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How to break your career out of the doldrums



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Struggling to make your next career move? Here's how to give your working life a kick start.



Sick of work? Take some action. *Photo: Shutterstock*

Has your career ground to a halt?

You might be returning from maternity leave or an extended break, or simply stagnating in a role that doesn't make you bound out of bed anymore.

Now is the time to take action, before your career rut turns into a serious derailment.

- [How to deal with a difficult boss](#)
- [Is 'performance pay' an excuse for no pay rise at all?](#)
- [How to future proof your career in the digital age](#)

[Careers Fast Track](#) CEO Nigel Phillips says forward career momentum is extremely important, especially with a comfortable retirement in mind.

“People often fragment their lives, and think that career is separate from relationships, which is separate from their health and wellbeing, which is separate from their financial wellbeing,” he says, when in fact all of these facets are interconnected.

“Many people are retiring and living on a can of baked beans, and it’s because people aren’t looking holistically at the whole notion of career-life development.”

Here are some tips to get your career under control, with hopefully spillover benefits for all areas of your life.

Learn to earn

Mr Phillips says we all need to be “continuously involved in learning”. University and TAFE are rock-solid options for formal learning, or consider Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) which are a very cheap for broadening your horizons.

MOOCs are a kind of online course that usually has hundreds or thousands of students, university-quality material and no (or a very modest) price tag. Great examples are the courses offered by [Khan Academy](#), [Udacity](#), [Coursera](#), [Udemy](#), [Academic Room](#), and [iTunes U](#).



“[MOOCs] can get you started and get you interested and build up your skills and your knowledge, and that’s when you can run out and get a more formal qualification,” Mr Phillips says.

Grow a quality online network

An online presence is a great way to build your network and boost your credibility. Think LinkedIn and Twitter.

But according to recruiting firm [Hays](#) Australia and New Zealand managing director Nick Deligiannis, it is not enough to simply build a large network – quality counts.

“Employers often go further and look at the quality of your connections, particularly if you are applying for a role where a relevant network is important,” Mr Deligiannis says.

Read more: for tips on how to make LinkedIn work for you, click [here](#).

Build a real life network

Real-life connections are even more important.

To help you network, the University of Queensland Business School [suggests](#) that you vary the networking events that you attend, and develop an elevator pitch, avoid being aggressive or overbearing, and listen intently.

Entrepreneur magazine [recommends](#) that you smile, ask easy questions, share your passion, and always follow up.

Volunteer for new projects

Hays senior regional director Peter Noblet says getting involved in new projects at your current workplace is a good way to get out of a career rut.

“A lot of places look at putting together committees or task forces to look at a specific business issue. Obviously you can get involved in that and volunteer your expertise there, and what that also does is help you build internal networks, especially if you work for a large organisation. You might end up working with other people who exert influence,” Mr Noblet says.



Change up your role

[eCareers Academy](#) owner and director Brian Horan says mixing up your role in your current job could give your career a much-needed jump start.

“One of the options, depending on the flexibility of the boss, is to meet with colleagues and find out what stuff the colleagues are doing that they don’t like, and maybe swap particular roles in that office,” Mr Horan says.

Or ask to take on extra tasks “that you’re passionate about,” Mr Horan says, such as a community project through work.

Career plan

Think of a career plan as a business plan, Mr Noblet advises – a crucial document setting out your future direction.

“It’s really important to sit down and try to work out what you particularly enjoy in a role, the type of environment you enjoy working in, and then starting to build a career plan along those lines,” he says.

Define yourself and your interests, values and skills; plot your progress thus far; and set achievable career goals. Be sure to review this plan regularly.

Find a mentor

Mentorship is a valuable form of informal learning that Mr Noblet says many people overlook.

“Some organisations offer a mentor-type program, and even if they don’t offer that specifically, then find someone in the organisation that you share values with who might be a bit more senior,” he says.

Move on

Stagnation could be a sign that it is time to look for a new job elsewhere. Don’t let fear hold you back, Mr Horan says.

“The first thing with fear is that you need to identify it, name it, and then work out the worst case scenario, and if you can’t push your way through it, then get help.

“[But] always keep your one foot in a paid job while you are searching for another.”