

Career Rx

By [Lisa Chenofsky Singer](#)

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Learn What You Don't Know

As a certified Executive and Career Coach, I work with many clients on finding their way when they get caught up in a tangled web. We begin our work with a thirst for learning. We are fully engaged, eager to please and climbing the learning curve. There is adrenaline pumping. As we explore the newness of the work and the relationships that are developing, we build our confidence and skills.

Think of a time when you are so engrossed in your work that you lose track of time. How often does this happen for you? If you answered all the time or most of the time, that is great. If you answered not often enough, then it may be time to think about why. Is the issue where you work, or what work you are performing? This comes down to values, aligning your values with the organization's values.

If work seems stale, it may be time to re-examine where you are and where you want to be. What I reference here is not physical location but rather where you are on your personal journey of learning. Have you hit a plateau and comfortable staying where you are for some time? Or do you need to muster the energy to begin to climb again? Are you on the right path? These questions are often ignored until an event jolts us to review where we are in our personal growth and development.

"You're either getting better or worse. You never stay the same." Woody Hayes

If you are frustrated or bored, are you holding yourself back? Do you feel that there is limited opportunity to advance based on the work situation or management team? Many managers tend to allow their employees to do what they are competent at, as long as there is no urgent need for change. Only good managers stretch their employees, challenge them, and allow them to grow. It takes initiative to grow beyond your current capabilities and develop the understanding and skills necessary to take the steps to prepare yourself for the next level. You need to build the capability so opportunities will follow.

"If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door." Milton Berle

If you believe there is limited opportunity to advance based on the work situation, you may be correct. If it is a small company, there may be many broad learning opportunities. In larger companies, the learning opportunities are typically more narrowly focused. If you believe others are holding you back, you may consider learning how to influence those who can help you change your situation.

According to Sean Covey, this may require you to step out of your comfort zone which holds the familiar stuff. The comfort zone is an easy, secure and safe place. Many times, we use excuses to justify our lack of initiative. As you venture out to stretch yourself, you enter the courageous zone. This involves taking risks, making and accepting changes, and acknowledging the possibility of failure to discover your potential.

The important thing to recognize is that individuals need to grow. Organizations need people to grow. There may be a tendency to resist change, but growth is an unyielding force. It may be suppressed for a time, but it will eventually find its way. The longer growth is suppressed, the more dramatic the eruption.

"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." Albert Einstein

Growth is a natural consequence of experience. As you grow in your career, you begin to shift from "me" and my capabilities to the group and its influence. You begin to see the bigger picture and additional spheres of influence on an issue. You can engage in debate to try to find the best possible solution. You can reach out to other colleagues' opinions, research and ideas.

As you continue to grow in your career and you find yourself in a leadership position, your focus may shift to the greater cause or larger organizational impact. You need to think differently to solve the problem, than you did to make the problem. Developing the skills to inspire others allows you to achieve things that you could never achieve by yourself. One person can conceive of fusion, however it takes a group of people to harness its power.

As you begin or continue on your career journey, keep in mind the nature of the work you do. Does it provide a learning environment for you? Does the purpose of your work give you satisfaction? When you are challenged appropriately, your engagement is strong. It is finding this balance, in both your work and your life that create harmony.

Lisa Chenofsky Singer is the Managing Director of Chenofsky Singer and Associates LLC www.ChenofskySinger.com, providing Executive and Career Coaching and Human Resources Consulting.

Lisa's extensive human resources and coaching experience with Fortune 500 companies, small enterprises, medium-sized firms, and non-profit organizations gives her the unique ability to bring together wide-ranging perspectives on career transitions, executive and leadership development. She has consulted with a wide variety of sectors — consumer goods, financial services, healthcare, media and entertainment, pharmaceutical and life sciences, publishing, professional services, technology, and non-profit. Lisa has a passion for motivational speaking, conducts career forums, and provides executive and career coaching.

Lisa's greatest strength is that she enables individuals and organizations to see themselves in new ways, freeing them to achieve their goals. Lisa can be reached at Lisa@ChenofskySinger.com.