Now that the recession – and exams – are mere memories, it is conceivably time to focus on what is in store for the future. An extravagant celebration, a dream vacation, the World Cup? Or perhaps a change of scenery and a new job?

Without doubt the market has been quite inhospitable for PQs over the past few years with very few organisations willing to assume responsibility for training and development, preferring instead to hire experience and know-how – short sighted, but true. But as you sail through your studies it is equally important that you focus on gaining the right practical experience to complement the theory.

First stop – time to review your personal and professional development plan: Is it on track? Do your real life skills tally with the competencies required at each level of theoretical assessment? If not, prepare your case and take it to the person in your business that is most likely to be able to influence your progress within the company. This might be your direct line manager, mentor or coach or possibly human resources. Be clear on what you need to achieve and where you feel there are gaps in your skills set and make sure that the timeframe you have allowed is realistic for both you and your employer.

Aim high: Think about advancement beyond the next stage of your development. Where would you expect to be in, say, two or even five years, and consider whether or not your current employer is likely to be able to accommodate your ambitions post qualification? Is there a succession plan in place and, if so, are you part of it? Make sure that you understand the objectives that you would be required to meet in order to make the grade and that you feel comfortable that they are realistic, if a little challenging.

Be flexible: The best way to purloin fresh skills is to put yourself out a bit. Volunteer to cover other duties or step up in the absence of a senior manager; be prepared to go the extra mile if you can see reciprocal advantage. Building your CV as you go along can only be a positive and will serve as a gauge of success as you work toward your professional dreams.

Manage your expectations: Naturally you are ambitious, and justifiably so, but with all the best will in the world your employer can’t conjure up promotions that simply do not exist in the current structure. Similarly, you should not anticipate a pay rise each time you take on additional responsibilities; make sure that there is a bit of give and take. Remember that, as you add tools to your tool box, you will enjoy greater job satisfaction in addition to subtly making yourself more marketable should the need arise.

On the other hand, do not allow yourself to be taken advantage of. Stepping up to the plate on a short-term basis can be mutually beneficial and highly rewarding, but filling in on an ongoing basis without commensurate pay and reward is exploitation. If you do find yourself in this unfortunate situation, be prepared to negotiate, but make sure you have a cast-iron case before submitting your proposal for a raise.

If, having considered all of the above, you still feel that your future lies elsewhere, now is not a bad time to explore greener pastures. A recent ICAEW/Grant Thornton UK Business Confidence Monitor (BCM) predicts almost half a million private sector jobs will be created in the next 12 months – which can only be good news for PQs. The finance and accounting market is now booming, with vacancies up on last year by over 25%, and rising month on month in 2014, with part qualified appointments on the ascent at last.

While salaries for PQs are not exactly rocketing just yet, there are substantial roles out there offering valuable training and career development as businesses take on board the fact that the apprentice of today is the manager of tomorrow and demonstrate a greater willingness to invest.

By planning ahead and applying the simple rules above you can reinvigorate your career and your aspirations – now and for the future!

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