

All or nothing – a poor career strategy!

People tend to overestimate what they can achieve in seven months and underestimate what is possible in seven years. If the top priority in career planning cannot be realised quickly enough, many people give up – consciously or unconsciously. In doing so, they fail to make the most of the remaining options available to them.

Peter Näf

A young woman came to me for a personal and professional assessment because she felt unhappy in her current job. She was given too few tasks that matched her level of qualification and was therefore employed well below her potential. In short, she was underchallenged and did not feel taken seriously.

Her reserved manner and insecure communication reinforced this impression. Within the company, she was not really perceived as a competent high performer. Several setbacks had dented her self-confidence.

Recognising knee-jerk decisions

She held a degree from a renowned university and had completed internships with top-tier companies. In addition, she had received an offer for further training abroad. Due to external circumstances, however, the start was significantly delayed, and the offer was ultimately withdrawn. Under financial pressure, she eventually accepted her current position.

In our discussion, one thing became clear: she

had not scrutinised the job critically enough. She now found herself stuck in a role that did not suit her – and in the short term, there was little she could do to change this.

In doing so, my client acted in a way I often observe among young people at the start of their careers: she put all her eggs in one basket. When her plan did not work out, she had no plan B. In this situation, she took the first job that came along, following the logic: “Since I’m not going to achieve my main career goal anyway, one job is as good as any other.”

A career is a marathon, not a sprint

This approach is misguided for two reasons. First, the so-called “dream career” is often idealised. We load it with expectations that rarely stand up to reality. And even if plan A had worked out, the outcome would probably have looked quite different from what we had imagined.

Second, building a career takes far longer than we usually expect. Setting a goal is, as with any project, only the beginning – the real work lies in implementation. And that process is rarely as straightforward as we like to believe (see the article “All roads lead to Rome – even if it takes a little longer”).

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