

Calling All
Optimists

Career Action Plan

©2020 Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC). All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, distributed or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of GMAC. For permission contact the GMAC Legal Department at legal@gmac.com.



Career Action Plan

A career action plan is a strategy to get you from point A to point B. It helps you write your goals and it gives you a timeline to keep you focused and motivated.

By now, you've probably spent some time reflecting about what you want to do and are now ready to set your career goals and map out your next career steps. So, in this plan, we'll go through the eight steps listed below to build your career action plan.

Checklist

- Write down your career vision
- Review your personal and professional needs
- Select your top career opportunities
- Measure your current situation
- Write down your career plan objective
- Develop SMART goals
- Take action
- Review and repeat

Career vision

Before we begin, let's make sure we are clear about what you want to achieve in your career. A career vision is a big picture statement that describes what you envision in your ideal career and lifestyle. This is not about your next role. It is about describing where you see yourself at the peak of your career: a future state that will inspire you, motivate you, and guide you along the way.

Not sure what your career vision looks like and how to create one? [Complete the guide here.](#)





Personal needs and professional aspirations

A good career plan should align your professional and personal demands. To do that, you must have a clear understanding of what you need in your personal life, know what you want in your professional life, identify your strengths, and list the roles or opportunities you want to pursue. The objective is to help you evaluate your options, compare them with your needs and strengths, and select the best opportunities you should target.

If you need help creating each list, go to our [career planning guide](#) to get step-by-step assistance.

Personal career requirements What career needs must you have in your next role?	Your top skills/strengths What skills do you want to use in your next role?	Career aspirations What roles or opportunities are you looking to explore?

Select your top career opportunities

You know your strengths, your needs, and your aspirations. Now, it's time to evaluate your options and select **only the opportunities that are best fitted for you.**

For each opportunity you listed above, evaluate it against your other two lists. Does it allow you to use or develop the skills you want to apply to that position? Does it provide the requirements you listed or, at least, have the potential to provide what you need? Does it fit into your career vision? Can you use it as a stepping stone?





There is a chance you may not find an opportunity that has everything you want and need (or you may not know for sure if it can), but this exercise should help you select career options that get you closer to where you want to be and reject the ones that go in the wrong direction.

Hopefully, you have identified one opportunity that fits well, like that director role in the sales department. But, if you are in a career stage in which you are exploring different options or different fields, use this step to narrow down your options to your top three. Remember, whatever you list below is what we'll use to build this plan.

Top career opportunities

- 1.

- 2.

- 3.

Measure your current situation

Before we start setting goals, it's important to assess where you are now compared to where you want to be. One way to do this is by recognizing what is valued, required, and needed in the opportunities you listed above and then compare that profile with your current situation. To help you get started, we've gathered a couple of questions. Answering these should act as a reality check to measure where you are against where you want to be. It will also help you create a profile for the roles or industries you want to enter and provide valuable information that you can use to position yourself for success.

Industry

- What are the top trends/topics in the industry you are researching?
- Are there any particular skills this industry requires?
- Are advanced degrees or other certifications valued in this industry?
- Are there any particular cities where this industry has more opportunities?
- Is this industry known for its culture, fast-paced environment, or other characteristics?
- What is the [earning potential in this industry?](#)
- What is the common growth path?
- Who are the key players in the industry? What does their career path look like?
What education and experience do they have? Are they part of other organizations or groups?





Role/Company

- What skills are mentioned in the job description? How about in the job description of the next level up?
- What [salary range should you expect](#) for the type of role you are seeking?
- What culture does this company have?
- Who is in their leadership team? What experience do they have?
- What hours, location, benefits can you expect?
- Does this company offer any common training, mentorship, graduate school tuition reimbursement, or other opportunities for growth?

Professional experience

- Are your [strengths in line with this industry](#) or role?
- What value can you bring right now?
- What skills and experience can you apply?
- Do you know the trending topics of your industry well? Do you have any training or education that can set you apart?
- What makes you a great candidate? Why would someone choose you over the competition?
- Are you missing any qualifications? Are you willing to commit to acquiring them?

After you answer some of these questions, take time to reflect whether the answers match your expectations.

Are you still interested in that career path? Do you see yourself in that role? Do you have any concerns? Does this align with your career requirements? Does this path capitalize on your strengths? What skills or experience do you need to succeed? Are you missing any of them? How about education? Should you be considering going back to school? Would you be willing to relocate? Is there another piece of information you are missing that could help you decide if this is the right choice?

Understanding what is needed and valued in your industry and in your next role will reveal what you need to reach your professional destination. If you are missing any core needs, this is the time to set them as goals.





Defining SMART goals

SMART is an acronym used to help you create strong goals that are clear and reachable. In this plan, we want you to use the SMART method to set up your career objective AND short-term goals.

- S SPECIFIC** Make it clear and significant. Ask yourself what you want to accomplish and why. This is not about brevity but about clarity, so take time to add details.
- M MEASURABLE** Defining how you measure success helps you track your progress and remain focused. Typically, this is a number but, in some cases, it can be a major milestone, like earning the promotion you are after.
- A ACHIEVABLE** You can dream big, but the goal should be realistic. Think about how you will achieve your goal. Are there any major milestones that you need to achieve, like gaining additional experience or skills?
- R RELEVANT** Is this goal helping you reach your career vision? This element ensures you are setting goals that are helping you reach your ultimate objectives.
- T TIME-BOUND** Without a timeframe, you'll be more likely to deprioritize tasks and forget about them, so you need to set deadlines for yourself. Just make sure to make your due dates achievable.

Career Plan Objective

Now, after all that work, you should be ready to set a SMART career objective. Just take the opportunity or opportunities you listed in step three and describe what you want to achieve in relation to it.

Example:

Get promoted to a role with more managerial responsibilities and a higher salary in the next two years.

Look at these [5 examples of SMART goals](#) for additional help.

My Career Plan Objective





Career Plan SMART Goals

You've assessed where you are (point A) and identified your objective for this plan (point B), now let's set-up actionable steps to get you from one point to the other. To start, create a list of tasks or milestones that you need to achieve to reach your objective.

EXAMPLE:

Objective:

Get promoted to a role with more managerial responsibilities and a higher salary in the next two years.

Milestones:

- Develop a profile with the requirements of my next role
- Create a list of missing requirements like skills, and experience that would set me apart from the competition
- Create opportunities in my current role to display my management and communication skills
- Identify ways I can acquire new skills and experience
- Review similar opportunities in other organizations
- Research part-time graduate programs
- Go to industry networking events
- Connect with my network

Now, take each milestone and convert it into a SMART goal. If you want to take a step further, you can add tasks to each SMART goal.

EXAMPLE:

Milestone:

Develop a profile with the requirements of my next role

SMART goal:

Create a detailed list of role requirements in the next 5 weeks by conducting research that answers the questions listed in the measurement section of this plan.

Tasks:

Add 2 hours to my agenda this week for research time. Connect with Sarah and schedule an informational interview regarding this company.





Take Action

Woohoo! If you are here, you have done a lot of work and deserve to recognize your achievement. But, no plan will provide results without action. This is a reminder to set daily or at least weekly check-ups on your progress. You can make this step as simple as you need it to be in order to keep moving forward. You can add a 30-minute recurrent meeting to your calendar, or you can go as far as creating a dedicated project in a platform like Asana or Trello.

This step is to ensure you don't forget to pursue the life you want. The secret to success is consistency and taking action every week, even if that action is as small as adding a task to your to-do list.

If you think you need weekly reminders and motivation to keep you going, [subscribe to our newsletter](#). We promise it will keep you moving forward.

Review and Repeat

Because your weekly progress reviews are based on short-term goals, we recommend reevaluating your entire plan every couple of months. We all tend to go back to our routines and busy schedules and can forget about our long-term goals. Setting up a personal evaluation reminder for every 6 months to a year can help you reevaluate your goals and aspirations. Life changes constantly, and the ability to adapt and embrace change is essential for success.

You are now ready to shine!



The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

– Abraham Lincoln

Subscribe to the newsletter to receive weekly career motivation, resources, tools, and tips.

SUBSCRIBE

Comments?

Let us know if this content was helpful or if there is anything you would change by contacting us at optimists@gmacc.com.



Calling All Optimists