

Dear Coach

What are your career aspirations? How are you going to reach those goals? This column will guide you to a new career stage. //

T+D WANTS YOUR STORY!

T+D is looking for workplace learning and performance professionals to contribute to this column. Are you anticipating a move into e-learning? Are you a recent graduate who wants to become a designer, presenter, or trainer? Are you a corporate trainer transitioning into a career as a consultant or entrepreneur?

We want to hear about your aspirations and help you with the challenges you face in your pursuit of those goals. Send your career path story to mailbox@astd.org.

Dear Coach,

I am interested in a career in training and development and consulting, but I am not sure where to begin. I have a degree in workforce education and development with a specialty in training and development and would like to move my career in a new direction. Should I focus on getting certification first? I am currently employed as an assistant administrator and customer relations manager for a long-term-care pharmacy.

Through my 17 years of experience as a certified pharmacy technician, I have moved into management roles as a customer relations manager, medical records manager, equipment manager, shipping manager, and technician supervisor. I also have experience in sales and marketing and with human resource issues. The knowledge and experience gained in this profession has allowed me to provide effective leadership, com-

municate with others, overcome many challenges, and enhance not only the growth of my company, but also my own personal growth.

My role as an assistant administrator allows me to work side-by-side with the executive director to develop and implement changes for our new pharmacy system from an information technology standpoint, manage and train staff to provide quality customer care, and address any issues between the pharmacy and our customers.

In my role as customer relations and medical records manager, I work closely with long-term care administrators to provide adequate leadership and training through orientations and classes for staff, develop policy and procedures for medication administration, review facility staff charting and procedures, and network at vendor events. As an equipment and shipping manager, I am involved with purchasing and maintaining equipment, writing vendor contracts, developing and implementing spreadsheets of historical data, monitoring and training staff, and developing and implementing policies and procedures.

Over the years, I have developed a desire to move into training. I enjoy talking to and meeting people, and providing the tools to develop skills and enhance growth and knowledge with encouragement along the way. I have found that, as a leader, I enjoy

introducing new concepts and educating others.

The curriculum for my workforce education and development degree focused on the ADDIE model and other approaches to instructional development and design in a business setting, and training methods and techniques. I was able to fulfill requirements for an internship with a local technical college, which allowed me to gain hands-on experience with writing objectives, analyzing material, and implementing changes. I do not have any specialized [training] certifications.

I need advice about my future direction. I feel that if I were to get certified as a learning professional, my horizons may broaden. I am also considering going back to school to obtain a master's degree. I really want to be able to transition into training and development with the possibility of teaching and consulting in different organizations. Eventually, I want to start my own business. For this to happen, I feel that I need to gain more experience (I would consider shadowing someone) and begin to network more. I have also considered joining a local networking organization for trainers.

I need to determine the appropriate direction for a concrete plan that I can begin to implement. I want to gain more authenticity, value, credibility, and a feeling of accomplishment by providing the tools for learning, growth, leadership, and top quality services. I also want to play a role in helping people reach their highest potential.

Any feedback from you and others would also be greatly appreciated.

Remanda Johnson

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Dear Remanda

You've taken a positive step in asking for guidance through ASTD. Wouldn't it be fabulous if someone reading your question also has an opportunity for you in their organization? There are some concrete steps you can take to launch your career in the training and development field just in case a serendipitous miracle fails to materialize.

Need to network

Instead of considering joining a networking organization, do it. If you want to get into the field, you have to know others not only in the field, but also potential employers. Get out and talk to people about what you can do for them! Of course, I highly recommend that you join a local ASTD chapter.

There are two of them in South Carolina. Also consider SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management), with 13 chapters in your state, and ISPI (International Society for Performance Improvement), which also has a local chapter near you.

Develop your 30-second introduction

Once you decide to get out and meet people, what do you say? You absolutely must have a succinct 30-second introduction that tells them who you are and what can do for them that is unique. "I'm trying to break into the training field" doesn't engage the listener or cause them to remember you. Instead, "I'm a learning professional in a line management role in the pharmaceutical industry, managing and training staff to provide quality customer care."

Build on your experience

You've got a good deal of management and line experience under your belt. What you don't have is focus. You have a desire to move into training—do you really want to make that happen? Do you want to stay in the pharmaceutical industry? Do you want to take advantage of your current employer's tuition reimbursement plan to further your education while you go to graduate school? Will your current employer finance your completion of the ASTD CPLP (Certified Professional in Learning and Performance)? In your current résumé, have you built in language that indicates you are a training and development professional?

You are the only one who can decide if you are truly ready to make a move. Seventeen years as a certified pharmacy technician is a substantial comfort zone to suddenly leave. Can you face possibly leaving your current employer and perhaps your community to pursue your career? Have you got companies in mind that you want to target?

Using that network you are going to build by joining—and being active in one or more—associations will be more successful if you know where you want to work and what you want to do. Do you want to focus on instructional design? Do you want to do organization development work? How about technical and skills training? What about applying your experience in customer relations? Do you have a life plan with a timeline illustrating when you'd like to accomplish specific goals?

Start with setting a date when you'd like to be actively working in the field as a first step to realizing your ambition.

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