


THE MAGAZINE FOR THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

CareerMatters



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HOW DO WE PLAN FOR THE UNPLANNED?



**CAROLINE GREEN
CONSIDERS HOW
TO BUILD AN
AGILE CAREER
TO DEAL WITH
UNEXPECTED
CHANGE**



Sitting on that famous red couch, appearing on the BBC as their career development expert, should have been one of the highlights of my career. Whilst it was an honour to represent the CDI and my own business on A-Level results day 2022, there was more to the story. I wasn't so much sitting on the couch as perched in agony. It was the start of a two-month health tornado that left my plans in its wake.

Thankfully I'm better now, but it got me thinking. We talk to clients a lot about planned career change, but what about those unexpected career moments? Within the careers sector we're used to constant change and with an added backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, cost of living crisis and a seemingly endless rotation of Government Ministers, the workplace is unsurprisingly unsettled. This can create unplanned

changes in career direction, unexpected redundancy or even health issues. So, with all this going on, how do you prepare yourself or your clients for an enemy you can't see? The answer is surprisingly simple; lay the foundations for an agile career. Or as a client recently phrased it, 'you don't learn to fight when you're already in the war'. Approaching unplanned career change is much the same; get ready before it happens.

Flexibility is key

We've been celebrating 100 years of careers and during that time, the concept of a job for life has evolved. We're now faced with a career trajectory looking more fractured than ever before. It's what makes working in the world of careers so exciting but can cause our clients a real headache. Unless they shift focus.

Moving away from the idea of having their whole life planned out by the end of Year 11 or knowing exactly what job title to search for further down the line, the focus needs to shift to adopting a flexible mindset. With values, supported by transferable skills, at the core of an agile career, you or your client will be able to shift and pivot with a career, whatever the cause of the change. Understanding my desire to help others as a core value shows why I love working in careers and gives me a platform to springboard a new career if that was ever to end.

Developing that sort of self-awareness is a tangible way you can support clients. Daniel Goleman takes this one stage further in his work on Emotional Intelligence (EI). With five foundations at its core, including self-awareness, developing EI provides an opportunity to not only deal with, but embrace, change. With this you can lead a pathway to an agile career by supporting a client to identify their values, strengths and how to build on them with a strong transferable skillset, whilst also addressing any blind spots.

Not all superheroes wear tights

Transferable skills and strengths are like superpowers for an agile career. Whilst you don't have to be a tights-wearing superhero, making sure you or your client remembers how great they are is important, as is the need for a growth and learning mindset to overcome those blind spots, so that if the changes afoot mean you're not sure how to do something yet, you certainly have the ability to learn how. It's important to let future employers know that too; I never write a CV for a client without stating that the client has the desire and ability to learn and grow.

Indeed, your clients knowing about their strengths is one thing but letting others know is even more crucial. Encourage them to be 'unashamedly them' in everything they do and develop their personal brand so that everyone knows what that is. A conversation I regularly have with clients is about their use of LinkedIn. Few use it for anything other than job hunting when they're seeking a new role.

They're missing a trick.

Building a personal brand on all social media platforms, as well as in person networking, is crucial to building an agile career which can deal with unexpected challenges. Whether the challenge is planned career change, redundancy, or ill health, having prepared your personal brand ahead of when you need to utilise it is vital. In developing a personal brand, you show the world who you are, what you stand for and what you're capable of. People want to do business with people; becoming liked, known, and trusted will help individuals weather the career storms with greater ease.

Be courageous

But as great as someone might be, and as much as they need to sell their brand, there will be times when everyone feels less confident. It's useful at these times to encourage clients to push forward with courage and to adopt a growth mindset where failure is an opportunity to learn. I often support employers who are struggling



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Sitting on that famous red couch, appearing on the BBC as their career development expert

with employees, particularly Generation Z, who are simply too afraid to try in case they fail. And it's holding both them and their employers back.

Encouraging employers to build psychological safety and trust amongst their team will support those individuals to take more of a risk. And sometimes that risk pays off, even if a 'failure' or a change doesn't feel great at the time; often better things come, like a phoenix from the ashes. I was devastated to postpone selling a development programme due to my health issues, but it gave me the time and space I needed to revisit the programme, tweak it, and have something I'm much happier to be delivering in the Spring.

The importance of resilience

Dealing with change can be tough, so it's good to keep check of work/life balance and assess resilience levels. Supporting clients with evaluating their resilience levels will help you and them work out what headspace they are in for making career decisions.

When it comes to resilience, we need to not over promise and under deliver. Many in this sector hold helping people as a key value and sometimes that desire can take over. We must remember that another key approach to an agile career is sometimes in taking small steps, rather than giant leaps, to future career happiness. Sadly, we can't always solve the world in one session. We can however help our clients to lay the foundations to building a pathway to a fulfilling and agile career where they can achieve success, whatever planned or unplanned changes, may occur.

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