

**DID YOU KNOW?** The average person will change jobs between five and seven times in their life.



## CAREER SUCCESS

# Evolution of the working species

Megan Johnston asks the experts to uncover the secrets to a flourishing professional life.



Step by step ... even the longest journey begins with a single step and a successful career depends on taking the right direction at each point along the way.

### DEVELOPING TRAINING

You'll need to bring your skills up to scratch pretty quickly when you enter the workforce, says an organisational psychologist and HR specialist from Challenge Consulting, Narelle Hess.

The first step is to find out what expertise you're lacking. To do this, consult a careers counsellor and look at advertisements describing jobs you would like to work towards in five to 10 years.

Start building up areas you need to improve on – for example, by volunteering to work on certain projects, practising skills on the job or enrolling in workplace courses or external programs.

Remember you'll also have to demonstrate your new-found abilities to future employers.

"Developing those skills both through education and work experience will help you sell those skills," Hess says.

### FINDING A MENTOR

Seeking out a mentor isn't just about finding someone to support you, Hess says.

It's also about understanding how that person reached his or her current position and learning from that career journey.

Some workplaces will have a formal mentoring program but if not there are plenty of opportunities elsewhere, she says. Professional organisations, for example, can arrange formal mentorships or put you in touch with prospective mentors. Teachers and professors are often good sources of industry contacts, too.

You'll need someone whose personality gels with yours and who has a career you would like to emulate. Once you have found

## Successful Australians ...

### Seek the expertise of others

"To be successful, you must surround yourself with capable people and ask for lots of advice." – Australian entrepreneur, aviator and businessman, Dick Smith.

### Are always looking forward

"Asia is the future. For sports and for business." – Founder of Westfield Group and chairman of Football Federation Australia, Frank Lowy.

### Set lofty goals

"You got to try and reach for the stars or try and achieve the unreachable." – Retired sprinter



Talent searcher ... Dick Smith.  
Photo: Getty Images

someone suitable, politely propose your mentoring plan.

"[Mentorships] are mutually beneficial so it's really important to think about what you have to offer," Hess says.

### LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

It's worth setting up some long-term goals even in the early stages of your career, Hess says.

"When we talk about long-term strategies, it's important to keep in



Stargazer ... Cathy Freeman.  
Photo: Allsport

and Olympic 400-metre champion, Cathy Freeman.

### Are not afraid to make mistakes

"If you know you are going to fail, then fail gloriously." – Actor and Academy Award winner, Cate Blanchett.

### Are true to themselves

"I don't think, to be a successful woman in business, you have to sacrifice your female traditions and the things that are important to you. I don't think you have to be like a man to be successful." – Journalist and businesswoman, Ita Buttrose.

mind both your interests as well as the world of work because we know the workplace is constantly changing," she says. Adapting your plan is also essential. "Review your long-term goals every year and review what sort of plans you can put in place to keep on top of what's happening in your industry."

Hess suggests keeping up to date with changes in your industry by attending networking events and relevant occasions.

### Are not overly concerned about what others think

"It doesn't worry me that people have criticised the building. I've always thought Blues Point Tower is one of my best buildings and I stand by that." – Architect Harry Seidler, whose controversial design has been widely condemned for producing one of the ugliest buildings in Sydney.

### Contribute to social debate

"I didn't fight to get women out from behind vacuum cleaners to get them on to the board of Hoover." – Feminist and academic, Germaine Greer.



Lessons learnt ... Cate Blanchett.  
Photo: Lisa Wiltse

### BEING OPEN TO FEEDBACK

Rather than waiting for your annual performance review, try to suss out how you're going at least once a month, says a Sydney career coach, Tina Monk, from mentoring agency Monk and Associates.

"It's how we learn best, especially when we're new," she says.

"Don't wait for it, go ahead and use your initiative."

You could ask your boss for an informal chat, then use the

opportunity to find out whether you're meeting the expectations and objectives of your role, Monk says.

"It's really important for someone starting out to know if they're on the right track and if they're not, to ask if there's something else they could be doing differently."

Seeking regular feedback should help you avoid harsh criticism but if you do receive negative comments, try not to become defensive.

"Just swallow, take a few deep breaths and actively listen to the person," Monk says.

### ASKING FOR HELP

"Admit as soon as possible if you do need help," Monk says. "Don't brood on it and don't avoid it."

Asking for a hand will help build relationships in the workplace and most colleagues will be happy to assist, as long as you have the right attitude.

"Don't say, 'I'm overwhelmed, I can't cope,'" Monk says. "That makes you sound like you're giving up before you start. Think about the sort of help you need, say what you want, how long it might take and from whom."

### DEALING WITH SETBACKS

Everyone runs into problems at some point, Monk says.

The important thing is to learn from them and to have a back-up plan. "If you're prepared for setbacks, you'll see them as opportunities for growth and not failure," Monk says.

If you have been wronged then seek out support but if you have made a mistake, admit to it as soon as possible.

Whatever happens, one tactic will always stand you in good stead, Monk says. "Just keep on going."