



You Are a Skilled Professional...What's Next?

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INTRODUCTION

I vividly remember the conclusion of my academic career. I was in a room, participating in our final round's discussion with nine classmates when we were dismissed. As my classmates jumped and hooted with glee, fleeing the room to meet other classmates exhibiting the same amount of enthusiasm, I stayed seated. I recall thinking that I was going to miss the academic rigor and structure in which I had been immersed for the past four years. I also recall being scared. I had the book knowledge to be a veterinarian, but I did not feel like one.

Retrospectively, this was the first of many career transitions that I would undertake. The first years of my career were spent learning how to be a proficient veterinarian, how to communicate effectively with teams and clients and gaining confidence in my abilities. As I became a self-assured doctor, I found that I was not satisfied with my role as an associate veterinarian. I discovered a new passion, veterinary business, and with determination began to learn how hospitals become successful. These lessons, often painful, continued as I transitioned from associate to hospital owner. As I pushed myself to become a knowledgeable owner,

I maintained my clinical role. As the years passed, I learned new skills, such as advanced dentistry, to continue feeling challenged as a doctor. After a successful hospital sale, I appreciate the flexibility that a DVM degree provides. I have been fortunate to have worked in Industry as a Technical Services Veterinarian, to be an entrepreneur again as a Veterinary Business Consultant and most recently to re-enter Industry as a Veterinary Relations and Business Development Executive.

How did I decide what path my career would take? What factors determined in which roles I would flourish and grow? Were my career transitions luck, or due to more calculated risks? As my career has evolved, I found the following to be most helpful in making 'jumps to the next lily pad'.

Who Are You?

To determine the types of positions that will be most satisfying to you, it is important to understand yourself. There are many tools to aid in identifying these criteria. Below are suggestions to help you begin.

Personality Preference Assessments

As individuals, each of us have personality preferences that influence our thought processes, emotions, and behaviors. These psychological characteristics also influence how we relate to others, in how we act and what we say. Self-understanding and acknowledgment of these preferences will help us identify our work preferences. Simply defined, work preferences are "the outcomes individuals desire from their engagement in paid work"¹. When considering work preferences, those positions with the best alignment between personal characteristics and work environment produce the most positive outcomes to both the individual and the organization.

How do you learn what your personality preferences are? There are many on-line assessment tools to provide this insight,

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such as Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator, DiSC and Insights Discovery. Gaining this knowledge will help you begin to identify reasons that your current work environment is unsatisfactory. Is it the work setting or is it the type of work that is inadequate in meeting your needs?

Strengthsfinder

Strengthsfinder is a different type of assessment tool. Rather than focusing on personality traits, Strengthsfinder assesses what you do best. Many veterinary professionals view their capabilities from the other side of the lens; what do they need to do better? As such, we miss the opportunity to capitalize on our innate skills and knowledge. A cost-effective on-line assessment tool, Strengthsfinder determines your top five strengths and provides resources to help you understand and build on these competencies.

What's Your Why?

Simon Sinek, a social scientist, popularized the concept of the 'golden circle' in books² and a Ted-X talk³. He postulated that individuals and organizations do not understand 'why' they do what they do, because they start with the 'what' and the 'how'.

He explains that 'what' and 'how' are functions of the neocortex. This part of the brain is responsible for processing facts, figures, details, and logic; all important functions but ones that rarely move a person to action. Rather, our behaviors are best motivated through our limbic system, which process feelings and emotions and corresponds to the 'why'. As he states, the 'why' is why we get out of bed in the morning and why anyone should care. It is the essence of who we are, our primary driving force behind our actions.

When considering career moves, a clear understanding of your 'why' is essential. With this information, you will be able to determine which positions and organizations offer the best alignment to and for you. I have engaged in some healthy debates around the evolution of a personal 'why'. I believe that because your 'why' represents the central belief that you hold sacrosanct, one's 'why' is a

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constant throughout life. To illustrate this, consider my 'why' as a practicing DVM: "I am a veterinarian because I love helping people by keeping their beloved pets healthy. By forming strong partnerships with my clients, my patients benefit".

Now consider how my statement changed as I entered the various permutations of my professional career:

"I am a veterinarian because I love helping people by keeping their beloved pets healthy. By forming strong partnerships with my clients, their clients and patients benefit." Despite many role changes, my fundamental 'why' has remained untouched. The 'how' and 'what', or details and facts, changed.

Core Values

Core values "are the guiding principles that dictate behavior and action"⁴. Individuals have core values, as do organizations.

It is necessary to understand your core values before actively pursuing a career move. With this knowledge, you can assess which career changes and organizations have the highest likelihood of creating an impactful and long-lasting match. There are many core values worksheets found on-line to help you identify your guiding principles.

What's Next?

Once you have an understanding and can define what is important to you, it is time to think about "what's next"? Consider the following viewpoints as you contemplate options:

The Starting Point

Why are you contemplating a career move? Dissecting what is going well with your current position and what could be better will help provide insight into possibilities for your future. Are the core values of your current organization in alignment with your own values? Does your personal 'why' fit with the focus of the organizational 'why'? Are you still learning and being challenged in your current role?

New Skills Versus a New Job?

If you are feeling stagnant in your position, what would make it more fulfilling? Do opportunities exist to develop new competencies? Considerations include enhanced proficiency in communication skills, dentistry, behavior, surgical techniques, rehabilitation, business management and leadership. When negotiating with a hospital owner or manager to add new or enhanced profit centers and services, be prepared to discuss the return on investment to the patient, the team, your growth, and the business. Provide hard facts: what will additional training and equipment cost? How long will it take to implement? How will it be marketed to clients? How sustainable is the investment? How will you measure outcomes?

As a practice owner, I had three associates, at separate times, that believed in the benefits of acupuncture and wanted to offer those services in our hospital. I agreed to pay for these associates to attend classes and become certified. As a profit center, acupuncture represented less than 1% of our total revenues. Sometimes return on investment is measured tangentially. Patients benefitted, clients

were appreciative, and my associates developed new skills and passions.

If your work preferences have changed, options include practice ownership, self-employment, employment within the animal health industry, a different discipline within veterinary medicine, or exploring new career fields outside of veterinary medicine. As you evaluate these possibilities examine what the benefits of such a move would be personally, professionally, and financially. What commitments are necessary to make this move? For example, pursuing a different discipline within veterinary medicine might require additional education. Pursuing residency training often require decreases in household income, increased debt, and physical relocation. How do the benefits of such a decision outweigh the costs? Practice ownership often requires huge time commitments, undertaking of large sums of debt and the need to perform many different job roles within the hospital. The rewards can be substantial, in terms of financial performance, personal and professional growth, flexibility and the satisfaction of working with a team to bring your visions to life.

"The rewards can be substantial..."

Networking

A critical component to answering the question "what's next" includes "who can help?". In all aspects of these mid-career and late-career roles, trusted advisors offer differing perspectives and valuable

life lessons that impact the decision-making paradigm. Many career positions are more readily accessed through personal connections. A robust network of acquaintances is invaluable as you position yourself to move toward new career paths.

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Networking can be a challenging skill to master. It can feel disingenuous; for introverts, making new connections can be uncomfortable. When approached with the right mindset, networking is liberating. By meeting new people, you are exposed to new ideas and have opportunities to broaden your perspectives. Networking allows you to identify common interests and form collaborative relationships. By focusing on what you offer, rather than take, networking feels more authentic and is infinitely more rewarding.

How and where can you network? Everywhere! Opportunities to form strong networking groups exist within your community, your local and state Veterinary Medical Associations, other organized veterinary medical groups, veterinary meetings, industry sales representatives, your veterinary school classmates, former employers, LinkedIn and professional groups in the community such as Chamber of Commerce and dedicated networking groups.

Assessing the Fit

What methods and tools will provide confidence that the career move you are deliberating is a positive one? This multifactorial question is answered by evaluating the data that you have collected from the "who are you" section above, in addition to the exploratory actions undertaken in "what's next". I have found a particularly helpful tool to assess the fit of a new opportunity is to perform a SWOT analysis. This analysis evaluates the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the contemplated change. When combined with the strengths from Strengthsfinder, this assessment helps bring clarity to appraise the wisdom of the career move. An example may be found at the conclusion of this article.

In assessing the fit, the relative risk of the move and available resources should be considered. If the decision is made to become self-employed, as practice owner, relief veterinarian, consultant, or to offer mobile ultrasound or rehabilitation services, do you have enough income to meet your expense obligations for the next 6 -12 months?

If your chosen career path will be in the animal health industry, will you be able to relocate within a timely fashion? To what parts of the country would you be willing to move? Are you willing to spend a percentage of your time away from your home and family, traveling? Are you willing to work some weekends?

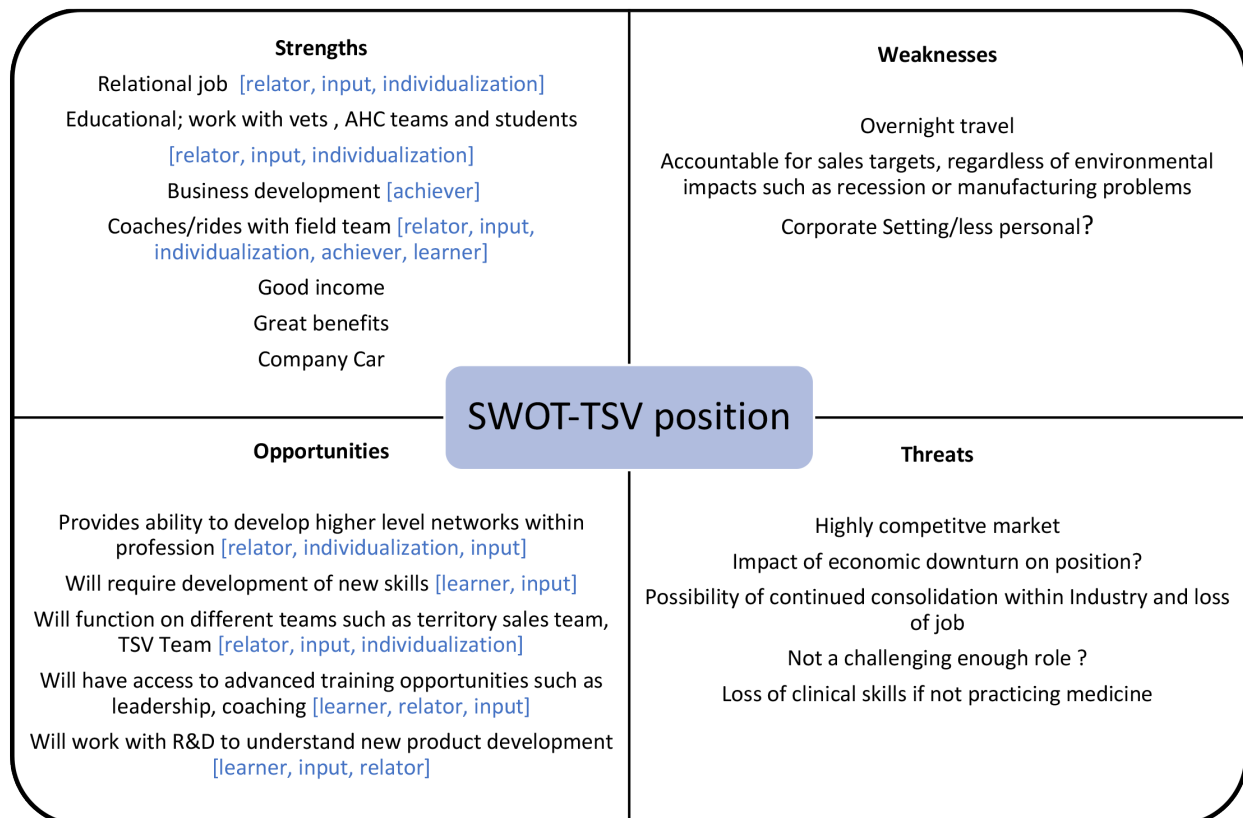
"In assessing the fit, the relative risk of the move and available resources should be considered."

SWOT Analysis Example

Finally, when would you like to make the career change? As you can determine from this article, wise career changes require effort, time, patience, and perseverance. In my experience, the journey is worthwhile!

Hypothetical position: Technical Services Veterinarian (TSV)

Use the competency descriptions from the job posting to initiate the SWOT analysis, complete with information about your core values, 'Why', Strengthsfinder and personality preferences. For this example, we will use the strengths: learner, achiever, input, individualization and relational, as indicated in the chart in brackets.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Wendy Hauser, DVM is the founder of Peak Veterinary Consulting and has practiced for 30+ years as an associate, practice owner and relief veterinarian. She has worked in the animal health industry as a pet health insurance executive and as a technical services veterinarian. Dr. Hauser, passionate about education and innovation, consults with both industry partners and individual veterinary hospitals. She is a regular presenter at veterinary conferences, facilitating workshops on hospital culture, associate development, leadership, client relations and operations. Frequently published, she is the co-author of “The Veterinarian’s Guide to Healthy Pet Plans.” Learn more about Peak Veterinary Consulting at www.peakveterinaryconsulting.com.

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¹ Gilbert, R.G., Sohi, S.R., & McEachern, G.A. (2008). Measuring work preferences A multidimensional tool to enhance career self-management. Career Development International, 13(1), 56-78.

² Sinek, S. Start with Why. 2009

³ Ted Talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sioZd3AxmE>

⁴ <http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-core-values.html>

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