The Career Advancement Toolkit:

10 Tools To Earn More And Get Ahead

By Bruce Harpham

A ProjectManagementHacks.com Resource
Introduction

Welcome to the career advancement toolkit!

You’re going to find the fundamental practices, habits and principles that help you to get ahead in your career. These ideas have been tested by top performing professionals in a variety of industries. Even better, these career tools are timeless - these concepts could be used fifty years ago and fifty years from now.

Before we dive into the tools, let me outline what you’re going to learn. I have arranged these principles into a three part structure:

1. Foundation
   The foundation provides the ideas and behaviors that make everything else possible. Implementing the foundation will put you ahead of 50% of people.

2. Building Your Network
   The people you know and your reputation will provide you with excellent opportunities. This section will give you the tools you need to create and sustain your network. It’s all about helping people, asking for help and volunteering. No Facebook required (though it can help!)

3. Sustaining Daily Progress
   Each and every day, you have the opportunity to improve your career. These career tools move you forward each day, while others simply react to their struggles.

Ready?

Let’s get started.

Important Note:

This toolkit is designed for you to make notes and take action. For the best results, print a copy of the report and make notes as you learn the tools.
Section 1: Foundation Tools
Tool 1: Write Your Career Goals

“If you don't design your own life plan, chances are you'll fall into someone else's plan. And guess what they have planned for you? Not much.” - Jim Rohn

Without goals, your career advancement will be random at best and non-existent at worst. You may have read about goals before and thought it was a good idea. It is certainly not a brand new idea. I encourage you to think about goal setting as a tool. A hammer left sitting in your toolbox will not achieve anything. Likewise, goal setting will only help you if you take action and create goals.

Why set career goals?

- Time: you spend forty hours or more of each week at work. Why not make the most of that time?
- Money: the money you earn from your career makes many of your other goals possible.
- Impact: you can change the world for the better when you have a successful career.

6 Principles For Goal Setting

- Objective: Can someone else tell if you achieved the goal?
- Quantified: Are there numbers in the goal?
- Deadline: Without a deadline, your motivation will quickly ebb away.
- Written: Written goals have a much higher likelihood of being achieved.
- Ownership: What do YOU want to achieve in your career?

Example Career Goals

- Weak: I want to earn more money.
  
  If you earned $1 more, technically you would achieve this goal. That’s probably not what you had in mind.

- Better: I want to earn $5000.
  
  This statement is objective and quantified but not quite there.

- Best: I will earn an income of $80,000 by Dec 31, 2015.
  
  Your income tax return will clearly show if you have achieved this goal. The deadline will also motivate you effectively.
Application: Set Your Career Goal

Using the principles described above write down your most important career goal. I encourage you to focus on a single career goal at a time. The second part of the exercise is designed to help you clarify your motivations for career advancement (e.g. earn more to pay off debts, pay for increased luxuries, invest to reach your financial freedom, give more to charity: it is up to you!). The final part puts you on the path to goal achievement by selecting the one action that will start you down the path of achieving your goal.

1. My Income Goal Is:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. I Want To Achieve My Income Goal Because:
   I) ________________________________________________________________
   II) ______________________________________________________________
   III) ______________________________________________________________

3. My Next Action Is (to be completed in the next 24 hours):

________________________________________________________________________
Tool 2: Sleep To Success

Without health, it is difficult to be productive let alone happy. While I’m not a physician or personal trainer, I have the research and personal experience to back up this tool.

Sleep is one of the most important activities you can undertake to maintain your health and effectiveness. Consider the following research findings on sleep.

- Insufficient sleep harms your health.
  Insufficient sleep increases your likelihood of depression, obesity, cancer and reduced quality of life (Centers For Disease Control and Prevention)

- Lack of Sleep = Drunk?
  …by the end of two weeks, the six-hour sleepers were as impaired as those who, in another Dinges study, had been sleep-deprived for 24 hours straight — the cognitive equivalent of being legally drunk. (4 Things Astronauts Can Teach You About A Good Night’s Sleep)

- Naps Help You Manage Your Emotions
  People who stay awake throughout the day become progressively more sensitive to negative emotions. In contrast, those who take an afternoon nap are desensitised to negative emotions yet more responsive to positive ones. (An afternoon nap tunes out negative emotions, tunes in positive ones).

It is clear that limited sleep hurts your career. Think of it as “working while drunk”: embarrassing and ineffective.

4 Tips To Improve Your Sleep

Fortunately, improving your sleep habits is easy. Assuming you do not any other health problems, the following tips will improve your sleep hygiene.

- Maintain the same bedtime every day of the week.
- Make your bedroom as dark as possible.
- Avoid or reduce caffeine and alcohol consumption if you are having sleep problems
- Avoid electronics (mobile devices, computers, television etc) an hour before bed
Application: Three Steps To Improve Your Sleep

We all know that sleep is important so let’s get clear put those ideas into writing.

1. My Bed Time Each Day Will Be (+/- 30 minutes): ______________________________

2. My “Put Electronics Away” Time Is (Bedtime +/- 30 Minutes): __________________

3. My Wake Up Time Each Day Will Be (+/- 30 minutes): __________________________
Tool 3: Build Your Career Portfolio

If you’ve read this far, you have probably achieved a great deal in your career already. You’re determined to keep growing and keep achieving!

Here’s a difficult question for you: are you making the most of your accomplishments?

How prepared are you for the following opportunities:

- Applying for a new job:
  Your friend at another company tells you about a great opportunity that would be a great fit for you. The only problem is that you have to deliver a customized résumé by tomorrow. Where are you going to get all the details on your accomplishments?

- Asking for a salary increase:
  Asking for a pay increase is an excellent way to improve your income. To pursue this goal, you need to demonstrate your value in writing. Where are you going to get this information?

- Delivering an impressive annual review
  Nearly all companies use an annual review process of some kind to determine pay increases, promotions and bonus payments. Preparing and delivering a report on your performance is an excellent way to set yourself apart from the competitors. But where will you get the material to prepare?

The Answer: Your Career Portfolio

You may think that only artists and writers have portfolios of their work to impress potential clients. In fact, many of the most successful career professionals use portfolios to keep track of their accomplishments, skills and work experience.

What Goes Into Your Portfolio:

- Copies of your annual performance reviews
- Complimentary emails from your manager, customers, or colleagues
- Your current job description
- Detailed information on any awards you have earned
- Copies of templates or other resources you have created (e.g. a planning document)
- Notes on the business value you have created (e.g. revenue generated, costs reduced and other improvements).
Application: Three Steps To Create Your Portfolio

An effective career portfolio is created over time. In these three steps, we will start the process.

1. Schedule 30 minutes on your calendar for Portfolio Development next week:
   Date: ______________________
   Time: ______________________

2. Create Your Career Portfolio Document In Evernote, Microsoft Word or Tool Of Choice:
   Where I Created My Career Portfolio Document: ______________________

3. Add These Three Items To My Career Portfolio:
   □ Copy of most recent annual performance review
   □ Copy of current job description
   □ Copy of your most current résumé
Tool 4: Know Your Strengths

“Long-term, we must begin to build our internal strengths. It isn’t just skills like computer technology. It’s the old-fashioned basics of self-reliance, self-motivation, self-reinforcement, self-discipline, self-command.” - Steven Pressfield

Career advancement requires focus. You have limited time and energy to dedicate to your career. Where can you get the greatest results in the least amount of time?

The answer: your strengths.

This is a different perspective compared to what we learn in school. In traditional education, we are often encouraged to continue working away on weaknesses. While there is something admirable about that approach, it is a tough path to walk.

In their book ‘’Now, Discover Your Strengths’’ Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton, Ph.D point out that we have much to gain from focusing on our strengths at the workplace. This observation is backed up by the pattern we see in top executives and entrepreneurs: they hire people to work on areas where they have weaknesses so they can focus on their strengths.

I encourage you to look for your strengths in two areas: functional (or hard skills) and relational (i.e. soft skills). As the outstanding Manager Tools podcast points out, career success is based on results and relationships. Both are highly valuable at all stages of your career.

Examples of Hard Skills

- Planning. Looking ahead and creating plans is an important skill for business and personal success.
- Technology Skills: This includes everything from Microsoft Office to programming.
- Financial Skills. The tools and techniques of finance and accounting.
- Procurement Skills. The ability to work with vendors of products and services.
- Supply Chain Management. The art and science of obtaining the right supplies at the right cost.
- Quality Management. Delivering top notch products and services that impress customers.

Examples of Soft Skills

- Running effective meetings.
- Building an effective network.
- Motivating staff to increase their contributions.
- Delivering winning presentations to customers and management.
- Managing your own emotions.
- Stress Management.
Application: Knowing and Applying Your Strengths

1) Identify your top hard skills (i.e. hard skills you use every day, think about performance reviews and complimentary emails you receive)

My #1 Hard Skill: _______________________________________________________
My #2 Hard Skill: _______________________________________________________

2) Identify your top soft skills (i.e. skills you use regularly and skills other people ask you to help them with from time to time).

My #1 Soft Skill: _______________________________________________________
My #2 Soft Skill: _______________________________________________________

3) What resources can I access to improve my strengths even further? Resources include books, courses, conferences, hiring a coach, hiring a consultant and personal reflection.

Resource #1: _____________________________________________________________
Resource #2: _____________________________________________________________
Resource #3: _____________________________________________________________

4) What Is One Action I Can Take Tomorrow To Improve My Strengths:

________________________________________________________________________
Section 2: Building Your Network
Tool 5: Maximizing The Value of Associations

The currency of real networking is not greed but generosity. - Keith Ferrazzi

Associations are one of the most powerful career tools in existence. For a small annual fee, you can obtain access to a group of likeminded people who are interested in seeking growth. Even better, many associations offer magazines, training courses, certifications and conferences. Simply put, it is one of the most effective ways to grow your career.

To illustrate the point, here are the benefits I have received from joining the Project Management Institute (PMI):

- Free digital copy of the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide) book
- Access to free educational web presentations ("webinars") on various aspects of the profession
- Discounted fee to take the Project Management Professional (PMP) Exam
- Discounts to attend project management events in Toronto
- Access to exclusive project management job listings

That’s not a complete list either. That’s what came to mind in five minutes of thinking through the benefits I’ve received from joining the organization. You can benefit even more if you are an active volunteer and contributor to the association.

In outlining the benefits above, I have saved one of the greatest benefits for last: growing your network! Often, the very best people in your profession take leadership roles in associations. You can learn a great deal from talking with these people, finding out about how they have overcome problems and more.

If you’re unsure about the benefits of networking or simply how to get started, here are three books to get you started:

- How To Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie. Few business books have been in print (and still read!) for over fifty years. Carnegie’s book is a classic for a good reason. It is well worth reading.

- Never Eat Alone, Expanded and Updated: And Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time by Keith Ferrazzi and Tahl Raz

- Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our Success by Adam M. Grant
Application: Knowing and Applying Your Strengths

1. Write a list of three associations (e.g. professional association, trade group or industry association) that relate to your career goals:

   Association 1: ____________________________________________________________
   Association 2: ____________________________________________________________
   Association 3: ____________________________________________________________

2. Join one of the associations you identified above.

   I Will Join The Following Association: _______________________________________

3. Choose the next action to start receiving benefits from the association (e.g. read the association magazine, contact an association leader to ask for advice, register to attend an event etc)

   My Next Action To Receive Benefits From The Association:

   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

   I Will Complete The Above Action By The Following Date: ____________________
Tool 6: Grow Your Career With A Coach

Learning and improving on your own is difficult. While self-study is valuable, it makes sense to realize the limits of that approach. In this tool, you will discover how high performing professionals, athletes and entrepreneurs take their skills and results to the next level.

They seek the expert advice and perspective from coaches and mentors. Many of us likely think of coaches in the context of sports. However, coaches are now active in many areas of business and life improvement. Many credit the growth of the industry to Anthony Robbins, the noted American author and seminar leader. There are also established and successful coach associations and training programs that equip coaches to serve clients.

Can a coach help you reach your career goals? That depends on your circumstances and your beliefs. Before you sign up to work with a coach, complete this checklist:

✓ I have written goals for my career (see Tool 1). A coach can help you refine your goals but you need to come prepared with some ideas.
✓ I have an open mind about attempting new ideas and approaches. Creating new career results may require learning new skills that may be uncomfortable.
✓ I understand that I am paying for a professional service. Professionals cannot guarantee your success – even the best defence lawyer in the world cannot guarantee a result in a trial.
✓ I understand that coaches have different specializations and capabilities and that I will have to find one that matches my goals. According to the International Coach Federation, there are over 45,000 professional coaches. Take the time to select a coach who has the experience and capabilities relevant to your goals.

Now that you have completed your preparation, you can proceed to look for coaches. For some people, the research process is fun. However, I encourage you to stay focused on your goals. See the next page for several action steps you can take to move forward on your goals.
Application: Finding A Coach For Your Career

1) Read the “Frequently Asked Questions” document from the International Coach Federation for further background on coaching. 
   http://www.coachfederation.org/about/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=844&navItemNumber=617

   Specifically, read the sections “Is there proof coaching works?” and “How is coaching distinct from other service professions?”

2) Search for the directory of coaches and identify at least two potential coaches.

   Coach Directories:
   International Coach Federation: 
   http://coachfederation.org/members/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=3030&navItemNumber=589&navItemNumber=570

   Possible Coach #1:
   Name:   ______________________________________________________
   Website:     ______________________________________________________

   Possible Coach #2:
   Name:   ______________________________________________________
   Website:     ______________________________________________________

3) Contact each coach to request an initial consultation and get answers to the following questions:

   What is your approach to coaching clients?

   My goal is [DESCRIBE YOUR CAREER GOAL]. Have you ever helped someone with a goal like that?

   Can you please share references with past successful clients?

   Why should I hire you to help me reach my goal?

4) Make a decision on whether coaching is relevant to you:
Tool 7: Get A Career Role Model

When you pursue a challenging career goal, there will be challenges. One way to overcome challenges is to take observe a role model and use their approach.

For example, let’s say that you have a career goal to land your first management job (or move up to an executive role – the kind that comes with stock options!). You may take a year to complete a few courses to build some hard skills needed for the role. After applying for a few jobs, you find that you are not receiving offers after the interview (or invitation to interview). One solution to that situation is to get a career role model.

For the best results, look for career role models that meet the following criteria:

- Currently hold the job role that aligns with your career goals
- Located in the same city as you
- They are in the same industry as you (where possible)
- They have a good reputation (or at least no “red flags”)

A career role model has the capability to offer advice and suggestions to you. In time, they may develop into a mentor or sponsor actively supporting your career goals. At this point, you are simply looking for understanding. Think of this career tool as “active biography”: you are learning from someone who has walked a similar path so that you can overcome obstacles and reach your destination faster.

Before we move to the action steps, a few words of caution are in order. As a general observation, your career role model is likely to be a highly experienced professional with significant responsibilities. Given that reality, they may refuse to take on taking on a significant commitment. Instead, seek to gradually develop the relationship.
Application: Finding Career Role Models

1) Describe someone who has achieved your career goals (e.g. what is their job title, what industry are they in, what company do they work for?)

Career Role Model Description:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2) Research two awards given to people in your industry to identify possible career role models. Award winners tend to be the elite in their field and the profiles written about award winners will give you a sense of whether they have achieved similar goals:

Career Award Examples:

- Accounting: http://aaahq.org/awards.cfm
- Project Management: http://www.apm.org.uk/Awards
  http://www.pmi.org/About-Us/Our-Professional-Awards/Project-of-the-Year-Award.aspx
- Writing and Authors: http://www.pulitzer.org/

Note: look for award winners over the past five years to build your list of possible career role models.

Award List #1: ___________________________________________________________
Award List #2: ___________________________________________________________

3) Write a short list of five career role models you plan to contact in the seven days.

Person 1: ______________________________________
Person 2: ______________________________________
Person 3: ______________________________________
Person 4: ______________________________________
Person 5: ______________________________________
Section 3: Sustaining Daily Progress

“The only guarantee for failure is to stop trying”
— John C. Maxwell
Tool 8: Do Five Daily Action To Advance Toward Your Goals

Reaching your career goals requires steady daily action. That’s why you need to continue working on your goals each and every day. Consistent daily action is far more likely to lead to success than sporadic sprints. How exactly do you create daily progress?

Let me share an example from the excellent book, “The Success Principles” by Jack Canfield. To many readers, Canfield has become famous as the co-author of the “Chicken Soup for The Soul” book series which has sold millions of copies. As with other runaway publishing successes, Canfield and his coauthor Mark Victor Hansen struggled to find a publisher and sell the book. Eventually, they found a publisher. That created a new challenge: how to sell copies?

Their solution: five daily actions. For inspiration, they consulted a book with hundreds of book marketing techniques. Each day, they picked one technique and went to work implementing it. At this point, they were both running companies and had limited time to dedicate to the book. Yet, they both found time to perform five actions to advance toward your goals.

Determining the right actions to take each day to reach you closer to your goals is challenging. However, it is well worth the time and effort to take break down your goal into manageable tasks. Consider the following example:

Career Goal: obtain employment as a senior project manager with a $100,000 salary.

Daily Actions:

- Study 5 People: Search for 5 people who have achieved the job you are interested in and contact them to start building a relationship.
- Write 5 Staying in Touch messages: Your own network is full of opportunities – these will only become apparent once you put some effort into
- Send 5 Questions To An Executive: In your research, you may learn that executives typically play a role in hiring professionals with six figure salaries. If you haven’t had much contact with executives, now is the time to start building that relationship. Find an executive in your network and send them a few well thought out questions.

Whatever daily actions you decide to pursue, the essential concept for this discipline is daily work. Until your goal is translated into mundane work that you can perform on a regular basis, you will not be able to make progress on your goals.
Application: Defining and Applying Five Daily Actions

1) Write down five small actions – an action you can complete by yourself in five minutes or less – that brings you closer to your career goal. Your daily actions can cover knowledge (e.g. reading, studying, and reflection), connections (e.g. starting new relationships and deepening existing relationships), preparation and more.

Important Note: Limit time spent on planning to one or two days. Direct experience – successful and otherwise – will provide excellent insights that cannot be obtained exclusively through planning.

Ten 5 Minute Actions That Contribute To My Career Goal:

1) _______________________________________________________________________
2) _______________________________________________________________________
3) _______________________________________________________________________
4) _______________________________________________________________________
5) _______________________________________________________________________

2) Set a reminder to work on your goals each day

I have long used Google Calendar (email alerts and text messages) and Remember The Milk. Another option is to use a specialized habit app such as Lift.do once you have a successful action that you would like to develop into a habit.

3) Review your progress after one week

Ever since I read “Getting Things Done” by David Allen, I have found the Weekly Review an excellent practice to stay in control of my calendar and priorities. The weekly frequency of the process makes it highly effective, especially in this case where you are experimenting with new techniques to reach your goals.

Questions to ask during your weekly review of daily actions:

What did I learn from performing this action?

How can I improve this action (e.g. different words, different timing)?

What can I do next week to reach my goals more quickly (e.g. schedule more time to work on my goals?)
Tool 9: Harness The Hour of Power

“The first hour is the rudder of the day” - Henry Ward Beecher

Your morning routine is a powerful career tool. When you get up at 6am or 5am, there are no meetings to attend or other demands on your time. By getting up early, you seize control of the day.

Do you need further proof that getting up early will help you to reach your career goals? Here are six successful people who use an early morning routine to reach their goals

• Play your favorite sport for an hour.
  Anna Wintour, Vogue editor-in-chief, wakes up at 5:45am and plays tennis for an hour each day.

• Write a plan for your day’s work and activities.
  As a student of Benjamin Franklin (I’ve read his Autobiography and Walter Isaacson’s 2003 biography), I have to include him in this section. Franklin’s morning routine lasted several hours with time for breakfast, planning, study and work.

  I suggest writing down 3-5 tasks that will contribute the most to your priorities. Alternately, other people have found it effective to write this list the night before.

• Write in your journal in the morning to reflect on yesterday.
  Tim Ferriss and Michael Hyatt both practice a morning journal routine. Depending on your implementation, this practice yields some of the benefits of meditation and reminds you of what to work on next.

• Use a two part morning routine: energy routine and time for goals.
  Steve Scott, entrepreneur and author of dozens of Kindle books, recommends a two part morning routine in his book “Wake Up Successful - How to Increase Your Energy and Achieve Any Goal with a Morning Routine.” At present, I use Scott’s routine as follows:

  10-30 minutes energy routine: breakfast, light exercise (e.g. 10 pushups), and reading an interesting book

  60 minutes of goal time: I choose one of my annual goals to work on each morning, preferably one that involves action such as exercise or writing.
Application: Creating Your Hour of Power

1. Choose one hour each day (preferably early morning) to make progress on your goals.
   
   My daily hour of power time is: _________

2. Write out the activities of your hour of power routine. For the best results, I encourage you to start with an activities to wake yourself up and allocate some time to your goals

   Activity 1: ______________________________________________________________
   Activity 2: ______________________________________________________________
   Activity 3: ______________________________________________________________
Tool 10: Allocate Time and Money to Lifelong Learning

“Invest 3% of your income in yourself (self-development) in order to guarantee your future.”

— Brian Tracy

Lifelong learning is a powerful tool to advance your career. Here are 12 ways to add lifelong learning to your life.

1. Block 1-2 hours on a weekend morning for study.

2. Learn technical skills by taking a course through Udemy.com or Lynda.com.

3. Take an evening course at a local college or university.

4. Buy a book about your field and go through it to take notes.

5. Re-read a classic book in your field (e.g. “Getting Things Done” by David Allen is worth reading several times).

6. Search Meetup.com for events related to your career (Meetup is an especially good resource for those with technology interests).

7. Attend a seminar or presentation given by a professional association.

8. Teach someone else a few of your skills (articulating your skill and teaching it to someone else pushes you to acquire a deeper understanding).

9. Investigate learning and training courses provided by your employer (large organizations and companies often training courses at no cost to staff but you have to request them).

10. Ask a fellow professional for a recommendation for a book, course or event they found valuable.

11. Attend a webinar presentation about your professional or industry

12. Earn a certification related to your industry (e.g. the Project Management Professional [PMP] certification from the Project Management Institute).

As the above suggestions show, there are many options you can pursue to advance your career goals. There are options available to fit all budgets – there’s no need to go into debt for a MBA degree.
Application: Create Your Lifetime Learning Plan in 5 Steps

1. Write down your career goal (see Tool #1)

   My Career Goal Is:
   
   ________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________

2. Write down four learning options that will help you reach your goal:

   Option 1: ________________________________________________________________________
   Option 2: ________________________________________________________________________
   Option 3: ________________________________________________________________________
   Option 4: ________________________________________________________________________

3. Choose one learning option to implement next month. I recommend starting by choosing an option that costs less than $100.

   Next month, I will learn: ________________________________________________________________________

4. Determine the approximate time and money required to implement the learning option

   Time (hours) required: ______
   Cost (money) required: ______

5. Save up the money for the learning option and schedule it on your calendar.

   I will save the following amount of money so that I can “learn to earn”:
   
   ________________________________________________________________________

   I will work on my learning on the following date:
   
   ________________________________________________________________________