

5 STEPS TO REBUILD YOUR CAREER CAPITAL THIS YEAR

IF YOU FEEL STUCK IN YOUR JOB, HERE'S HOW TO GET BACK IN THE GAME.

BY LAURA VANDERKAM

Careers go through peaks and valleys, and sometimes life can push you into hunker-down mode. Maybe you're caring for an aging parent or child, or dealing with a health issue. Maybe you had a horrible boss for a while, and all you cared about was self-preservation. At some point, though, the situation can change. If 2016 is the year you want to get back in the game, here are some steps that will help you rebuild your career capital, and move from the slow track into the fast one.

STEP 1: SET SMALL ACHIEVABLE GOALS

Small wins boost your confidence, and part of getting back in is believing that you can. "You could just do something as simple as say, 'I want three new experiences,'" that would be professionally helpful, says Barbara Mistick, coauthor with Karie Willyerd of the new book *Stretch: How to Future-Proof Yourself for Tomorrow's Workplace*. Maybe you set goals to give a speech, lead a project, and attend a conference. As you achieve these, you'll know you're making solid progress.

STEP 2: SAY YES TO MORE THINGS

Mistick recounts interviewing a man who told her, "I never want to volunteer for anything. Next thing you know, they might ask you to do something else!" That's as good a definition as any of hunker-down mode, but getting back in the game means you *want* people to ask you to do more. So get in the habit of raising your hand for opportunities. It may mean working a few more hours, so make the logistical arrangements in your life that would allow that to happen.

STEP 3: ANNOUNCE WHAT YOU'RE DOING

Saying yes is great, but when you're trying to rebuild your career capital, it's also insufficient. You also have to stop being perceived as the person who says no. "To change your narrative is not easy," says Mistick. "You can't just change your narrative with behavior," because people selectively see behavior that supports what they already believe. Instead, you have to announce what you're doing. It may feel stupid to tell everyone that you'll be attending an industry event, but people can't read your mind. "If you let people just see you in the same way, they're always going to see you in the same way."

STEP 4: NETWORK STRATEGICALLY

You don't need a huge network, you need a good one. So "focus on a couple of people who can really help you stretch," says Mistick. "They make you think of something bigger every time you're with them." Finding five such people over a year is very doable. That's one new person every 10 weeks or so. Be sure to meet with these people quarterly, ideally in person. "Every time I sit down with someone in person, I learn a whole lot more than I could in a phone conversation," Mistick says.

STEP 5: LOOK EXTERNALLY

When you're in hunker-down mode, it's easy to forget that there's a world outside your organization. But any industry can be disrupted. Rebuilding your career capital means knowing what's coming next. If you're on Twitter, "try to follow five organizations or thought leaders in your area and see what they're talking about," says Mistick. See what resonates with you, and then do some research on the topic. Maybe you can write a white paper that other people will start discussing. In any case, start broadening what you read so the new ideas start coming. The opposite of hunkering down is opening up. "You want to get your mind thinking in a bigger way."

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