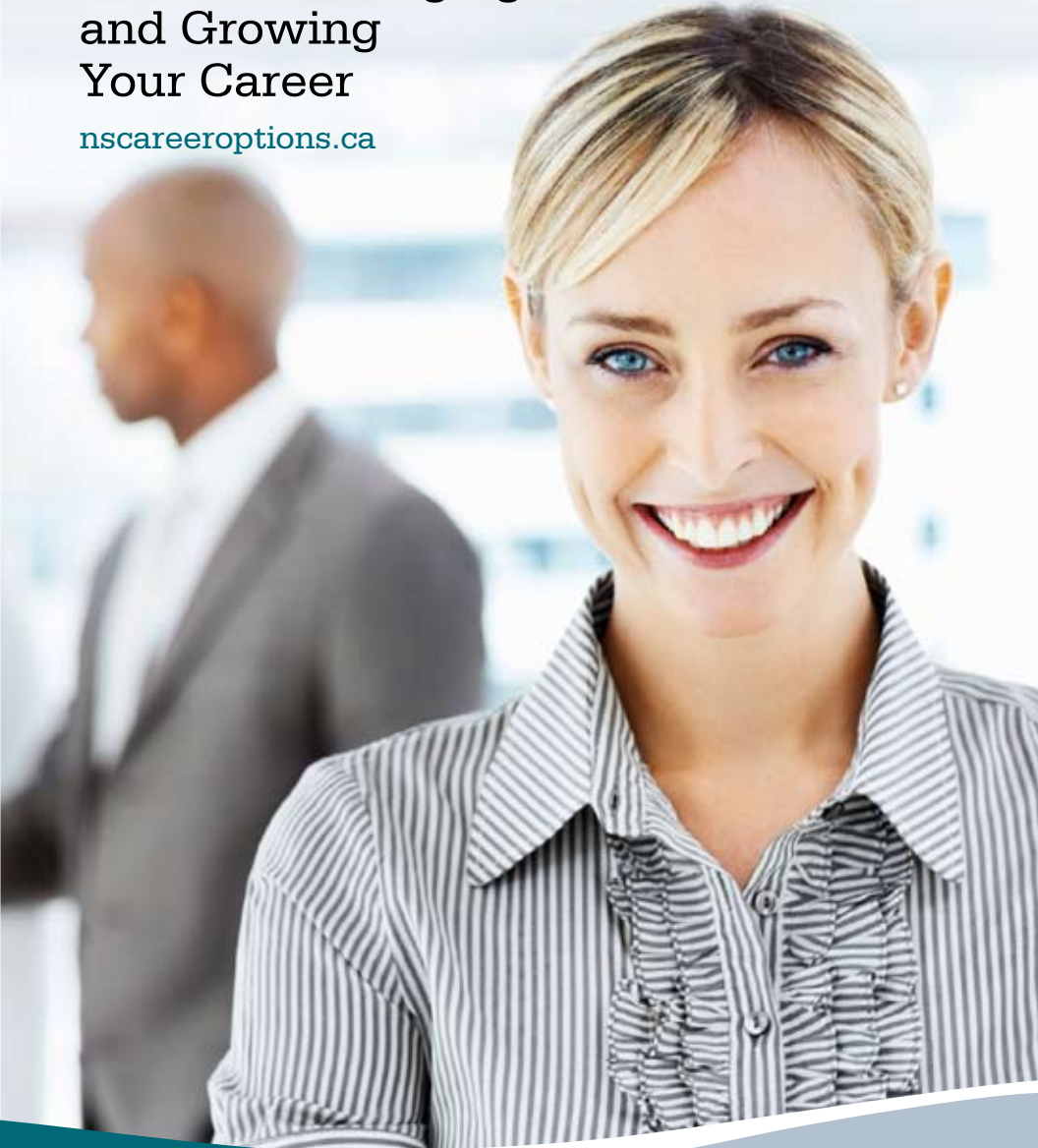


# Career Options

Guide to Managing  
and Growing  
Your Career

[nscareeroptions.ca](http://nscareeroptions.ca)



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Labour market and employment requirements are subject to change, and it is recommended that the reader verify the information before making any career decisions.

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Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education

An initiative of JobsHere



## NAVIGATING THE WORKFORCE

Looking for a promotion? Considering some professional development? Contemplating a career change?

If you are reading this, chances are you have entered the working world and are now thinking about what your future holds. Career planning should not stop just because you have landed a job. To maintain job satisfaction you need to continuously set new goals and take the steps to achieve them.

This guide will help you learn about key concepts in a “self-managed” career – one where you call all the shots. Do not wait until you lose your job. A person who is “self-managing” their career is proactive – growing their network, meeting new people, handing out business cards, taking courses, and thinking about what they want!



Visit [nscareeroptions.ca/careerplanning](https://nscareeroptions.ca/careerplanning) for more information on the career management cycle and steps for career planning.

### Inside this guide you will find information on:

- Becoming an employee who is valued. . . . . PAGE 4
- Developing career building relationships . . . . . PAGE 7
- The career management cycle . . . . . PAGE 8
- Making a career change . . . . . PAGE 10
- Troubleshooting in the workplace . . . . . PAGE 13
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# A RECIPE FOR A VALUED EMPLOYEE

Career success is a building process and it is hard to recover from bad first impressions or shaky starts. If you commit to doing your best all the way along, there is a lot of room for growth.

You can have all the “on paper” or technical skills that the job requires but if you are not a productive, flexible worker who cares about his/her work and communicates well, you are not going to be moving up the ladder anytime soon.

## Did you know?

The number one complaint employers have is their employees’ attitudes. One negative employee can poison a whole workplace. Attitude directly affects performance and significantly impacts a company’s ability to produce and succeed. Having a good attitude is a tried and true way to shine as an employee and get your boss’ attention.



Today’s job market is very competitive, so you must continue to demonstrate your abilities to your employer. In order to advance you need to convince your employer that you are up to the task.

## Top tips to guide you in becoming a valued employee:

- ✓ **BE CONFIDENT IN YOUR ABILITIES TO LEARN AND GROW ON THE JOB** – Nothing is worse than a know-it-all who comes in and states their opinion without knowing the facts. No one expects you to know everything right away, so take a deep breath, listen carefully, ask questions, and be respectful of the experience and wisdom surrounding you.
- ✓ **LISTEN TO INSTRUCTIONS** – Many mistakes happen because someone misunderstood what was supposed to be done, likely because they failed to pay attention to what they were being told. Listen carefully and ask questions where necessary to reduce mistakes.
- ✓ **SHOW INITIATIVE** – Try to anticipate problems and solutions before the need arises. Rather than waiting for your boss to tell you what to do, think things through and look for tasks that need performing. Evaluate the way your organization currently does things and try to identify ways to improve.
- ✓ **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY** – If something goes wrong do not attempt to shift blame if it should lie with you. Take responsibility for the situation, develop an action plan to deal with it, and learn from the mistake to prevent similar situations in the future. Valuable employees are not afraid to take responsibility for their actions.
- ✓ **BE DEPENDABLE** – Arrive to work on time, return phone calls, respond to email, and perform your tasks on time. No matter what the task, strive for excellence.
- ✓ **SHOW A GENUINE INTEREST IN THE ORGANIZATION** – Hopefully you did some research before you got the job, but do not let it stop there. There is no better way to impress your employer than to continue to learn about the company and display a keen interest in what is important within your workplace. Keep abreast of all happenings within your profession and industry.
- ✓ **MAINTAIN A FRIENDLY AND POSITIVE OUTLOOK** – The reality is that no one wants to work with someone who is always negative. Being courteous and acting in a likeable way will help you be accepted by the team and excel in the workplace.
- ✓ **BE WILLING TO WORK HARD AND GO THE EXTRA MILE** – Nobody likes to hear “that’s not my job, ask somebody else.” It is true that your position will have specific role to play in the organization. However, unexpected things are bound to come up that fall outside your daily routine. Going the extra mile and helping out will get you noticed by your boss, and help build positive relationships with your co-workers.



## FINDING THE PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP YOU

One of the best things you can do for yourself and your career is to talk to people. Everyone has heard about the importance of “networking” but it does not stop there. It is essential to continue to build your web of supporters, “vital friends,” mentors, and potential future employers even after you have entered the workforce. When you are managing and growing your career, relationship-building is absolutely crucial.

Here are some types of people who can help you in your work life:

### VITAL FRIENDS

This is a term created by the writer, Tom Rath. It refers to co-workers who act as your sounding board, who pat you on the back for a job well done, or who give you that needed reality check. In fact, there are a handful of different roles these vital friends can play. Forming these types of relationships can help you survive your day-to-day.

### MENTORS

Many organizations and companies formally offer mentorship programs while some people find mentors informally through working relationships. A mentor is usually a more experienced person who acts as a role model, guide, or leader to someone just starting out. They provide advice and encouragement by sharing their experiences, competencies, and skill. The most important thing is that you trust your mentor and feel you can freely share your feelings and thoughts. You may not have found someone to fit this role yet, but being open to the idea is a good place to start. These are powerful relationships that can be life-changing.

If you have not landed the job of your dreams yet, then you need to always make an effort to meet new people, make good impressions, and look for interesting opportunities. Remember, employers largely hire people that they know so get out there and make some connections.

- ✓ **SELL YOURSELF ON YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS** – Sometimes an employer needs to be reminded of your accomplishments. Your performance appraisal is a good time to remind your boss of your achievements if they appear to have gone unnoticed. Do not resort to bragging though as that can be seen as a negative trait.
- ✓ **GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE** – While it is important to sell your own achievements, you do not want to be seen as taking credit for a fellow employee’s work. Most workplaces operate in a team environment and a good employer will value an employee who recognizes everyone’s contribution to the team.
- ✓ **PRACTICE SELF-ANALYSIS** – You should continuously analyze your own performance. Each day ask yourself if there are things you can improve on. Be aware of how your skills compare to changes in the workplace to identify areas that might require further training or development.
- ✓ **ASK FOR FEEDBACK** – It is important to request feedback so you can know if you are on track and whether you are focusing on the appropriate things. Being able to accept constructive feedback and initiate steps to improve will demonstrate to your employer your willingness to put your best foot forward.

Visit [nscareeroptions/lookingforwork](https://nscareeroptions.com/lookingforwork) for tips on building your network.

Visit [nscareeroptions.ca/lookingforwork](https://nscareeroptions.ca/lookingforwork) for additional tips on conducting an information interview.



## CHARTING A NEW COURSE

Career Management is a continuous cycle. You should always be moving through the following stages during your career:

- Evaluating where you currently are – what are your current career priorities? What are your current skills and abilities? What is your work/life balance?
- Determining where you want to be – exploring your options, whether they are improvement within your current position, advancement in your organization, or a complete change of career.
- Planning to get there – make plans – determine what you need to do to achieve your goals.
- Getting there – take action on your plan.
- Assessing what you have learned – review what you have learned in this process and begin the cycle again.

Even if you feel perfectly content with the job you have now, chances are that something is going to happen to change your situation. The most likely thing is that you are going to get a little restless and want to shake things up. Life can also throw you curveballs you were not expecting. Either way, you should always be prepared.

### Here some steps to get you ready:

- ✓ Visualize what you want. Imagine yourself completely happy. It might help to write the details down so you can see exactly what aspects of your life and your work give you the most pleasure.
- ✓ Compare this vision to your current reality. Do not despair if there is a substantial gap between the two. The great news is that you can begin to take action on any number of fronts to realistically close that gap. Once you have focused in on what you are really looking for, then you can move on to the next step.
- ✓ Do some research. You may need to conduct some information interviews with potential employers, graduates of particular programs, or institutions that offer training. The more information you can gather, the better informed your choices will be.
- ✓ Set a goal.
- ✓ Set a deadline to meet the goal and outline the small steps you are going to take to get there.
- ✓ Get supportive help. The key word here is support. Seek out people who have a positive outlook, who go after what they want, and who genuinely believe that all people should pursue their dreams.
- ✓ Do not let mistakes or bumps in the road deter you. For many people, the very thought of failing is what stops them from ever stepping outside their comfort zone and trying anything new. How someone responds to mistakes or perceived failures is more important than the mistakes themselves.
- ✓ Take action – begin baby-stepping today!

You may want to create a portfolio of all your experiences and accomplishments. This will be something that you can easily pull out to see where you have been and help plan where you want to go. It will also be on-hand and ready to go in case any great opportunities pop up.

In addition, an up-to-date portfolio and resume will highlight gaps in your training and development that you may need to address before you can make your next steps. It also helps you be more aware of how you might be able to transfer your skills to related occupations.

### Did you know?

Most businesses (95%) offer some form of training, either formal or informal, to their employees. It is in your best interest to capitalize on those opportunities (CFIB, Canada's Training Ground, 2009).

Individuals who are in charge of their career do not become complacent – they pursue whatever professional development and training is necessary for the next step of their journey. Your development is your responsibility, not your employers.

visit [nscareeroptions.ca/lookingforwork](https://nscareeroptions.ca/lookingforwork) for tips on resumes and interviews, and job search strategies.

# INITIATING CHANGE

There are literally millions of people out there who do not feel fulfilled by their work and think they have missed out on something special in their lives. The cycle of full-time work that pays bills and helps raise kids, can start to feel like a bit of a trap. Many look at a career change as a way to find satisfaction. If you are one of the people looking for that “something special”, this next section is for you.

If you are unhappy with your current situation you do not want to act impulsively. Here are some career changing mistakes to avoid:

- Do not give up your job for the next “hot field” (you are no further ahead if you are just following the latest trend)
- Do not let money be the deciding factor
- Do not make any big changes in your work if your personal life is out of balance
- Do not throw the baby out with the bathwater (sometimes the type of work is not the problem, it might be the workplace)

If you feel the need for a change a good first step is to do a thorough evaluation of your current situation. Before you can decide on a course of action, you need to determine your motivation for wanting to act. Are you running toward something, or away from something? If you are running away from something chances are you are avoiding something that makes you unhappy. You need to identify this and determine if you can change the situation.

For example, you might have a long commute, be dealing with a nasty co-worker, or believe there are no avenues for advancement.

Your situation might improve if you can change your schedule to miss traffic, or talk with your co-worker to resolve conflict, or discuss office opportunities with your manager.

Sometimes we can fill what is missing in our life outside of work. Hobbies, volunteering, and taking classes are all excellent ways to get some mental exercise and relieve stress outside the workplace. Take up a new sport or activity, join a community group or get involved with a charity, join a reading group or cooking class.

Hobbies and passions can also turn into career opportunities. If you firmly believe that you are in the wrong line of work, try stepping out into something new a little bit at a time. Keep your day job but check out the scene by starting a business on the side or freelancing. For example, if you want to be a singer you could try an open mic night. If you want to be a writer you could start a blog.

Another step is to examine your values. Ask yourself what your objectives are. Are they in sync with what you are currently doing? Perhaps you are in the right industry, but you have drifted away from the parts that truly give you joy. Take the time for some self-assessment to evaluate what is best for you.

So you have evaluated your motives and assessed your values and have decided you still want a career change. Where do you go next? Are you able to initiate change?

Before you act you need to understand the risks. Is it a good time to be entering your industry of interest? Some industries are expected to experience growth in the coming years, but others might not have many opportunities. Will you need to go back to school? Will you be taking a pay cut when you start your new career? Someone with the responsibilities of a family might not be able to afford a pay cut, or might not be able to pay tuition without causing financial hardship for the rest of the family. If you do your research you can develop an action plan to deal with any obstacles you might encounter.



View detailed profiles of over 300 occupational groups and potential employers at [nscareeroptions.ca/searchjobprofiles](https://nscareeroptions.ca/searchjobprofiles).

# TROUBLESHOOTING IN THE WORKPLACE

Over the course of your career, you are going to encounter troubles and difficulties. It is okay and completely normal. Issues such as a lack of feedback, conflict in the workplace, or being passed over for that promotion you were sure you would get can all leave you feeling discontented.

## FEEDBACK

Not all employers are going to be as vocal as you would like with their positive feedback. It is important to not get discouraged if you find yourself in that type of situation.

You would be surprised at the number of employees who suffer in silence. They assume their boss will identify the issue and magically fix the problem without having to bring it to their attention. While there are definitely a lot of insensitive supervisors out there, they simply cannot help you if you do not tell them something is wrong. Most employers would rather hold onto a good employee than be surprised by a resignation out of nowhere.

If you are concerned about a lack of feedback you should schedule a meeting with your supervisor and ask. Come prepared with previous work as examples or the objectives outlined in your performance plan and ask if you met expectations. If you did not, find out where you fell short and how you can improve. When given a new assignment re-state what you are supposed to do back to your supervisor to ensure you have understood. Take this time to ask questions to keep you on track, and identify your first step. Opening the channels of communication with your boss can go a long way to improve the situation.

## WORKPLACE CONFLICT

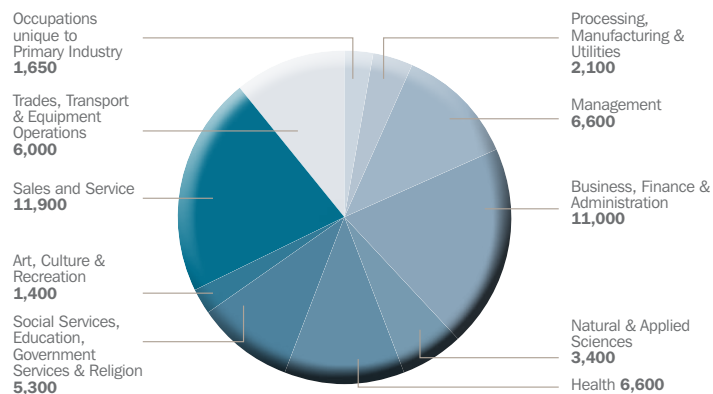
Another common problem at work is conflict. The first thing to realize and acknowledge is that you cannot escape conflict. It is natural and it exists in every workplace. The best thing you can do for yourself is learn how to deal with it.

## Did you know?

Studies show that 24-60 per cent of management time and energy is spent dealing with anger among employees. Anger and resentment lead to decreased productivity, increased stress among employees, hampered performance, high turnover rate, absenteeism, and even violence.



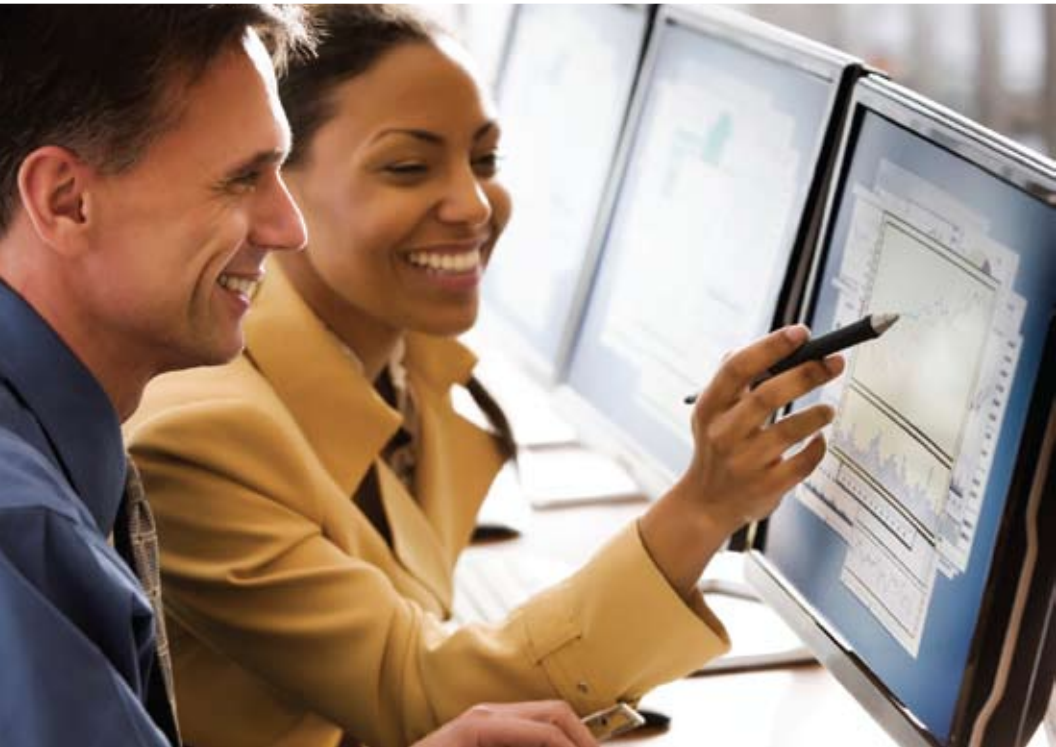
## What kind of work are people getting hired to do?



Source: COPS, Service Canada and the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education. Estimated openings due to growth and retirements, 2008-13.

As you mull over your options it can be helpful to discuss your career plan with a career counselor. There are Career Resource Centres throughout Nova Scotia that can assist you with your transition.

Visit [nscareeroptions.ca](http://nscareeroptions.ca) for information on Nova Scotia's labour market and a list of Career Resource Centres.



### Tips for managing conflict:

- ✓ Do not let bad feelings drag on. Use a friend, mentor, or supporter to discuss the situation, get another perspective, and form an action plan.
- ✓ Never assume that someone is doing something intentionally to spite you or make you angry. Ask questions to open up dialogue and get to the root of the problem.
- ✓ Resist the urge to talk behind someone's back. If you are feeling angry with a co-worker, nip the conflict in the bud by actually telling the truth.
- ✓ When you sit down to talk to someone you are having a conflict with, remember to state the problem clearly, let the other person have equal airtime, acknowledge what role you play in the conflict, and make any necessary apologies. Try to avoid being defensive, listen to the other person's perspective, and work on solutions together.
- ✓ If you are really angry and talking is not an option in the moment, do not lose your cool. Instead, go for a brisk walk at lunch to clear your head. This release of pent-up energy will make you feel better and breathe easier.
- ✓ In situations where the conflict has grown out of your control, it might be helpful to get a third party mediator.

### Did you know?

Anger is a legitimate emotion that can be expressed in constructive and positive ways. If you choose not to express yourself, it can breed stress and even more negativity. Remember conflict can be viewed as both a challenge and an opportunity. Make sure you view conflict situations as a chance to grow, not something holding you back.

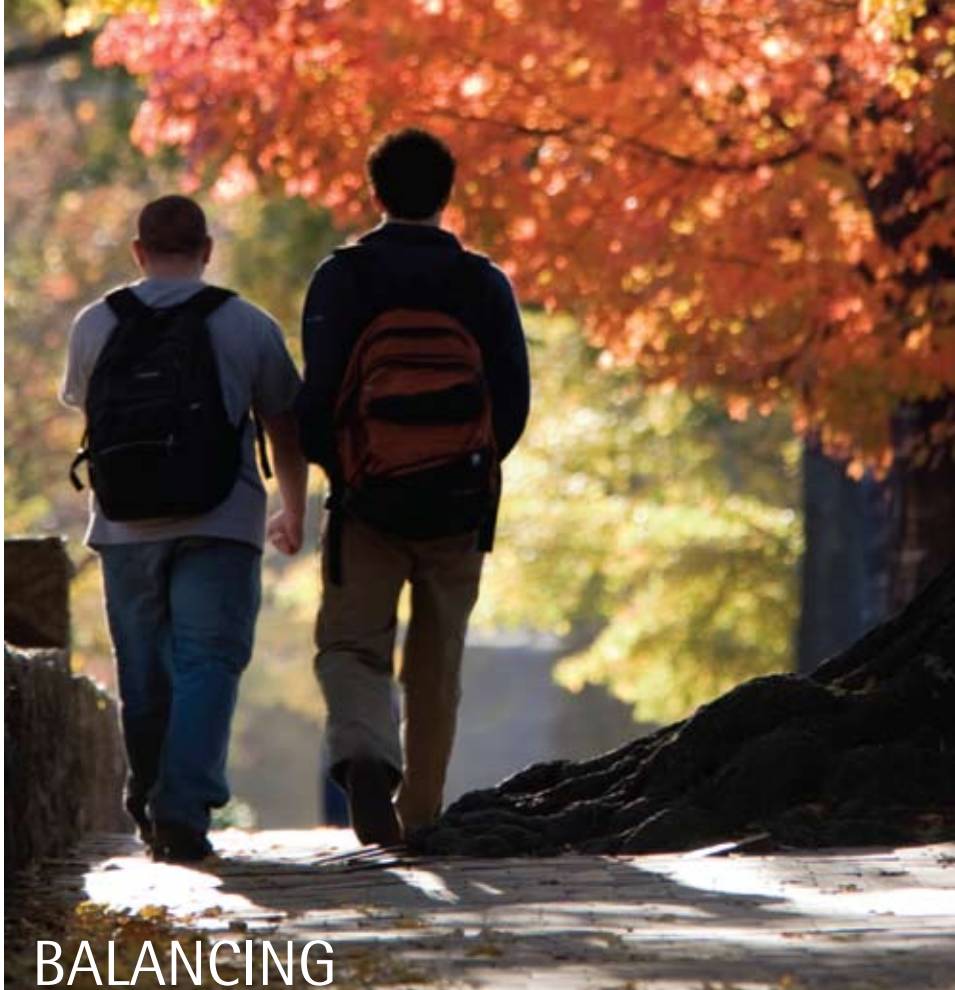
### NOT GETTING PROMOTED

You have spent years working hard only to learn that you were not quite good enough. Yes, it happens. The promotion you thought was yours went to someone else. It is natural to feel angry, disappointed, and even embarrassed. Give yourself a few days to work through these feelings, but do not let them take over and hinder your career future. Bottom line, do not do anything dramatic that you might regret later.

Take the time to learn from this experience. Meet with your boss to discuss where you fell short. Be prepared for answers that may be hard to hear. It is possible that while you felt that you had worked hard your boss may have felt that you still had more work to do. Maybe you were missing some specific skills, or did not have quite enough experience, or maybe your contributions were not visible enough to make an impression. Either way, listen and learn. Whatever they tell you can become the basis for some new career goals.

Remain professional. Try to support and learn from the person who was hired for the position you wanted. It might be tempting to dislike them, or be uncooperative, but they could provide good examples that can help you in the long run.

Visit [nscareeroptions.ca/workplaceresources](https://nscareeroptions.ca/workplaceresources) for links to information on employee rights and responsibilities.



## BALANCING YOUR WORK AND YOUR LIFE

Work life balance is really what you decide to make it. There is no magic formula. It is about getting to know yourself and your personal sense of well-being. Usually, you will have a sense of balance when you feel like you can effectively manage your various responsibilities at work, home, and in your community.

Balance is more than the hours you spend at work versus the hours you spend in the rest of your life. If you are feeling well physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, then chances are you have found your balance. If one or more of those elements feel out of place, it is time to explore what needs to shift.

Over the course of your career, your notion of a balanced life will most likely change. It is a good idea to frequently take stock of what is going on in all aspects of your life and see how they are interacting with each other.

### Did you know?

3 out of 4 workers say a healthy and safe work environment is very important to them and 2 out of 3 workers say a good balance between work and personal/family life is very important (CPRN, 21st Century Job Quality, 2007).

Visit [nscareeroptions.ca/educationandtraining](https://nscareeroptions.ca/educationandtraining) for information on available education and training programs.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Hopefully, you are feeling motivated to create and re-direct your career in a way that both suits and inspires your life. If you believe in yourself and hold tight to your dreams, anything is possible.

Have a clear vision, be proactive, know your options, focus on the positive, take action, and follow through. These steps will help guide you through many of the ups and downs of your career path. Remember, obstacles can be seen as both challenges and opportunities.

**Best of luck!**