

THE PORTFOLIO – A TOOL FOR JOB SEARCH AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

During a recent job transition, I made a commitment to put into practice all the suggestions I had made to my career counseling clients throughout the years. I would clarify my goals, research possibilities, construct a resume that highlighted my most relevant skills, network relentlessly, and ... develop a career portfolio.

Skills and accomplishments are the most meaningful currency in our rapidly changing economy. In *Portfolio Power*, Martin Kimeldorf observes that transferable skills provide our greatest insurance against the insecurities of the workplace, and the image of a portable case in which to carry our skills to a new location is an apt one. A strong resume will tell the reader not only what we did, but how well we did it. A portfolio goes beyond that by showing the results and the quality of the work.

I started assembling my portfolio by gathering artifacts of my past work. I found a memo evaluating my effectiveness at a project that I'd forgotten about, certificates attesting to continuous learning, staff directories that reminded me of contacts that could be resurrected, reports that I had written and letters of appreciation. I filled a folder with evidence of skills developed and work well done.

Next, I sorted the papers into categories and identified my skills and strengths based on the solid evidence of results achieved, a strategy that helped me get past my aversion to self-promotion. I hadn't been consciously questioning my career goals, but reviewing this record of my work in a tangible way confirmed that my choices were good ones. Even at this point in my career, I could decide to explore new applications of my skills, but for me the decision was clear. My career as a counselor had been good for me, and I had been able to make worthwhile contributions.

Finally, I assembled the most relevant pieces in an attractive format that would protect them and allow them to be easily shown to others. I paid a small amount for a three-ring binder, some vinyl page protectors and tab dividers. I kept the items that did not make the final cut in another binder, so that pages could be exchanged depending on the job I was pursuing or the company with which I was communicating. I composed an introduction that pulled the pieces together and explained why they were chosen. My table of contents will require occasional revision as items are pulled out or new pieces are added.

Most employers believe that past performance is the best indicator of future performance, and actual work samples go a large step beyond assertions of ability. But even if we never carry our portfolio to an interview, the effects of creating one - heightened self-confidence, a clear awareness of skills and accomplishments, and the chance to reevaluate the appropriateness of our direction - will be held securely in our internal portfolio. If you're looking for a productive exercise and a tool for career management, consider developing a portfolio.

By Nancy Swenson, career counselor, Life/Work Center