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10 Tips for Turning Your Career Dreams Into Reality

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Commentary by



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10 tips for turning your career dreams into reality

Few things excite me like the chance to teach about turning dreams into reality. Add the opportunity to talk one on one with dreamers, and I have the makings of a perfect day. I had the chance to do both at the 2006 SPJ Convention & National Journalism Conference in Chicago.

So how do you turn your dreams into reality? Start by turning your dreams into a goal that's specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic and time sensitive. From there, incorporate these 10 tips into your life.

Creativity

Use your imagination. Imagine how your skills can be used, where you can use them, how to deliver your skills and knowledge to a wider audience and how you'll get to your destination. Don't censor yourself and certainly not your dreams. Dream BIG (Bold, Inspiring and Grand) dreams. The sky is the limit.

Assess and compare

Assess where you are with your skills. If you think you're the top reporter or copy editor in your newsroom, but you rarely get an assignment for 1A or the section front, you might be a little off track. If you want to work at a larger newspaper or bigger market, how do your skills and experience compare to those who are already there?

Network

Go beyond your comfort zone to meet new people, especially those who may possess the information you need. Then, keep in touch with them over time with a postcard, e-mail, phone call or holiday card. You can sometimes start the conversation by asking people who are doing what you want to do how they got there. Not all will reveal their secrets, but a good number don't mind sharing. When you've learned something of value or someone has given their time to you, be sure to say thank you. A handwritten note is always a nice touch. Then, be sure to return the favor, either to that person or to another who considers you a resource.

Report

Use your skill to ask good questions to gather the information you want and need. Ask your boss for an honest assessment. Ask a columnist you admire how they landed a syndication deal. Travel the World Wide Web to discover information you need. Don't back away from the challenge of approaching some "bigwig," instead approach it as an assignment that you cannot avoid or return from empty handed.

Plan

Write down your goals. Every journalist knows there's power in the written word. The same holds true with your own goals. Just getting it all on paper can cause a shift in how you approach your goals and even

your life. Writing them down will reveal things you've never really seen while the goal was floating in your mind.

Remind

Once you've done the hard work, you don't want life to drown your dreams. So remind yourself of what you have decided to pursue. Tack your list of goals to your calendar, your daytimer or someplace you'll see the list frequently. To my bathroom mirror at home, I posted a list of goals that takes me through at least the second quarter of 2007. I see the list a few times each morning and each night. My mind plays mental gymnastics: Where do I stand on that? What's my next move? Who do I need to talk with? And, when I've accomplished the goal, I don't cross it off. Using a different color ink, I write in all capital letters "VICTORY!" That's encouragement to keep going.

Support

Develop a support network. Surround yourself with people to keep you on track, to encourage you when you feel discouraged, to challenge you to do better, to do more, to try again.

Time

The biggest excuse I hear is "I don't have the time." We all make time for the things that are important to us. Add up the hours you work, commute and sleep and subtract that total from 24 and you have identified your disposable time in a day. With your disposable hours, figure out what tasks you can complete and progress toward the finish line. The funny thing about time: You can invest time and make sacrifices on the front end, or you can waste time with regrets on the back end. Either way, you're still left with the same amount of time.

Proceed without fear

If you want to realize your goals, you must go beyond thinking to doing. Take action on your goals. Sure, fears will invade your mind — fear of failure and success, fear of what others will say, and more — but you must press past your fears and go for it!

Persistence

You can use the wisdom of mothers across America who teach: If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again. I'm sure my mother wasn't the only one who dispensed that life lesson. If you prefer to ignore your mom in favor of a politician, then use Winston Churchill: Never, never, never give up.

To borrow a song title from the Cinderella soundtrack, "A dream is a wish your heart makes." Don't end up with heartbreak because you've failed to pursue dreams. Trust me, there's nothing more fulfilling than living your dreams. —