, or give some kind of measure of the contribution the results made to the team mission.

Writing Effective Accomplishment Statements

Examples of Accomplishment Statements

to address a KSA on “Ability to lead” (leadership skill)

As a manager for the past 14 years, I have developed performance and training, plans, counseled, appraised and hired employees, worked with unions, and taken disciplinary actions. I have gone from supervising five employees to managing 100 headquarters and field employees.

As the head of the Department’s Office of Discrimination Resolution, I inherited a 4-year backlog of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaints and a 10-member staff. At the same time, the Department issued a mandate requiring us to reduce the complaints backlog within 60 days and to eliminate it within 4 months. **(Situation)** I had neither the funds nor the time to hire additional staff, so I set out to make the maximum use of the human resources I had on board.

My first step was to review the complaints inventory to determine which complaints could quickly move through the system and which ones required in-depth review. I then reorganized the office by defining the structural needs of the EEO program and assessing the skill levels of my employees. I created five teams, using my own staff as well as field staff and ensured that work was evenly distributed to each group. I worked closely with my employees to develop appropriate performance standards for their new assignments. In addition, we discussed the training that would be needed to enhance their performance. **(Action)**

I ensured that each employee understood the importance of his or her contribution to the project. Throughout the transition to teams, I kept an open-door policy and listened closely to employee’s suggestions. As a result, the teams developed a remarkable “can do” attitude toward this overwhelming workload. The spirit and determination with which we worked together enabled us to meet the Department’s goal of eliminating the complaints backlog within 4 months. **(Result)**

Writing Effective KSA Statements

What are KSAs?

KNOWLEDGE statements refer to an organized body of information, regulations, or accepted practices usually of a factual or procedural nature that, if applied, makes the performance of your job possible.

Example: knowledge of federal personnel policies.

SKILL statements refer to the proficient manual, verbal or mental manipulation of data or things, to the successful performance of a specific task. Examples: skill in written communication.

ABILITY statements refer to the results you get when you perform specific tasks and use specific knowledge. It answers the question, “What can you accomplish with these skills and this knowledge?” Abilities employ specific skills and knowledge to accomplish a desirable outcome important to a mission. Examples: ability to manage multiple projects.

As a general rule, KSAs can be categorized under four broad areas:

- Occupational knowledge and technical skills
- Ability to plan and organize
- Interpersonal relationships, e.g., teamwork, leadership
- Communication skills

As the grade level of a position for which you are applying goes up, the length and number of examples provided by the applicant for each KSA gets larger. Candidates applying for a GS-12/13 position would be expected to give a larger number of examples that demonstrate a knowledge, skill, or ability than an applicant for a GS-7 position. As well, the higher grade of the job for which you are applying, the more complex the demonstration of a skill could expect to be.

For example, *the skill of communicating* in writing for a GS-9 employee might include emails, letters, memos and reports, whereas a GS-14 application might include examples of writing that is submitted to highest levels of management or leadership, to Congress, etc., and entail much more complicated writing such as proposals, talking points for a Deputy Secretary, policy, or legal opinions.

For example, a sample statement of a common KSA is “the ability to communicate in writing.”

Writing Effective KSA Statements

At the GS-5/7 level:

As an undergraduate student of International Relations at Georgetown University, I was required to produce a minimum of 5 research papers per semester. These are technical papers that present and support a thesis statement or a research issue with little existing research available, providing detailed documentation to justify my position and information. In my senior year, I produced a 25-page paper that explored the issues of Muslim women in China, a topic about which there is almost no existing research information. The paper received top recognition and was a principle influence for my being selected for a prestigious and highly competitive, intensive International Policy study program at the University of Michigan.

At the GS-9/11 level:

For the past five years I have served as a free-lance writer, preparing text for publication in technical manuals, magazines and other publications. I have written and edited materials in such subject matter areas as medicine, the arts, politics and law enforcement. I am able to conduct research and select the appropriate level of complexity for the target audience.

In addition to the technical writing and editing that I have performed, I have published a collection of essays and several short stories. I am a member of the Washington Area Writers Guild and have been a guest speaker for American University's Professional Writing Seminar.

At the GS-12/13 level:

As a program manager with the Maryland State Correctional Administration, I have been required to prepare detailed written reports and regulations on development and management of correctional programs throughout the state. I have created procedural manuals and policy guidelines that are now accepted standards for all Correctional Administration operations. These written materials are clear, concise and detailed and convey highly technical matters that could be vital to the safety and well-being of the staff as well as the prison population. My manual on the proper search of inmate living space (shakedown procedures) provides detailed guidelines for securing individuals while safely searching for contraband. The manual provides thorough descriptions of unusual and innovative methods of concealment and has resulted in a 72-percent increase in the seizure of contraband since its implementation.

At the GS-14/15 level:

As Director of Development with General Dynacon, I was responsible for directing the creation of all marketing materials for federal defense industry marketing. I created complex technical proposals, often comprised of many volumes and thousands of pages of highly technical data. I prepared the introduction and abstract portions of these proposals, synthesizing the information to create an informative overview of the contents in order to convey the information to non-technical management officials. These proposals were instrumental in securing new corporate business, and I consistently received bonuses based on my performance.

Tips for Writing Great KSAs

1. Follow the Situation, Action, Results (STAR) Model to describe your accomplishments.
2. Use clear, concise statements written in the first person.
3. Spell out all acronyms.
4. Describe recent education and training that enhanced your skills in a particular competency.
5. Include special projects if they are relevant to the KSA.
6. Include awards that relate specifically to a particular KSA.
7. Focus on specific challenges and results. If possible, quantify your accomplishments.

Networking

What is Networking?

Networking is the art of sharing ideas, know-how, experience, stories, and the discipline and values of a particular career field with others. It is a reciprocal relationship that helps those who share a “community of practice” to tap into each other’s insight, experience, and accomplishments. In a time of information explosion, benchmarks from all sources are welcomed sources of suggestions and practices. Networking, in this particular meaning of the term, is not as much a career exploration skill as a critical life-long management habit. It is a skill that stimulates ideas, perspectives, and breakthrough actions in our work, and because of this it is a skill that is likely to be a profound influence on our success and full engagement in what we do. Networking also becomes an important source of recognition, encouragement, and new career opportunities.

Myths About Networking

Myth: *I am not outgoing enough to network effectively.*

Truth: The kind of networking that is most useful in career development and professional success is based on the fact that two or more people have experience, information, professional information, and interesting stories in common. All people, both introverted and extroverted, can learn to enjoy the kind of story sharing that occurs in networking.

Myth: *People who are good at networking are lucky that talking with strangers is easy for them.*

Truth: Networking for resources and information makes everyone who does it nervous and a little at a loss at times. Networking is not a skill you are born with; it is a learned habit picked up from others and from practice. It can become a fairly comfortable habit for anyone once they learn what is involved and how useful it is to their success and satisfaction.

Myth: *If I want others to see me as an expert and successful in my line of work, I have to achieve my success on my own. I don't want others to think I can't do my work without the input of others. I want to be a success on my own knowledge, experience, and ability.*

Truth: Tapping the expertise and experience of others through the ongoing habit of sharing knowledge and experience has nothing to do with becoming a success on your own. No one person can know it all, and the know-how that is available in today’s high technology world is far too complex for one person to master all they need to know on their own. When we tap others’ experience and expertise, adding that know-how to your own experience and insights, the judgments and solutions you explore become far greater than what we might have constructed on our own.

Myth: *I really don't have time to network with others and to maintain all those contacts.*

Truth: The facts are clear on this: If you care about the kind of success that keeps your work life challenging and provides you with new opportunities, you will become an effective bridge to knowledge and experience resources beyond your own context. The fewer connections you have, the more likely your career is to stagnate and become unsatisfying. The more effective and extensive your professional network, the more likely you are to experience upward mobility and to find the development you need. A strong network also frequently eliminates the need for traditional job searches. Dynamic and well-maintained networks carry with them access to opportunities that you will not see on your own.

Networking

Keys to Networking

Clarify the expertise around which you want to build a network of shared experience and know-how. What is your area of professional responsibility? What professional practices, skills expertise are involved in your line of work? What are your personal interests and commitments within your line of work? What responsibilities, commitments, or outcomes about which you would like to compare notes, share practices, experiences, and insights with other professionals?

Example: *Roz, a GS-14 mid-level manager in the Department, was interested in encouraging development options for Civil Service employees beyond occasional skill-building classes. In recent years she had become increasingly convinced that organizational performance depended more on developing staff to meet new challenges and responsibilities than on policies and discipline. Her commitment to intentional employee development first took the form of working with other managers to establish employee development as a principle activity of managers and sought to provide organizationally new ways to develop stretch assignments and challenge roles for employees. She recently heard a speaker address the Department concerning how it had moved up the performance scale on the Best Places to Work Survey, from 19th of all Federal agencies to 9th. The speaker made the point that the main force in improving performance and becoming a desirable place to work in government was the ability of managers and leaders to “fully engage their employees.” This statement helped her clarify the issue to which she was committed. She reasoned that if it was not the right time to change policies and management expectations to foster employee development, then perhaps the cause could be furthered through networking and alliance building. She concluded that she wanted to find and discuss the issue with other managers in government who were interested in or had found innovative ways to work within the current Civil Service rules and the busy schedules of managers to encourage really profound development among Civil Servants. Working with a Career counselor, she identified and read a wide range of articles about leadership and management in government that were focused on the role of development among Federal managers. Her reading helped her to identify and clarify the issues she wanted to share with other managers.*

Networking

Keys to Networking

Research all the fields in which the professional practice you are interested in building is used and identify anyone who appears to have some expertise in that practice.

Where am I likely to find the best practitioners of this professional skill/tool? Of the other professionals I already know, to whom would they refer me on this subject or practice? Where could I find information and articles on this subject? Where else in my profession do other professionals assume responsibility for the same or similar functions?

Read everything you can find on the subject. Research information relevant to your areas of interest and involve yourself in as many different experiences as you can where you apply what you have learned. As you read about your area of interest or commitment, make notes for yourself on who is being quoted or who is writing about the issues that you care about most. Your own knowledge and thinking about what you want to learn from others is a powerful way to demonstrate that you share values and interests with them.

Example: *Roz, drilled down in the bibliographies of the articles, monographs, and books that she found with the assistance of her career counselor, management coach, and librarian. She read everything she could and began to note who and what organizations were mentioned in her readings. She researched where she could contact some of the writers whose work she had read on the manager as a developer of employees and soon began to communicate, visit, and share ideas with them. She engaged the help of other management coaches, professionals in the field, and her peers. Her list of people she wanted to network with grew dramatically as she discovered there was a great deal of interest in her management cause. Her networking plan began with other managers in the Department who she knew or discovered by referral were interested in the development role of Civil Service managers. Some of those people became enthusiastic about her networking project and agreed to begin similar projects from which they all agreed to share ideas and findings. Roz's networking plan began to develop rapidly as she discovered that some of the young professional organizations in the Department were bringing some of the very authors she wanted to meet to the Department. Beginning with those contacts, she would share her ideas and concerns with them, ask them for names and connections to others who might be good additions to a network of people interested in the development role of Civil Service managers. One of the managers in the Department of State, with whom she had discussed her networking interests, was a Senior Fellow of the Council on Excellence in Government and suggested that Roz have a conversation with some of her contacts at the Council. They were, in turn, a wonderful source of professional contacts of direct relevance to Roz's concerns. The networking that ensued became a vast and complex interconnection of Civil Service professionals, with so many innovative ideas and practices uncovered that the network seemed like it was going to explode. One of Roz's reading sources from the IBM Center for The Business of Government focused on the growing use in government of "Communities of Practice," a kind of on-going focus group centered around a particular professional role or practice. In order to integrate and manage all of the information the network had uncovered, Roz joined with others to form a "Community of Practice" around the role of managers in developing employees. Her career counselor and management coach suggested that when a network is highly successful, there was a tendency to fall away from the connections because of time limits. Roz used the Community of Practice as her particular way of keeping the information she was uncovering alive and useful in practical ways.*

Networking

Keys to Networking

Plan your communications strategy as you are building your network, so that you are not fumbling around for things to say as you talk with others in your field. Some of the most important communications skills you want to employ include: a 60-second summary of who you are, what you are interested in discussing, and why.

Plan and practice a specific brief presentation that only takes about 60 seconds to relate to others. This presentation should express your interests and commitments that might be shared by others you want to get to know in an interesting way. Outline what kind of information you are looking for. What kind of know-how would you like to benefit from? What do you want to compare notes on? What trends do you care about? What do you care to know about who's who in your particular area of interest? Practice talking with people you have never met before. When you are at conferences or meetings, make it a habit to introduce yourself and to try to find common interests with those you are meeting. If this is very difficult for you, watch someone you know who is comfortable with meeting people they don't know and establishing a connection, listen to what they say, and then try it with people who agree to help you.

Example: *Roz organized a summary statement for meeting new people with whom she wanted to share ideas. She thought she might begin with something like this, "Maria, I appreciate your willingness to get together to talk about the development role of Civil Service managers. Over recent years I have become more and more concerned about the needs of our employees to find development and challenge opportunities beyond attending formal training. The Civil Service system seems to me to make that difficult to do. The longer I have managed civil servants and watched the interrelationship between an employee's opportunity to develop significant new abilities and the performance our organization is able to mount, the more critical the development role seems to be. My target is to find practical ways to help managers fully engage their employees through stretch assignments and other development activities as a strategic part of the organization's mission. Bill Rathburg and Margaret Smith agreed that you would be one of the first to contact. I would appreciate any ideas or information about what you are doing. I would be happy to tell you more of what we have in mind, and perhaps you know of some other sources of experience and ideas I might tap into."*

Networking

Is There a Danger in Networking Related to Giving Up Sensitive Information?

Many Department of State professionals engage in research and analysis in a variety of disciplines and areas of interest to the Department. If this is so for you, you may find it useful professionally to become aware of who else shares those issues and interests and tap into as much of their experience and expertise as possible. Sharing of this kind of proprietary knowledge capital need not compromise sensitive information. While remaining sensitive to what can and cannot be shared, there are many kinds of information that can be shared, such as, approaches, points of view, positions, experiences, etc. Networking does not have to compromise sensitive information, and it is an individual's responsibility to know what that means.

Organizing a Network

Organizing a plan for effective resource networking begins with the questions, "Who has the kind of know-how and experience that would ideally relate to my own abilities and know-how?" "Who shares my particular interests and perspectives, my values and priorities?"

Within an organization it is pretty easy to simply ask the people you know already who they think you would want to network with. Outside the organization you may have to get more creative about identifying the best people with whom to network.

You might want to remember that having contacts and people you can use as sounding boards and information sources should come from every level of responsibility in your organization. Resource networks that are one-dimensional are less useful to you over the long haul than a network of resource contacts that are highly diverse and with varied perspectives on the work to be accomplished. Top leaders are likely to share with you that a part of their ability to guide the organization through change and achievement was their access to information from every corner and level of the organization.

Outside the organization, you are most likely to learn about who might be a dynamic addition to your network of know-how through some of these sources:

- Reading periodicals and newspapers
- Suggestions and referrals from people you already know
- People you meet or who stand out at conferences and meetings
- People who are known to share some of your interests and commitments
- Happenstance meetings while traveling or on public transportation, etc.
- People you meet at church or at a community meeting
- Friends of friends of friends

Once you get your network established and you work at maintaining the network, it will grow automatically because you are nurturing and feeding it.

As your network grows, structure your interaction with the network in some regular way – e.g., periodic group meetings, or scheduled phone or email contact – so that you and your resource contacts become familiar parts of the network memory. The idea is that when something in your network happens of particular interest, you want to be included in information about the turn of events or new information available. As well, when others in your network have a need to share or collaborate with you because of your unique location, accomplishments, or role, you want them to feel free to contact you. It is in this kind of open communication situation that you will gain the most from your resource network.

Networking

Networking and the Job Search

The fact that networking is so frequently associated with a job search requires that something be said about it here.

Sometimes a person gains a lot of valuable information about employment opportunities by speaking with individuals in situations where they think they might like to work. In the best-case scenario, the employment situations have been determined to be places where a specific individual's interests and commitments can be exercised professionally in ways that are appealing to him or her. Job seekers who are using this form of networking ought to be clear that they are not contacting people to identify actual jobs; rather they are exploring the fit between their work interests and the work environment and opportunities in a particular organization. Where there are clearly mutual interests, the job seeker is able to establish a positive and genuine rapport with someone in the organization, and the contact person feels s/he has some incentive to recommend the job seeker. Then the likelihood of getting an interview and getting hired increases.

Research has shown convincingly that 65%-85% of jobs are filled through networking. Most organizations count on some form of preliminary contact with or knowledge of a job candidate to determine whom they are going to consider.

Even though a significant outcome to networking is that you will have exposure to the "hidden job market," the relationship of resource networking to job opportunities is truly a secondary effect. The research sighted earlier showed that significantly more opportunities for promotions and new challenges went to professionals – without seeking the opportunities. These opportunities went to professionals who maintained large resource networks, strictly for the purpose of maximizing know-how, and who served as a similar resource for others in the network.

Electronic Networking

Once you are comfortable and have mastered the general practice of networking, then you might want to take it on-line, since the same basic principles apply. There are a lot of advantages to on-line networking but you need to do your homework and learn "net-etiquette" before proceeding. Here are a small number of websites that can expand your knowledge of electronic networking:

<http://www.rileyguide.com/enetwork.html>

<http://dlis.gseis.ucla.edu/people/pagre/network.html>

<http://jobstar.org/hidden/network.cfm>

<http://surfingforwork.com/topic.cfm?chapterid=63&chapter=5>

Informational Interviewing: A Powerful Networking Tool

What is Informational Interviewing?

Informational interviewing involves meeting professionals in a particular field to discuss their skills, background and career path, as well as insights they may have on the state of the field. Informational interviewing is a great developmental tool for you to learn more about a field, agency, bureau, or a particular office or position. An informational interview is one that you initiate—you ask the questions. The purpose is to gather advice, information, referrals and support. It is a way for you to gain an insider's perspective on what it is like to work in the field of interest, but it never entails asking for a job!

Some people think of informational interviewing as something you do when you are looking for a new job or career. But informational interviewing can, and should be, a lifelong career management skill. It is a powerful networking tool when you use it throughout your career, whether you are in transition or not. For example, if you are new to a position or a field, it can be used as a great way to get to know your colleagues and the field better. If you are established in a field, you can use it to stay abreast of your field or to know about future alternatives for your career path. And lastly, when you are considering changing jobs or careers, you can use it to gather important information in order to make an informed career decision.

Why conduct Informational Interviews?

Informational interviews allow you to gather valuable information for career exploration and can help you clarify career goals. It also helps you uncover previously unknown areas and the 'hidden job market' of potential job leads that may not be advertised. You can use it to learn about the important issues and jargon in a field of interest. But most importantly, it will enlarge your network of contacts. What you will find is that the more informational interviews you do, the more your network will grow. And it is your network that will most likely inform you about future job opportunities.

Guidelines for Informational Interviews

- **Identify the field, agency, bureau or position that you want to learn about.**
This involves assessing your own interests, abilities, values, skills and personality. If you need help with this, seek the advice of a career counselor in the Career Development Resource Center. If you need more information about a particular position or field, use the Internet to browse job descriptions or to identify professional associations and trade magazines.
- **Decide what type of information you want to obtain.**
Whether you are considering entering a completely new career field or just simply trying to determine the political ways and means to navigate an organization, your first step is to determine what it is that you need to know most (i.e., career options, leadership strategies, unwritten rules of the organization, etc.)
- **Identify people to interview.**
Ask colleagues, former supervisors, mentors, family members and friends if they know anyone who is working in your field of interest. Consider joining a professional organization like YPro or Blacks in Government, or attend a seminar, reception or conference. Consider volunteering to help plan, publicize, or run an upcoming program. If you assume a leadership role, you will make yourself stand out from the crowd.

Informational Interviewing: A Powerful Networking Tool

Arranging for Informational Interviews

Successful informational interviewing requires that you present yourself professionally and follow common business courtesies. Consider the following questions to select the right way to approach someone for an informational interview:

- *How comfortable am I speaking on the phone to someone I do not know?*
- *What type of communication is the person most likely to respond to, e-mail or phone calls?*
- *What is the person's role at the organization?*
- *Would it be best to talk in person?*

Contact the individual by phone, email or letter.

Introduce yourself and explain why you want to meet with them and the type of information you want to obtain. If someone referred you, mention the referral's name.

Be direct and state clearly that you are looking for advice or information, not asking for a job.

By using words such as "research," "exploration," or "advice," you will communicate this to your contact. Acknowledge the value of the other person's time and ask for a 20-30 minute meeting.

Sample Networking Email:

Dear Mr. or Ms. _____:

I am currently an intern with the State Department's Foreign Service Institute. Originally, from the Ivory Coast, I am interested in combining my interests in Africa and education in the international education field. My future career goal is to develop programs for African youth. Marilyn Jones of the African Bureau referred me to you.

I am eager to learn more about the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and your role in the African Programs Branch. I would greatly appreciate an opportunity to talk to you for 20-30 minutes to ask some questions that I have prepared and obtain some career advice.

I am free on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. Would there be a convenient morning we could meet over the next two weeks? I would be grateful for any information you could share with me and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Name

Preparing for Informational Interviews

Your ability to make a positive first impression is influenced by how well you prepare.

- **Send your resume in advance of meeting.**
When you send a reminder to the person about your meeting, you could forward a copy of your résumé to them. Attach a note indicating that you are sending your resume for them to get a sense of your background before the informational interview.
- **Do your research.**
Learn as much as you can about the organization and the individual with whom you will meet. Remember you want to use the meeting to obtain information you can't get from the Internet or other sources.
- **Write or type up questions you will ask.**
Prioritize your questions so that you know beforehand the most important information you want to obtain.

Informational Interviewing: A Powerful Networking Tool

Sample Questions for an Informational Interview

- *How did you get into your current position?*
- *How did you get into this line of work? What has been your career path?*
- *What was your academic preparation?*
- *Have you made a career change? If yes, how did you make it?*
- *Would you make the same career choice again? Why or why not?*
- *What knowledge, skills or experience are necessary to qualify for your position?*
- *What skills do you need to be successful in this field?*
- *What is your typical day like? What do you find most rewarding about your work?*
- *What problems or frustrations do you encounter in your work?*
- *What do you like most/least about working in this Bureau?*
- *What challenges do the organization as a whole face? What is being done to solve these challenges?*
- *What trends do you see for this field in the next 3-5 years? What kind of future do you see for this organization or Bureau?*
- *What are the current buzzwords in this field?*
- *How is your organization structured?*
- *Who are the important “players” in this organization that I should know about? (Be sure to include informal leaders, not just higher ups.)*
- *What are the important initiatives or projects affecting this office?*
- *What are the most important issues affecting this field, office or Bureau?*
- *What are the important factors used to hire people in this field (e.g., education, past experience, personality, special skills)?*
- *Is turnover high here? Do people move throughout the Bureau?*

Informational Interviewing: A Powerful Networking Tool

- *How would you describe the culture of this office or Bureau? How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, work hours, telework, etc.?*
- *What magazines, newspapers, or journals do you read to keep up in the field?*
- *What associations or professional membership organizations do you find most useful?*
- *How well is my background suited for this field?*
- *What responsibilities or job titles do people with my skills and experience have?*
- *When the time comes, how should I go about finding a job in this field?*
- *What experiences or training would you recommend?*
- *Where do you see yourself in a few years? What are your long-term goals?*
- *Do you have any other advice for me?*
- *What do you think of my resume? Any suggestions on how to improve it?*

Following-up on an Informational Interview

Good follow-up is just as important as good preparation.

- **Write a thank you note or letter within 24 to 48 hours after your meeting.**
- **Contact referrals as soon as possible.**
- **Maintain contact with professionals you meet by calling or emailing periodically.**
Keep contacts apprised of the outcomes of meetings with their referrals and occasionally call or email to report your status and progress.

