



Career Path: Are You Globally Competitive in Your Career?

Skills and Professional Development



Do you know if your company considers you a valuable employee? How do you compare to other employees, not just where you happen to be working right now, but across the globe?

These questions will help you objectively benchmark yourself. If you answer five or fewer of the following questions with "yes," then you may not be as competitive globally as you think.

1. Are you relentlessly positive?

Can you find something to be happy about every day when you start work? Do you bring a smile to your face when you encounter colleagues in the hallway? Can you find a kind word for a co-worker who is struggling? Can you be forgiving when someone has frustrated your plans, and is being stubborn and unhelpful? Not to be corny, but do you break into a spontaneous whistle or song because you enjoy what you're doing?

Or are you the person who always can be found complaining around the water cooler? Every business commits countless follies, after all. If we're honest, not a day goes by without some idiot doing something to annoy us. What's the harm in pointing these things out? After all, how else will things get better?

2. Do you volunteer for projects?

Are you the first one to raise your hand when management proposes a new project? Do you pitch in to help even when the project is outside your area of expertise? Do you volunteer for projects despite being genuinely busy with your own work? Do you even volunteer to work on tasks that are important, but unglamorous?

Or do you refuse to volunteer for more work because you're focused on your own priorities? Do you prefer to stay in your area of expertise? Do you carefully avoid doing work that is repetitive, boring, or thankless?

3. Are you (relatively) inexpensive?

Are there any employees where you work who are paid more than you for the same or similar work? Are there employees anywhere in the world who are paid more than you for the same or similar work? If you look at broad-based market surveys, are you at or around the median salary?

Or are you comfortable being paid more than anyone else? Because after all, you worked hard and you deserve it. Even if your salary is relatively high, you have to look out for yourself, because no one else will do it.

4. Do you spend at least an hour each day working on your strategic priorities?

This means topics *you* have identified as the most important and most valuable. These will vary frequently depending on what is going on in your business and in your team. The key factor is you make it happen every day (or as near to it as possible) to spend at least some time on your self-identified priorities.

Or do you spend your days busy? Busy with meetings and calls, administration and personnel issues, responding to emails, and putting out urgent fires.

5. Do you prioritize physical fitness like you would a work project?

One way to tell if you should answer yes is if you have a daily or weekly physical fitness habit. Do you walk or bike to work? Do you shun elevators and walk up and down all the stairs you can find? Do you join friends for a weekly yoga or dance class?

Do you lace up your shoes and go for regular hikes or runs? Do you throw yourself into the lake or pool for vigorous swim, or make your way to the gym to sweat around the circuit? There is no end of choices. The key is, do you treat your physical fitness as one of your most important strategic priorities?

Or do you find yourself skipping a workout because of an urgent project at work? Do you find yourself sleeping in when you had planned to exercise because you've been so busy that "you deserve time off"?

6. Do you set aside at least one day each month for strategic planning?

This could also be a few hours each week, or half a day every two weeks. The point is, do you invest regularly in quality blocks of time where you are thinking strategically and updating your plans?

Or do you feel satisfied with accomplishing tasks and getting things done? You are too busy to take 10 percent of your time to just sit and think.

7. Are you a woman or minority?

This is just a yes-no question. I am not putting any judgement or criticism behind it. I've been in many search discussions, across public companies, private companies, for-profits, and charitable enterprises. In 30 years, I have never once heard the phrase, "We need to fill this role with a white guy." I have, however, heard "We need to fill this role with _____ (every other variation)."

8. Do you expose yourself to new ideas regularly?

I originally wrote "Do you read widely for business and pleasure, and learn something new every week?" In the meantime, there are more options than just reading, including podcasts, audiobooks, online courses, and more. The point is whether you are constantly seeking to learn new things and to be exposed to unfamiliar ideas.

Or do you feel that your school days are behind you, and thank goodness. That books are painfully boring, and if they can't get the point across in a 30-second TikTok video, what's the point?

9. Are you OK with your salary?

No matter how much you are paid, do you trust your company to pay you fairly, based on broad-based market comparisons? Do you believe that the reward for work is measured in more than money? For example, in things like your professional development, having colleagues your like and respect, and in working for a company that has values aligned with your own?

Or do you regularly check the salary surveys to see if others are making more than you, and bring these surveys to the attention of your boss? Do you secretly worry that you are not being paid the same as others doing the same work? Does it bother you to know friends who are making lots more money than you?

10. Can you describe your key priorities in 60 seconds?

In other words, do you effectively build a common understanding of your value proposition? We all have countless competing demands for time and resources. Does your team understand what the vision is and why what they are working on is important? Do your colleagues understand what you do and why? Does management understand how you are making a vital contribution? Yes, I am referring to the elevator speech.

Or when someone asks you what's keeping you busy, do you make the mistake of simply describing what you're working on at the moment?

Bonus question: Would you consider yourself happy?

This is, of course, related to the first question. Being positive is a good way to become happy. Happiness is a condition that can be cultivated, often through simple steps that you can take on a regular basis.

Your career can certainly make you happy, but too often people make themselves miserable in pursuit of their ambitions. I discuss this, and ways to avoid the trap, in The Stoic Career Path (to

come).

Be well.

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