

Chapter 7. Experience & Evaluate

As you'll recall from Chapter 1, career self-reliance involves taking responsibility for reaching your career goals and finding meaningful work. Of course you will enlist the support of your supervisors, program managers, mentors, the AmeriCorps community, family, and friends but the bulk of the work lies with you.

Career development is a life-long process and continuing to actively plan your next steps will make you more likely to achieve your goals. Managing your career over your lifetime involves cultivating a professional image, being a continuous learner, attending to your network, recording accomplishments, and seeking feedback. Let's examine each of these areas in more depth.

Cultivate a Professional Image

According to a workplace study done by the Center for Professional Excellence at York College of Pennsylvania, 96% of HR executives/managers reported that a job applicant's professionalism affects the likelihood of being hired. Therefore, improving your professional image is likely to have a positive impact on your ability to achieve your career goals. Keys to professionalism include:

Workplace Etiquette:

- Stand up, make eye contact, and shake hands whenever you are introduced to someone.
- Be courteous and remember to say thank you.
- Keep your work area neat.
- Learn the names of your co-workers and greet them when you arrive in the morning and say good-bye when you leave.
- Be friendly but don't let your friendly disposition keep you from doing your work.
- Clean up after yourself whether in the break room or the supply room.

Appearance:

- Follow the office dress code.
- Don't let a messy, overflowing purse or bag detract from your professional image.
- Practice good hygiene.
- Use perfumes, cologne, after shave, and lotions sparingly if at all.

Time Management:

- Be on time or arrive a few minutes early every day, and call if you are running late.
- Make efficient use of your time and other's time. This includes asking questions to clarify, taking notes when someone is giving you directions, and planning ahead.
- Return calls and emails promptly (aim for responding within 24 hours, sooner if the issue is time sensitive).
- Stay organized: use a calendar, reminder apps, "To Do" lists, and other organizational tools to ensure you work efficiently and meet deadlines.

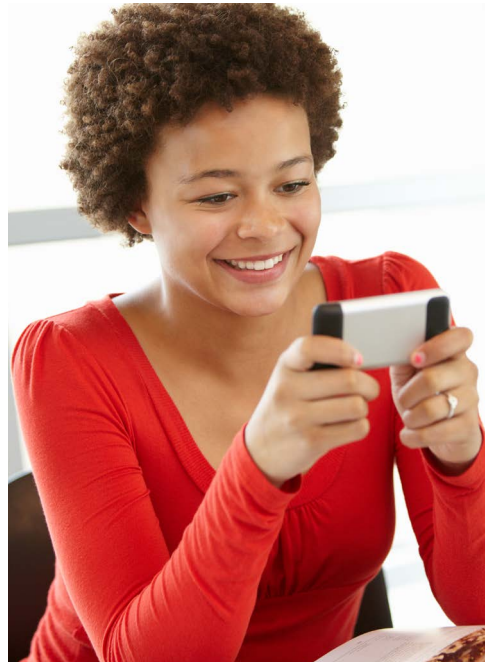
Conscientious Work Habits:

- Emails should be grammatically correct and free of spelling errors. They should not include text abbreviations.
- Always double-check that you have selected the right email recipient and don't say anything in an email that you wouldn't say to someone's face.
- Be alert and remember sleepiness doesn't look good in the workplace.
- Be a team player; recognize others' accomplishments as well as your own.
- Be respectful of diversity.
- Always bring a pad of paper and a pen to meetings.

High ethical standards:

- Keep your word and follow through.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it.
- Own your mistakes. No one is perfect and you will make mistakes on the job. The important thing is to admit your mistake and show an eagerness to correct it.
- Don't take credit for other's ideas.
- Don't get involved in gossip or other people's drama, and be very careful about discussing your own personal issues at work.

- Be careful with jokes and humor. What one person finds funny, another may find offensive.
- Stay Sober. Do not get drunk or use drugs on the job or at work-related events. It might be tempting to have a few drinks at the office holiday party but jobs have been lost because people said or did something inappropriate while under the influence.
- Don't swear. According to a nationwide survey by Harris Interactive in 2012, 81% of employers say swearing brings an employee's professionalism into question and 57% would be less likely to promote someone who repeatedly swears in the office.

**A word (or two!) about cell phones in the workplace:**

Rachel Wagner, President of Rachel Wagner Etiquette and Protocol, is a Certified Etiquette and International Protocol Consultant. She offers the following tips for cell phone etiquette in the workplace:

- **Give 100% focus to the person in front of you.** Don't interrupt a face-to-face conversation with someone by taking a call or texting.

- **At a business lunch, a mobile device shouldn't be part of the place setting.** Keep it stashed in a jacket pocket, handbag or briefcase.
- **In meetings, avoid "reading under the table."** Most people know to turn their phone to silent in a meeting. However, it's not the occasional phone ringing that's so annoying. It's the people who scroll through their emails, check their Facebook page, text, tweet, or check sports scores—in their lap. People notice this more than you think. It's not only distracting and discourteous to the speaker, but also to those around you. Paying attention to your messages instead of the meeting sends a signal that the people in the room are not important to you. And that's a dangerous message if those people are clients, or have power over your job or career path.
- **Have a professional ring tone.** Whether it's your personal cell phone or one issued by your company, a professional ring tone is important to convey a professional image of you.
- **In a cubicle, turn your mobile device to silent.** It's annoying and distracting if your phone rings and you're there, but it's more irritating to coworkers if it rings and rings when you're away from your desk.
- **Take personal calls in a private place.** Hearing someone talk loudly on a cell phone, especially about personal business is distracting and discourteous to coworkers trying to do their jobs. It's best to go to an empty conference room or other private location to make a personal call. And keep personal calls to a minimum so that you don't appear unfocused to your team or your boss.
- **Never use your cell phone in the restroom.** This is not the place to share personal or confidential company or client information. You never know who might be in listening range.

Be a Continuous Learner

- Ask questions and be curious.
- Take advantage of training opportunities such as workshops and seminars that may be offered by your employer whether online or in-person. Online training is convenient as it can be done at your convenience 24/7 but in-person classes have the added advantage of offering a ready-made networking opportunity.
- Continue to build job specific and transferable skills especially those that you have identified as necessary requirements for the next step in your career. You can do this through on-the-job-training; community college courses; online sites such as Udemy, Coursera or Lynda.com; or through taking open enrollment or extension classes through a college or university.
- Stay current in your field by reading industry publications, blogs, and e-newsletters.
- Stay up-to-date with technology.
- On LinkedIn, follow companies and join groups to keep informed on career development topics and engage in your field of interest.



"Cultivate a career growth mindset of being a lifelong learner and long distance runner, this will help you navigate career changes with curiosity, creativity, and compassion."

Dr. Maureen E. White, California
Community Colleges Chancellor's
Office of Workforce & Economic
Development Division

Attend to and Continue to Build Your Network

- Be actively involved in your profession and industry to gain exposure to a wide network of people and stay abreast of trends.
- Go to lunch with a colleague or co-worker you don't usually see. This will help build the relationship and lead to stronger collaboration.
- Participate on organization-wide or cross-functional committees or teams to increase your awareness of what is happening outside of your department.
- Keep your LinkedIn profile up-to-date by adding accomplishments and newly acquired skills as well as connecting with new colleagues.

Record Accomplishments

As a career self-reliant professional, keeping track of your career successes, significant projects, and newly developed skills is important because you can use these accomplishments to market yourself for your next position. A simple way to do this is to make a list of your job responsibilities and then every 6 months write what you've achieved in each of those areas. Keeping a career journal to track projects, accomplishments, and reflections can also be a valuable tool to recall details, identify patterns, and continue your journey of self-discovery.

Evaluate and Seek Feedback

- Take time every six months to take stock of what's working well in your career, and what's not. What skills do you still need to develop and what are you doing to improve in those areas?
- Check in with your supervisor quarterly to get feedback on how you could improve your effectiveness.

Identify a Mentor

Establish a mentor relationship with a senior staff person or someone in a related position who can support you. A mentor might work at your current organization or be someone you worked with in the past or who has been helpful to you in your career. It could be someone who is 20+ years ahead of you in their career but could also be someone who is only 3-5 years ahead of you in their career development- both would have valuable insights to share. Meet with these mentors and let them know how you are doing and ask them questions about how to continue to move your career towards your goals. Also, it's never too early for you to be a mentor! Be open to giving a hand to new AmeriCorps members or other employees who are seeking guidance.

Change Positions Smoothly

When you decide it is time to move on to another position, do so with professionalism- how you leave a job is just as important as how you start a job. Schedule a time to speak with your supervisor to let them know you are a finalist for a position or have been offered a new position (the timing of this will likely depend on whether or not you've listed your supervisor as a reference). Typically 2 weeks notice is the standard amount of time you are expected to give an employer before departing, although depending on the specific circumstances, this might be a bit shorter or longer. Before your last day, discuss pending projects with your supervisor and come to agreement on what you will complete prior to your departure. Collect contact information from co-workers so you can stay in touch and thank your colleagues. Leaving a job in a positive fashion is important for continued references, maintaining your network, and not burning bridges with those with whom you've built positive working relationships.

Be Open to Career Serendipity

This guide has set out a career development process that when implemented has a high probability of success. However, career serendipity, a phrase coined by career counselor Constance Stevens, or chance can certainly play a role in the process. As John Lennon wrote in his song “Beautiful Boy”, “Life is what happens while you’re busy making other plans.” Consider Riley’s story of career serendipity:

Riley tried a couple of career search efforts and jumped from one job to another for 3 years after high school. Nothing seemed to fit. Then he met a man at his regular coffee shop who was hearing impaired. Over the course of a couple of months they struck up a friendship and Riley began to learn about the lack of services available in the community for the hearing impaired. Riley began volunteering at the NORCAL Services for Deaf & Hard of Hearing, returned to community college to learn sign language and now is a successful interpreter helping the hearing impaired in accessing needed health care.

Ideas for increasing your career serendipity:

- Put yourself in the position of being in the right place at the right time by continuing to network and stay involved in your field.
- Take a class that relates to your hobby
- Join a recreational sports team
- Volunteer for something outside of your field
- Take a different form of public transportation or change up your usual ride time so you are with a new group of people
- Never pass up the opportunity to network

Stay Connected to AmeriCorps



In addition to these important career management tools, you are fortunate to have the added advantage of the AmeriCorps network. Staying connected to this community of professionals can be a tremendous boost to your long-term career success. Join the AmeriCorps Facebook page; follow AmeriCorps’ handles on Twitter (@americorps, @americorps alums, @National Service, and @AmeriCorps Vista); and join the AmeriCorps Alumni Network at <http://www.americorpsalums.org>. AmeriCorps Alums is the official national network that connects the one million alumni from all AmeriCorps programs to the people, ideas, and resources that can support you in reaching your goals. It only takes a few minutes to register and it’s free! Once you are registered you can access resources to help you:

- **Network:** Connect with hundreds of thousands of alumni either in person or through social media. There are 80 AmeriCorps Alumni Chapters across the country and an active community on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.
- **Find a Job:** The site offers a monthly career newsletter, a Career Center and Coach, professional development webinars, virtual resume reviews, and more.
- **Identify Schools and Financial Resources for Continuing Your Education:** AmeriCorps partner schools and innovative programs like the Virtual Grad School Fair attract schools that value your national service experience.

- **Serve:** Continue a “lifetime of service” through local volunteering, service campaigns, and skills-based volunteering.
- **Get Benefits:** Take advantage of free tax return assistance and other member discounts and benefits from national partners.



Career Authenticity

Each of us is a unique individual with different life experiences, resources, strengths and weaknesses. We all have assets that help us achieve our goals and obstacles that block our progress. Because of this uniqueness, no two career development processes or job search efforts will look the same, nor should they. Use this document per its title, as a “Guide” to create the framework for your career journey. Seek the advice and support of your supervisor and program manager along with other trusted people in your network. Throughout your process, capitalize on your strengths and don’t stress too much about your weaknesses

(while at the same time taking steps to lessen their impact on your effectiveness).

Dr. Howard Figler provided an excellent example of this concept in his book “The Complete Job-Search Handbook, 3rd Edition”:

Job Seeker #1 says, “I hate the telephone. It’s too impersonal, and it makes me nervous. I would rather deal with people face-to-face, which is more natural. So I ... talk to people or meet them someplace, and one thing leads to another...”

Job Seeker #2 says, “The telephone is my ally. I keep on the phone for days and weeks until I get ten solid leads or interviews... this is more efficient.”

Both techniques will help move your career forward, and you are likely to be more successful playing to your strengths than avoiding making progress on your career development because a certain technique makes you uncomfortable.

Delve into the suggested reading, websites, and apps at the end of the Guide to continue to expand your understanding of yourself and the world of work. Through this continued discovery you will find your “best fit” career for now and in the future, which will lead to satisfying work that brings you happiness.

In other words, be authentic in your approach. Know yourself, listen to your inner voice and choose your own path!

“There is no passion to be found in playing small-in settling for a life that is less than you are capable of living.”

NELSON MANDELA

Complete the Career Fitness Post-Test to see how your career self-reliance has improved since beginning your year of service.

Career Fitness Post-Test

	YES	STARTED	NEED TO DEVELOP
I know the five stages of the career development process.			
I am aware of my strengths and skills.			
I know my weaknesses and have developed methods for improvement.			
I understand how my personality influences my career satisfaction.			
I can identify 5 things I need in a career for it to be satisfying.			
I am clear about my most important work-related values.			
I can describe the type of work environment in which I would feel happiest and most productive.			
I know how to explore career options.			
I have developed a list of career options to explore and research.			
I have conducted an informational interview in the past year.			
I can clearly and confidently state my career goals.			
I have a written career development plan.			
I have identified steps to take in the next six to twelve months to achieve my goals.			
I have an updated, accomplishment-based resume.			
I have developed a list of professional references.			
For each of my past job-related experiences, I can list <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 work activities • 5 skills used • 5 accomplishments 			
I understand how to network effectively.			
I have developed and can effectively deliver my 30-Second Introduction.			
I know how to use social media in my job search.			
I'm aware of other ways to look for a job besides online job boards.			
I have practiced my interviewing techniques and am prepared to answer the most commonly asked interview questions.			
I actively seek feedback and mentoring from others.			
I maintain a network of contacts for learning and sharing ideas.			
I know how to project a professional image both in-person and online.			
I keep current about issues related to my career interests.			
I attend events, conferences, or trainings to learn more about my current field or fields I might explore.			
I have joined and become active in a professional association related to my interests.			
I know how much money I need to meet my needs.			
I have taken ownership of my career development.			

Count the number of "Yes" Answers you had.

22-29: Congratulations! You have worked on your career fitness and have just a few items to add to your career management toolkit. Keep up the good work!

11-21: You are headed in the right direction but have some work to do to more effectively manage your career. Build on the skills you already have developed to enhance your career fitness level.

Less than 10: It's always a good time to get started in building your career management skills. Continue to use this Guide and the connections you've developed over your year of service to get "career fit!"