

The Power of Your Career Vision

By Dr Uwe H Kaufmann

“Uwe, what is your career vision?” was Steve’s first question during my job interview many years ago. As a German I was not really prepared for this kind of question. In the German language the word for career is “Karriere”, which is reserved for someone with outstanding professional accomplishments like Franz Beckenbauer, Robert Bosch or Angela Merkel. This kind of people “machen Karriere”, i.e. have a career. Therefore, I had not spent any minute to think about my career. I was puzzled by his question, mumbled something but could not answer for a while.

However, Steve’s question got me thinking. My thoughts went beyond the usual culprits when it comes to career like ensuring a good life for my family, getting my kids on the right track and – from time to time (Germans don’t want to be caught doing this too often) – enjoying life. Steve was nice enough to help me with some very simple yet powerful questions like ‘What is your passion?’ or ‘How do you think you can contribute best?’ or ‘From all the jobs you have done so far, in which one did you find most satisfaction?’

“I would like to work in Asia” I said with a smile after considering our conversation and my responses. And, I had no doubt that Steve must have found my answer and the explanation I gave him highly amusing. Furthermore, I was absolutely sure that this was the last time we had spoken about this topic. Yet, I found his question a nice new touch during my job interview. I was especially intrigued by the fact that this was my first job interview that did not really evolve around his company but much more on me as a person. Much later he revealed that he knew that my knowledge and skills are exactly what he needed. He just wanted to find out whether I would “fit in” and could grow with the company.

Some years later I was sitting together with Steve going through my appraisal. As usual this was serious yet always a very nice chat in a totally relaxed atmosphere. We almost never held this kind of discussion in the office. We usually met in a restaurant or hotel. At the end he asked me “Uwe, are you ready for Asia?” and explained that our company had decided to go East with management consulting and they wanted me to start this journey if I still had this career vision. A few months later, I arrived at my new home in Singapore.

There are numerous articles showing survey data and research results about one very important driver for employee retention: career planning and development. As a result, more and more organisations make career planning part of their performance appraisal cycle. However, for some it does not go far beyond the template with fields for short-term and long-term career aspiration. Out of all the supervisors I have experienced myself, only one was up to the task.

Having a fruitful career dialogue needs preparation and skills, especially on the side of the supervisor. A Career Exploration Studio for both, supervisors and staff, is a powerful enabler for a quality career dialogue. Knowing someone’s Career Anchor or Personality Profile will help guiding him in the right direction. Supporting this person with adequate development options beyond training such as mentoring, project work, job rotation etc. ensures that his career vision becomes reality over time.

A side effect will be that you have a much better visibility of your staff’s next move.