

Time for Your Lifework Check-Up

By Leonard Lang

We all know about getting regular check ups for our health—physicals, vision exams, hearing exams. Your lifework is also worthy of a regular check up to make sure everything is healthy and that you are doing what you need to do to continue to take care of yourself.

The good news is that you don't need an insurance plan, and you don't have to sit around half-naked in a cold office waiting for a doctor in order to do a LIFEWORk CHECK-UP.

Everyone will benefit from a lifework check-up once a year. Even if you are not considering any change, with the volatility of today's job market that downsizes people en masse on the one hand, and the happy possibility that you might suddenly learn about a great new job opening on the other, you'll want to be prepared for change instead of caught off guard.

Your LIFEWORk CHECK-UP requires 7 steps to complete. In this article, we'll cover the first 3 steps. Next time, we'll cover the remaining 4 steps.

1. Review your lifework and job goals.

- Check in with yourself about your career direction and see if you might be ready for a change in course.
- If you've written down goals and have a lifework (or personal mission) statement, see if they still pass the gut-check test—they feel right when someone reads them to you and you really listen to what was said. If they do, great. If you feel a bit uneasy about anything, notice what that uneasiness is about and see if you can improve your statement or goals to deal with that.
- If you don't have anything written to check with, jot down your goals for the next year, 3 years, 5 years. Where do you want to be? What do you want to be doing? What do you want to learn or try? What kind of salary do you want? **Make it fun.** Instead of listing things, spend 10 minutes writing down what a specific day will look like 1 year (or more) from now if everything goes well.

2. Review (or create) your lifework action plan

- Don't get weighed down by this. If things are going well, all you may need is some notes on when you'll have to do what to make sure things keep going the way you like, such as building your 401K for retirement, or getting updated on your software skills, or planning to start your own consulting business.
- If you have no plan at all, start easy. Just think about the main things you may need to do in the coming year to get to your goals. List them. Then give yourself timelines for when you'll start doing

each action and when you expect you can complete each. If it begins to look overwhelming, either you have too much laid out, or you're looking at everything at once and might want to just concentrate on the next 3 months.

3. Review your resume. Update. Revise.

- I can hear the groans on this one. But you don't want to hear that the great job opportunity that just came out of nowhere requires you to submit a resume TODAY, and you haven't updated, let alone revised, your resume in 5 years. Make it easy on yourself and update it once a year no matter what.
- Don't just put in your latest job title or the current year. Rethink the focus on how you might highlight more recent, important accomplishments.
- You may also want to rewrite any sections to make them point more clearly to current job goals.
 - i. For instance, in your old resume, let's say you wanted to emphasize your financial responsibility. To do so, you summarized how you had completed a project on time and on budget. Now, though, you might be pushing for a job in management that requires bringing together a variety of people who don't know how to work together. So you might take the same example and add to it the fact that you had successfully led a new, untested multi-department team to complete the project.
- Have someone review the resume for technical glitches and to ask you questions about anything that seems fuzzy, too general, confusing or negative.

4. Review your current job in detail and, in conjunction with your larger lifework goals and action plan, determine if you need to talk with your boss about any changes you'd like.

- Look at such things as:
 - What you might want to learn that will help you expand your skills for your own and the organization's benefit
 - New job responsibilities you want or tasks you'd like to start doing
 - Current responsibilities and tasks you'd like to pass on to someone else
 - When you would be ready for changes, and how these might affect salary/benefits
- You may have had a job review recently, but this will prepare you for the next one or help you decide if you want to discuss a particular issue sooner.

5. Check in about the latest changes and opportunities in your profession or field.

- Things change so rapidly today that even if you adore your current job, you may find yourself left behind with outdated skills or an outsourced job. This part of the check-up can be ongoing, especially keeping up with colleagues and coworkers. But if you haven't paid attention, make a special effort at least yearly to check in with want ads, colleagues, professional groups, professional magazines, etc.

6. Where appropriate, get new (or update old) letters of recommendation.

- Even if you will need a more customized letter again later when applying for a specific job, your writers will be able to tweak a recent letter quickly in most cases, while writing one from scratch at that time will take much longer and be less likely to be effective.
- On the other hand, you may not want to ask a current boss for a recommendation unless you know you can explain what you're doing so it won't set off alarm bells about your preparing to leave.

7. Take time to appreciate all you've accomplished in the past year and time to appreciate where you are now.

- For one day, forget about the negatives about your job or career—have some fun. Hold a celebration for yourself. Treat yourself to something nice.
- Take time to notice all the great things you've accomplished and all the great things about your current job or work situation.

Some of these 7 steps may be more relevant to your individual needs than others. But **at least think about each of these 7 steps**. That way you'll be moving toward your goals all year and will be prepared for sudden opportunities that may come your way as well as unexpected downsizing or job changes.

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