



What is Your Career Goal?

By Tina Wyffels, P.E.

As I reflect on everything that has happened since the pandemic started, I recognize I have primarily been operating in a survival mode. For the past year, most of my personal and work-related decisions have been affiliated with day-to-day tasks and very short-term thinking. There were months when I essentially stopped planning or working toward any long-term goals. This was because I was discouraged that the moment I thought I had a plan mapped out, the school teaching model would change, and my kids suddenly had two days off to allow time for the teachers to adjust. Or, a new CDC recommendation would come out, and plans to gather with friends or family were canceled. Planning for anything beyond a few days seemed futile, and I lost focus on any long-term goals.

We have all been through a lot this past year and a half. We transitioned to a largely remote workforce. We navigated different learning models for our kids. We are adjusting business policies to allow more flexibility to working remotely. We are evaluating office cleaning policies and monitoring health regulations to keep employees safe. We are deciding what business policies to have about masks and vaccines. There has been no shortage of decisions needing to be made that have nothing to do with our engineering education, and it has been easy to lose focus on why we chose to be in this profession.

focused time to think about what you desire for your future. Think about how you define success and align your career goal with your definition of success. Then, as you think about your future, consider if your career goal aligns with other personal goals you may have so that you are not overstretched in your time and energy.


I recently had a conversation with a new entry-level hire at another consulting firm, and she talked about how her work mentor had asked what her career goal was and that she had not given it much thought. I cannot say I would have been able to answer that question at that point in my career either, but her statement reminded me that I also needed to revisit the goals I have for myself and be more proactive in achieving them. If you have lost your focus as I had, try to revisit your goals and restart your efforts in achieving them. And if you manage other staff, I encourage you to ask them about their career goals. It concerns me to hear statistics like over 30% of millennials are considering changing jobs after the pandemic. I fear that if we do not help our employees understand what options there are within this industry and help them find a career path that they are passionate and motivated about, the demands of our profession may cause them to overlook how rewarding it can be.

When you have your career goal identified, write it down someplace that can be regularly reviewed. Then identify at least one short-term goal that will help progress you toward your overall career goal and start working toward achieving that short-term goal. Set a timeframe for when you want to accomplish this short-term goal, and if possible, find a mentor that can help keep you accountable. When one short-term goal is reached, celebrate your achievement before restarting the process with the next short-term goal. Be intentional and set aside time each week to make progress, even if just a few minutes. Time flies, and there is no shortage of work and personal agendas competing for that time. It is very easy to get trapped in a day-to-day mode without achieving any progress toward your goals. If this happens, give yourself grace and adjust to get yourself back on track. Keep your goals fresh in your mind so that your momentum is not stagnated by days turning into years without any progress. The most important thing is to give thought to what you aspire for in your career and then start making progress so it can become a reality.

I am optimistic that the worst of the pandemic is behind us, and we will experience increased stability as each month passes. With this stability, we can transition into a new normal. And, this is an excellent time for all of us to revisit our career goals to confirm they still reflect our personal aspirations. Now is the time to get back on track with your career, as the pandemic may have changed your priorities and where you need to spend your time moving forward. ■



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When I ask what your career goal is, I am asking about your big picture, long-term career goal (and you may have more than one!). This is an excellent question if you are entering the workforce, but it can still apply to you regardless of where you are in your career if you have not given it recent thought. What position do you aspire to hold, and what have you set your mind on achieving? Do you want to start your own company? Do you want to be a technical leader? Do you want to teach? Are you interested in becoming an active member in a local or national professional organization to help advance the structural engineering profession? Do you want to be responsible for winning work for your firm? There are several different paths your career can take, and each can be very rewarding. If you have never given this question much thought, I recommend you set aside some