

How to write a career plan

We all know we should have a career plan. But hands up who really has one?

It can be hard to know where to start. What's missing quite often, is bite-sized instructions of how to write that plan and what it should look like.

So we asked the experts at [Hays](#) and [Robert Walters](#) how to turn your good intentions into a reality on paper. It takes time. But Your effort will be richly rewarded throughout your career if you have a current career plan at all times.

Here's how to write a career plan:

- **Think about you:** "Ask yourself what's important to you," says Christian Brown, manager professional services Auckland at Robert Walters. "Be honest. 'What skills do I have and what skills do I really need in the career I am aiming for?'," he says. "You really need to do this before setting any goals."
- **Dream big:** Too many of us don't have an image in our minds of where we could go with our careers. A law student, for example, probably dreams of working at a big city firm. But graduates end up in a wide variety of jobs, especially in commercial roles or even regulatory bodies such as the Reserve Bank of New Zealand. Don't limit your brainstorm. Enlist friends, mentors, career coaches and recruitment consultants as sounding boards. Make sure your big goals are the aspirational ones, says Brown.
- **Dream small:** You're not going to get from where you are to chief executive of Air New Zealand or Xero overnight. As well as a long term goal, it's really important to have one, two, five and ten year goals as stepping stones in your plan and consider both your career and personal goals, says Lisa Morris, senior regional director at Hays. Your small goals will be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based.
- **Start writing it down:** There is a point where you have to step back from naval gazing and start writing, says Morris. Don't worry if you haven't got everything sorted yet. First drafts can be edited.
- **Create action points:** Commit, says Brown. Action points encourage you to take steps to execute your plan and get to the next level. Those steps may involve adding skills or they could be [networking](#) or whatever is relevant to your career.

- **Be prepared to be flexible:** Your career plan needs to be a living document because people change and the world is evolving even faster. A classic example is a parent returning to the workforce after a break to raise their family, says Morris. “Sometimes their aspirations need to be crafted in a different way.” What’s more, don’t be in too much of a hurry to increase your salary, says Brown. That will happen when you make it to management. Concentrate for now on [your career progression](#). In a retail situation, for example, that might be working your way around all the departments as a junior manager to broaden your expertise before turning towards the top.
- **Review, review and review:** You aren’t necessarily going to find the perfect career path when you first create a plan. Review it yearly, says Morris. Your personal priorities will change over time and stay tuned to economic indicators. As digital disruption takes hold you may need to change direction.

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