Keeping Your Career Resolutions in 2011

By Charles A. Volkert, Esq.

Charles A. Volkert is executive director of Robert Half Legal, a leading staffing service specializing in the placement of attorneys, paralegals, legal administrators and other legal professionals with law firms and corporate legal departments. Based in Menlo Park, Calif., Robert Half Legal has offices in major cities throughout the United States and Canada.

Every new year begins with the best of intentions, as career-minded professionals take stock of how far they’ve traveled toward their goals and where they hope to go from here. But how many of these resolutions will survive past February?

The key to realizing ambitious goals hinges on breaking them down from sweeping changes into smaller components. For example, the desire to find a new job can seem daunting when considered alone, but when viewed as a series of smaller steps, the process seems much more manageable – and achievable.

Consider, for instance, these common career-related resolutions, along with suggestions for enhancing your chances of making them a reality in 2011:

‘I want to find a new job.’ The beginning of a new year is the perfect time to revisit your resume and make sure it reflects the most notable accomplishments or changes that occurred in your work life during the past year. If necessary, tackle a different aspect of your resume each week until it’s been thoroughly updated and reviewed. Then, focus on other aspects of your job search, such as building your LinkedIn profile, researching new job opportunities and arranging meetings with business contacts, including recruiters who specialize in your field. Reassess your job search goals monthly, and shift your emphasis to focus on different steps as necessary.

‘I want to expand my professional capabilities.’ Even if you’re not completely sure of your long-term goals, pursuing new skills will keep your career on a forward trajectory. Target areas where you have knowledge or skill gaps. Your list could include anything from gaining experience in a new legal area to becoming proficient with a case management software program. Once you've identified improvement areas, develop a plan for addressing each one and commit yourself to working through it during the year. Keep your goals manageable by planning what you will do on a quarterly, monthly or weekly basis to achieve them. Be sure to update your resume as you reach professional development milestones.

‘I want to advance my career.’ When opportunities for promotion are limited, as they have been lately in many legal offices, you may have to go on the offensive to advance
your career. Meet with your boss or the managing partner to identify areas for improvement and establish career objectives. In addition, look for opportunities to take on projects beyond your job description that will allow you to raise your profile within your office and increase your value to your employer. Also consider seeking input from mentors, recruiters, career coaches and colleagues who may be able to provide insights and guidance to help you take your career to the next level.

‘I want a raise.’ Set up a meeting with your manager to discuss your recent contributions and how you’ve added value, especially during the recession. Make sure you’re up to date on the latest salary trends by consulting industry resources such as the annual Salary Guide from Robert Half Legal to determine average pay rates for someone in your position. Then, present a business case to your supervisor for why you deserve a boost in pay. Although many firms still may not be in a position to give raises, by starting a dialogue with your boss on the subject, it may become a top-of-mind item for him or her as budgeting decisions are made in the coming months.

Although the changing of the calendar year can inspire people to retool their careers in various ways, resolutions remain much easier to make than to keep. As the days of a new year mount up, it’s common to slip back into old habits and comfortable ways of working. But don’t let setbacks – or even achievements – lead you to cast aside your good intentions. Keep your resolutions fresh by crossing off goals you’ve accomplished and adding new ones throughout the year.

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