



Three characteristics of career sustainability

By Michael Haubrich, CFP®

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Every day we seem to hear some reference to sustainability. Some people refer to it in relation to the environment. Others use it to reference lifestyle choices. Still others yearn for a sustainable economy. How many of us, I wonder, think of sustainability in terms of our careers?

I view career sustainability as vital to our overall well-being. I'm not using the term "sustainability" to mean that a person must enter a job or career and sustain that role indefinitely. Actually I view it as quite the opposite. Career sustainability relies on ideas that are more closely related to change than they are to stability. This is an important distinction. To achieve career sustainability, I feel every working person needs to benchmark their value proposition and skills against a constantly changing marketplace, actively engage in a process of lifelong learning and adaptation, and network to foster diverse relationships amid ever changing demographic distinctions.

Let's explore each of these ideas in more detail. For the sake of illustrating the first point, benchmarking your skills, let's say you graduated from medical school in 1970. At that time, your skills were finely honed to meet the medical needs of patients as you knew them to be. I don't think a doctor practices medicine today in exactly the same way as he or she did in 1970. And I know I wouldn't want to be a patient of one who does! Too many things have changed ... new diseases and illnesses emerged and a whole host of new drugs and treatment modalities are available that were beyond imagination four decades ago. To achieve career sustainability, doctors, as well as many other professionals, must benchmark their skills on a continual basis against an ever-changing environment, new information, new technologies, and so much more.

Similarly, lifelong learning is a critical component of career sustainability. We live in an age of information and knowledge. I think about my stepson in college and how outdated some of the things he's learned will be even by the time he graduates. I recently saw "Shift Happens, Educational 2010," video on YouTube that shared the thought that we are helping our young people prepare for careers that don't even exist yet. It emphasizes that ongoing learning is absolutely necessary to remain relevant in your career and to simply exist in today's society of constant, rapid change.

Networking with as many different people and groups as possible will also contribute greatly to your ability to achieve career sustainability. Anyone who says one key to career sustainability is "not about who you know," obviously doesn't spend much time building a vital, vibrant network of knowledge resources and value-added relationships.



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Benchmarking, continual learning, and active networking are three characteristics of a sustainable career that can contribute to your overall well-being.

Michael Haubrich is a fee-only financial planner with Financial Service Group Inc., a registered investment advisory firm at 4812 Northwestern Ave., online at www.ToYourWealth.com