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**This Blog**

About

Email

Apr	May 2006					Jun
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Search**
 **Go**
**Archives**

May 2006 (23)

April 2006 (30)

March 2006 (39)

February 2006 (41)

January 2006 (26)

December 2005 (26)

November 2005 (8)

October 2005 (6)

September 2005 (2)

August 2005 (7)

**News**

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» Blogs that link here



Canada's Association of Information Technology (IT) Professionals

**Resident Bloggers**

Stephen Ibaraki

Technology Journalist I.S.P.,  
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Barnaby Jeans

IT Pro Advisor  
Microsoft Canada

**Eight Career Tips {Life lessons}**

I received an e-mail yesterday if I could share some of the roles I have undertaken and then provide career tips.

I thought for a minute and compiled this list of a few background experiences:

1. Hardware: technical papers, designing, since 1965
2. Software: systems, design, development, since 1970
3. Teaching IT and business; since 1980
4. Writing: technical papers, articles, books, blogs; since 1970s'
5. Speaking: regional, national, international; since 1970s'
6. Marketing: regional, national, international; since 1980s'
7. Consulting; since the 1970s'
8. Strategic planning: since the 1970s'
9. Executive management and boards: since the 1980s'
10. Entrepreneurship and starting companies: since the 1980s'
11. Working and volunteering with a variety of non-profit and professional groups such as CIPS: since the 1980s' ; the latest is with the Canadian IT Managers forum

Here are my career tips or life lessons:

1. Have a pure motivation for your work... provide and make meaning for others: it is not about money. Strive to make it better for others. Your career goals and money will come.
2. Differentiate and provide value: This basic principle in starting a company and consulting also applies to careers. I had a meeting with a senior executive and he talked about how this made a substantial difference in his life. You will see these principles in talks given by [Guy Kawasaki](#) and on his blog.
3. Do not worry about being 100% ready before starting a new career move: try, and try again—be persistent. Colin Powell talks about this too with his P40-70 rule where you start considering taking something on when you have 40% of the information. It is easy to get into preparation paralysis where you put something off since you are not 100% ready. I use a mountain analogy sometimes to describe what I mean. Imagine it's dark and you have to get to the mountain top. You can't see the entire path but you can make out the next 50 meters which is the extent of your flashlight. So go the 50 meters and you will see the next 50 along the path to the top. You will get there if you are patient and keep trying!
4. Make continual incremental improvements from the feedback that you actively solicit. I always ask for feedback on how I can improve and in the process I learn a lot from others. I recommend doing a constant environmental assessment of your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (a personal SWOT analysis). I blogged about doing a SWOT analysis in response to a question from the [Mike Stonebraker blog](#) and about a personal SWOT analysis in a response to a question from the [Versatlist blog](#) (there's also a lead-up blog called: [Most Wanted: a Multi-Specialist with Business Acumen or I.S.P.](#))
5. It is all about relationships and continual communications. Endeavour to build relationship networks. I had a discussion last year with a noted entrepreneur who has founded a number of companies. His latest is shaping to be a very large company [I believe \$1B+] due to the technical innovation years ahead of the industry. He did graduate studies at Harvard and I asked him about the biggest benefit from going to Harvard. The course work was great but he felt the greatest value was from the relationships he formed. They helped him then and throughout his long and successful career. Two other successful business people I talked to this year took their MBAs for the relationships—they already had one MBA but took another from the US just for the relationships. The Canadian Information Processing Society (CIPS) is an ideal place to grow your relationships. This Canadian IT Managers (CIM) forum is another. The more you collaborate and exchange with others, the more you will learn and grow.
6. Keep a list of goals and review them once a day. Ask yourself, have I moved closer to my goals today? What have I done to direct this improvement? I find this keeps me focused.
7. 93% of any engagement is perception and 7% is content. Surprising, right? It's all about the message delivery. One international expert I talked to this year indicated, you can have the greatest technical competency but if you can not communicate it, its value is hidden. I recommended taking every opportunity to speak, teach, write, or volunteer to sharpen your messaging skills.
8. Look for opportunities to take on a wide range of roles. It is something that Gartner recommends. In fact, one way to gain a variety of skills is to do work for a non-profit group. I found throughout my career it has made a difference to take on different roles and challenges. My motto is that you succeed by trying and meeting added goals are just nice extras! It is about continually learning and improving.

Cheers,  
Stephen Ibaraki, I.S.P., [sibaraki@cips.ca](mailto:sibaraki@cips.ca)

Published Thursday, May 18, 2006 9:29 AM by [cdnitmgr](#)

Filed Under: [Stephen Ibaraki](#), [Guest Bloggers](#)



John Oxley  
Director IT Pro Evangelism  
Microsoft Canada



#### Guest Bloggers



#### Navigation

- Home
- Photos

#### Post Categories

- Adam Cole (5)
- Career Tips (2)
- CC Blogged Down (10)
- DJ Dunkerley (5)
- Events (13)
- Graham Jones (14)
- Guest Bloggers (84)
- Industry Perspectives (16)
- Interviews (26)
- IT Manager Interviews (3)
- Mitch Tulloch (4)
- MS News (13)
- Newswire (2)
- Partners (1)
- Stephen Ibaraki (74)
- Training (4)
- Val Matison (4)

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#### Comments

##### # Interesting Finds: May 18, 2006 AM edition

Thursday, May 18, 2006 11:09 AM by [Jason Haley](#)

##### # re: Eight Career Tips {Life lessons}

Thursday, May 18, 2006 3:01 PM by [E. E. M.](#)

I totally agree with your tips. I think that the most successful people have the vision to see beyond the short or long term. The success attained in reaching your goals is often the road taken to get there.

##### # re: Eight Career Tips {Life lessons}

Thursday, May 18, 2006 6:14 PM by [Ami Peters](#)

Many thanks for sharing the tips. Which is more valuable, more education, certifications, or experience?

Warm wishes

##### # re: Eight Career Tips {Life lessons}

Thursday, May 18, 2006 11:37 PM by [Stephen Ibaraki, I.S.P., sibaraki@cips.ca](#)

Jason,

I checked out your site. You have a good collection. Nice work!

Cheers,  
Stephen Ibaraki, I.S.P.

##### # re: Eight Career Tips {Life lessons}

Friday, May 19, 2006 11:36 AM by [Christoph](#)

add 6) i think once per day is too much. there are allways some days, where you didn't done anything to come closer to your targets, but they are needed to get thru the stuff that comes in daily. i have 2 lists. one of the short goals, that i'm reviewing maybe 2 times a week, and one with my big targets, that i review twice a month. depending on how fast the actual time goes by. i think thats a good time. too much reviewings of your goal list makes me nervous, if nothing changed.

##### # re: Eight Career Tips {Life lessons}

Friday, May 19, 2006 1:32 PM by [Stephen Ibaraki, I.S.P., sibaraki@cips.ca](#)

EEM,

There is definitely a benefit in the process itself and the lessons attained from this. Jung says, "Knowledge is rests not only upon truth alone but also upon error." I would like to extend this to include "and working through the challenges." It's a common theme in the dialogues I have had with more than 240 leaders in business and technology since 2001. However, you have to be open to watching and examining the journey itself. If you do this, you will gain valuable insights daily.

Cheers,  
Stephen Ibaraki, I.S.P.

##### # re: Eight Career Tips {Life lessons}

Friday, May 19, 2006 2:36 PM by [Stephen Ibaraki, I.S.P., sibaraki@cips.ca](#)

Ami,

Education, certifications, and experience—that is a question I'm often asked.

My background involves all three:

- 1) Having designed educational IT curriculum as a college educator for 25 years including setting up the first client/server labs;
- 2) Obtaining certifications by the major vendors [Microsoft, Novell, IBM] and professional designations, CIPS I.S.P. and NPA CNP;
- 3) Setting up academic programs providing academic education, industry certification and supporting professional designations;
- 4) And finally by working with computers since 1965 and advising thousands of companies worldwide – hinted at in my blog post.

.....  
About a month ago, I received a call from the US Department of Labour and their O\*NET Research program about my perspectives in this area—it was a good long discussion.

So, I am speaking from this perspective. I believe all three have value with experience having the edge. If you can show me what you can do backed by proven experience, this means a lot. This experience must be a minimum of 3 years but with a preference for 5 or more years. However I see the trend is to have more—experience backed by traditional education, vendor certifications, capped by a professional designation. Building high technical competence in multiple areas combined with a sound business knowledge is a good target. This speaks to the blogs you have seen on being a "versatilist".

Vendor certification provides validation of technical competence in an area and it is often a requirement in specialist jobs. Professional designations show competence over a broad range of areas and mastery of a body of knowledge, provide a code of ethics, standards of practice, demonstrated professional development, and all of this is complemented by a proven professional experience component. Moreover there is recognition and support of education. Finally a solid of understanding of business is an embedded reality with professional designations. It's for this reason that I have an I.S.P.—a professional designation from CIPS that I obtained in 1991.

It's an interesting question and the more you have, the better today.

Cheers,  
Stephen Ibaraki, I.S.P.

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**# re: Eight Career Tips {Life lessons}**

Friday, May 19, 2006 2:51 PM by [Stephen Ibaraki, I.S.P.](#),  
[sibaraki@cips.ca](mailto:sibaraki@cips.ca)

Christoph,

Those are some good points you are making. It definitely works to tailor your goals list to your preferences. Your idea of two lists, short and longer term, is a great way of keeping on target.

It also helps to have S.M.A.R.T. goals:  
Specific – pinpoint and not too general  
Measurable – so you know that you have attained the goal  
Achievable – the goal has to be reasonable and not so big that it would be impossible to achieve  
Relevant – the goal has to make sense to the position you are in  
Time-bound – the goal should have a time frame or end-date

These SMART goals come from strategic planning. Often, elements that apply to business and corporate goal setting, also apply to career goals.

Thank you,  
Stephen Ibaraki, I.S.P.

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**# re: Eight Career Tips {Life lessons}**

Friday, May 19, 2006 4:36 PM by jointer

Stephen, I cannot think of anyone that I know who is better equipped to offer these great insights. Based on looking back over my own career, I would like to add the following.

Clearly, it is very important to have both short and longer term goals but I think that it is also important not to become so focused on your formal goals that you don't see or consider the "road less traveled". When I consider now the many different things that I have done, each of which added important insights and experience, I would say the 80/20 rule applied; 80% serendipity and 20% plan.

I do not offer these comments to suggest that one shouldn't think about and have goals because without them you would tend to be "sailing without any kind of rudder"; more to suggest that perhaps when a "storm comes along", eg. being made redundant, that going where the "wind is blowing you" may take you to something totally different and ultimately beneficial. It may not all feel good at first but survivors are adaptable and ultimately prosper.

For example, in my own case, I have a degree in Chem. Eng. and had no other thoughts but being in the main stream of that discipline when I graduated. Since then I have worked in instant coffee process development, designed chemical plants, written software for others to design chemical plants, worked as a technical development engineer on chemical plants, operated/managed chemical plants in a unionized environment, worked in computer aided design of chemical plants, managed a drafting/design department, managed an engineering department of over 100 people, managed projects, managed an IT department, managed a project management department, gone back to school, worked as a software developer using Microsoft technologies, run my own web design business, and finally I am now teaching Windows desktop and Office. Although, much of my work has been in the process industry, the roles have been very varied; literally from "chalk" to "cheese" in successive jobs at times.

With apologies for the long list, which is most definitely not intended to convey, "look at me", the order and progression of those many different jobs was dictated as much by other people and events outside of my control as any goal setting.

Having said all of that, there was one thing that has been a constant theme throughout most of my nearly 40 year career, and that I was never very far from a computer. That is the one thing that I can say was a clear goal right from my University days!! It seems that may have been a good choice :).

Cheers  
Graham Jones

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**# re: Eight Career Tips {Life lessons}**

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Sunday, May 21, 2006 9:23 PM by [Stephen Ibaraki, I.S.P.](mailto:sibaraki@cips.ca)  
[sibaraki@cips.ca](mailto:sibaraki@cips.ca)

Graham,

Those are very good points you make.

What appears as roadblocks or chance events stalling your career in one direction produce new opportunities along a different path. There's a saying from Vince Lombardi, "Luck that's where preparation and opportunity meet." By investigating other paths and having the willingness to build diverse skill sets, you in essence create your own "lucky" opportunities, since you are more ready for them when they appear.

There's also a story from the famed Steve Jobs [the force behind Apple, Pixar, ...], that I would like to share:

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"... 17 years later I did go to college. But I naively chose a college that was almost as expensive as Stanford, and all of my working-class parents' savings were being spent on my college tuition. After six months, I couldn't see the value in it. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life and no idea how college was going to help me figure it out. And here I was spending all of the money my parents had saved their entire life. So I decided to drop out and trust that it would all work out OK. It was pretty scary at the time, but looking back it was one of the best decisions I ever made. The minute I dropped out I could stop taking the required classes that didn't interest me, and begin dropping in on the ones that looked interesting. It wasn't all romantic. I didn't have a dorm room, so I slept on the floor in friends' rooms, I returned coke bottles for the 5¢ deposits to buy food with, and I would walk the 7 miles across town every Sunday night to get one good meal a week at the Hare Krishna temple. I loved it. And much of what I stumbled into by following my curiosity and intuition turned out to be priceless later on. Let me give you one example:

Reed College at that time offered perhaps the best calligraphy instruction in the country. Throughout the campus every poster, every label on every drawer, was beautifully hand calligraphed. Because I had dropped out and didn't have to take the normal classes, I decided to take a calligraphy class to learn how to do this. I learned about serif and san serif typefaces, about varying the amount of space between different letter combinations, about what makes great typography great. It was beautiful, historical, artistically subtle in a way that science can't capture, and I found it fascinating. None of this had even a hope of any practical application in my life. But ten years later, when we were designing the first Macintosh computer, it all came back to me. And we designed it all into the Mac. It was the first computer with beautiful typography. If I had never dropped in on that single course in college, the Mac would have never had multiple typefaces or proportionally spaced fonts. And since Windows just copied the Mac, it's likely that no personal computer would have them. If I had never dropped out, I would have never dropped in on this calligraphy class, and personal computers might not have the wonderful typography that they do. Of course it was impossible to connect the dots looking forward when I was in college. But it was very, very clear looking backwards ten years later. Again, you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something — your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life..."

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Cheers,  
Stephen Ibaraki, I.S.P.

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**# re: Eight Career Tips {Life lessons}**

Tuesday, May 23, 2006 1:30 AM by [DJ Dunkerley](mailto:DJ.Dunkerley)

"A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects." - Robert A. Heinlein

Specialization is the bane of a IT career, especially, in my humble opinion.

I suspect, Stephen, that you would not debate me with great vigour on this assertion.

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**# re: Eight Career Tips {Life lessons}**

Tuesday, May 23, 2006 12:03 PM by [Stephen Ibaraki, F.I.S.P.](mailto:sibaraki@cips.ca)  
[sibaraki@cips.ca](mailto:sibaraki@cips.ca)

Graham,

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Cheers,  
Stephen Ibaraki, F.I.S.P.

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