

Vincent Yeo, a Los Angeles-based career counselor. "There seems to be an absolute compulsion that one must have success now, instead of establishing a solid record with one firm or a segment of an industry over a significant period of time."

A solid grounding in your field or discipline is paramount. It's relatively easy to cook up a "paper tiger" resume and start chasing a heftier paycheck, loftier title and greater visibility. But such job-hopping often exacts a heavy toll.

"Many individuals end up in their early 40s at a dead end—or at loose ends—in jobs for which they haven't developed the management skills required to perform successfully," says Yeo. He links this failing to overconfidence. "Too often people who are educated, bright and articulate think that they need no additional skills to end up in the executive suite. They're wrong."

In other words, basic technical competence is a necessary but insufficient condition for advancement. Concentrate on building a

credible, well-rounded professional foundation, then seek opportunities to acquire leadership skills. Direct a fund-raising drive for a charity, for example, or volunteer to head up a company task force. This will help polish your people skills.

"The name of the game in any organization is working with other people," says Prof. Humes. "You know what you can do yourself, but you need to know if you can get others to perform and function smoothly."

Know thyself

Career aspirations often blind us to our own aptitudes, likes and dislikes. Honest self-evaluation is the best remedy.

"I took a civil service job as a financial analyst with the federal government almost right out of college," says a Penn State graduate who now lives in Washington, D.C. "It just happened to be at the Department of Defense. In all honesty, most of the time I've hated what I was doing."

To keep his career moving, however, this young civil servant took whatever promotion was offered without much thought to what the actual job involved. "I reached a point where I hated to go to work because I knew I wasn't doing a good job," he says. "Quite frankly, I was so far in over my head that if it hadn't been the government, I probably would have been fired for my foul-ups."

Such experiences show the pitfalls of the path of least resistance. Serious introspection requires significant time and effort, but it's a must before accepting a promotion. Get to know the career path typical of your profession and try to project your own progress and development.

Example: Most lawyers pass through four basic career stages, according to Robert Wilson, director of vocational counseling at George Washington University. First they're researchers, then they may be asked to organize a case. Next comes actual work in the courtroom. Finally, after experience and suc-

cess in the courtroom, they may become partners, primarily a marketing and advisory role. "I've talked to lawyers who love the courtroom and don't like the cocktail, rainmaker,

senior partner routine," says Wilson.

No matter how flattering or prestigious, not all opportunities are for the best. "It's always advisable to step back and take a look," says Diane Sundby, director of Career Counseling and Assessments Associates in Los Angeles. "Evaluate your strengths, weaknesses and goals. How do your goals and skills match proposed duties and responsibilities?"

Most company reward systems are based on the three P's: pay, prestige and perks. None of these compensate for problems that develop if you get in over your head, however. Nor can money buy job satisfaction.

"If you aren't happy in your job and management dangles a promotion in front of your eyes, you may be tempted to see it as a way out," says Taras J. Cerkevich, a Washington, D.C.-based psychologist and career counselor. "Before you commit, however, ask yourself, 'Is it worth more pay to be miserable?'" The pay won't matter if you place yourself in an impossible position. In fact, it may result in less money overall because if your performance is lacking, you may lose your job."

Like pay, power is another enticement that can lure young professionals into positions for which they're ill suited. "It's a question of whether your priorities are external or internal," says Patrick Langlais, director of the Denver Center for Career and Life Management. "Those who are preoccupied with the external place too much emphasis on

The very success people achieve all too often gets them into trouble

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