

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. //



Dear Coach

After earning a master's degree in leadership in adult learning, I spent the first part of my career in facilitation, instructional design, and human performance improvement consulting roles in a variety of organizations. I've spent the past two years working with organizations and groups to design and develop customized leadership and management development programs.

I recently moved into the role of practice leader for our leadership and management business unit. In this role, I work with our team to set the strategic direction of our practice of developing leadership and management capabilities. This includes determining the direction of our products and services, serving as a subject matter expert and consultant, and working with clients to ensure we meet their unique leadership and management development needs.

I need your help with my future aspirations. I want to be a thought leader in the world of learning. For me, being a thought leader involves staying current with research, trends, and emergent concepts associated with helping leaders, managers, and organizations perform more effectively.

Thought leadership for me also includes publishing articles and books, as well as speaking at conferences and other meetings to encourage people to reflect on how they lead and manage others and their organizations. I am seeking to foster new, creative ways to approach workplace leadership and management.

I aspire to create space for learning, via creative and critical thinking, for

managers and leaders to consider ways that they can help individuals, teams, and organizations reach their potential. For me, this is about creating compelling ways of helping others see the importance of developing their capabilities through engaging leadership and management, developing emotional intelligence, and being genuine. I want to continue to create authentic learning solutions that fit for people and organizations.

I seek to create value for myself

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while also adding value for clients—as unique individuals, as members of groups, and as organizations. I can see myself working with external organizations (as I do now), yet collaborating more closely with clients to

better understand their organizations and needs to create more effective, organization-wide learning solutions.

At the end of my career, I'd really like to have contributed to the complementary fields of learning, and leadership and management development. I want to help people develop their own capabilities by creating space for learning and critical reflection on the way they approach leading and managing others.

As a relatively young but driven professional, I face a credibility issue. At a recent networking event an individual said to me “You’re a thirty-something—what do you know about managing or leading others?” Given my aspirations of thought leadership, I believe I need to find ways to maintain and enhance credibility in spite of my age.

I aspire to practice what I preach in terms of not just asking others to develop, but also developing my own capabilities. To help foster this, I’d like to find a mentor within the learning industry. I’d also like to continue to create connections through networking and conferences, as others often serve as a catalyst for my thinking.

I’d also like to get a PhD and engage in other learning, likely focusing in the area of individual and organizational learning. I plan to reflect on my thoughts and ways of being in the world, particularly as it affects my work with others. This ability to explore my own thoughts allows me to more authentically work with others.

I’ve recently written my first book, *The Cornerstones of Engaging Leadership*, which will be published in January, 2008. I’ve also written an article on trust and leadership. In 2008, I will be speaking at various conferences, both as a keynote and a session presenter while also attending others. I’ve also tried to better understand my strengths, interests, and passions through self-reflection, self-assessment, and feedback from others.

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Dear Casey

You’ve presented a straightforward approach. The secret to success is in the actual doing, which is your challenge: making your career happen. As always with career counseling, I have no answers, just a few suggestions about how to meet your future goals.

The age issue is one that does eventually go away. Overcome the apparent objection to your youth by believing in your qualifications. Don’t apologize—be affirmative. Demonstrate that you have solid experience through your accomplishments with your clients, your organization, and personally, including your experience as a keynote, speaker, and author.

Consider moving into a line management role for a couple of years to gain the experience of being on the front line, either with your current firm, or in a nonconsulting organization in the private or public sector. Even managing a large project will provide you with the type of experience that you’re looking for.

Following your plan will bring your aspirations to fruition. What are your personal earning expectations now—and in 10 years? What is your work-life balance goal? Is it compatible with your career plan? How long do you really want to work at full throttle? Being clear on not just what you want to do, but how much you want to earn and when you want it will help drive your future decisions.

While it is one thing to set direction, it is another to implement it. Congratulations, you’ve already begun your implementation plan with your forthcoming book and speaking engagements. Put that same thought process into selecting the type of projects you work on during the next 18 to 36 months. Write down affirmations of your aspirations to look at as daily reminders; at the end of your timeline, re-examine your personal and professional goals and make a decision about next steps. Change happens; you may need to regularly readjust your path and your plans.

One of the great pitfalls of our profession is the tendency to fall into jargon that is not business-oriented. Put yourself in the shoes of the management team who will compensate you and speak their language, not training and development industry jargon. There truly is nothing new under the sun, but there are new ways of transmitting and using information to reach organization goals.

While obtaining a PhD may result in long-term income and an aura of competence, nothing beats experience. Do you want to teach? Are you planning on starting your own consulting firm? Will it get you closer to your long-term goals?

Your wish to gain a mentor is right on target. What are the specific skills that you wish to or need to develop? What career obstacles are you facing? Who do you trust would give you the honest, forthright feedback you need? Who has guided you up to now? I was mentored by Dave Jamieson (former president of ASTD) early in my career; a lot of what I do can be traced to his influence.

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