

# THE CHOICE IS YOURS

## Choosing your employment options in the NSW Public Sector

### Introduction

There are many employment and career options and opportunities in the NSW Public Sector. Major objectives of the NSW Government are to provide quality services to the community while providing its employees with a work environment which encourages and supports professional and personal growth and enables maximum productivity and job satisfaction.

The Government is committed to the provision of equal employment opportunity, training and flexible work practices which assist employees to realise their career and work goals and achieve the corporate goals of their agency. The Equal Employment Opportunity Program in NSW monitors the implementation of these provisions and ensures that merit operates throughout the Sector.

The 1990s is an era of constant change in the work environment. The NSW Government, like other areas of employment, is aware of the need to be competitive and effective. The expectations of customers have changed and the Public Sector is responding by improving its services and ensuring its structures and employee skills are appropriate to meet customer needs.

The need to be responsive has meant there are new expectations of supervisors, managers and employees. There is a much greater emphasis on leadership, team work and communication skills at all levels and in a very broad range of jobs.

This has a significant impact on employees in the Public Sector. As the Public Sector changes to become more efficient, effective, responsive and flexible it also expects the same of its employees. While this can be a little unsettling, it creates opportunities for many to develop new skills, change career direction, find new and challenging jobs or make existing jobs more interesting and satisfying.

This booklet provides information on how to take responsibility for your work satisfaction and career choices thereby increasing your confidence and determination to succeed. It outlines steps in the process of making choices about your work situation and how to go about achieving your career goals. THE CHOICE IS YOURS!

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Director

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### Why people consider their work and future

There are a number of reasons why people at various stages of their working lives consider their work and future. Some reasons are:

- to build a career and gain a greater variety of skills;
- there are other jobs which might be more rewarding;
- to pursue other interests in life, or to balance the demands of work and other commitments, such as family, study and outside interests;
- the need to make themselves more competitive in the employment market;
- to more fully enjoy work or to find more challenging work;
- to obtain a promotion;
- to better utilise overseas experience and qualifications;
- to learn new skills or gain qualifications;
- following an organisational restructure when jobs have changed or cease to exist;
- personal circumstances have changed and people review the importance of their work, career and personal goals.

If you are thinking of making a change in your work, you need to plan for your future. It is better to take control and make the choice yourself.

A career change may take various directions. It does not necessarily mean a promotion. In the 1990s there are other options which increase your job satisfaction, your skills, increase your contribution to the Public Sector and allow you greater satisfaction in your personal life.

### Thinking about your present job

Before making a choice about your work options you need to think about what you want in your future. The most successful people are those who set both personal and work goals for themselves and plan how they will achieve their goals.

Think about your personal and work goals for the next two, five and ten years and write them down. If you have not already set goals for yourself or asked yourself what you want in the long term, you may need to spend some time on this task. Put aside time in the evening or on the weekend and write down your thoughts and goals. Do not be surprised if you find this

difficult. Keep a record of what you write as this will assist you in the future to determine if you are on track. Many career planning books contain information on the issues you need to consider when identifying your goals. At the back of this booklet there is a list of publications which may assist you.

Remember your work goals and your personal goals need to be compatible, and goals always need to be realistic.

Being clear about your future direction and setting goals is an important part of taking control. Dr Leonie Still states that:

*You will become a senior manager faster if you have a clear career goal.  
This means that you know where you are going in your career.<sup>2</sup>*

The following questions may help you assess your present situation.

- Do you enjoy your job?
- Does your job have prospects for gaining new skills, a transfer to other work, promotion or more responsibilities?
- Are you contributing to corporate goals?
- Does your income provide for your needs?
- Do you use your skills and qualifications in your job?
- Are there other jobs you might prefer?
- Will you still be happy in this job in two years?
- Do you want to broaden or add to your skills?
- Are you learning new skills?
- Is the work you are doing now contributing to where you want to be in five or ten years?

*Take care to get what you like, or you will be forced to like what you get.*

George Bernard Shaw<sup>3</sup>

*Work and play are words used to describe the same thing under different conditions.*

Mark Twain<sup>1</sup>

## Do you want another job or a new career?

In ***Becoming a Top Woman Manager***, Dr Leonie Still outlines eight decision rules for career planning. Two of these rules are:

*Decide whether or not you want a career. Once having made the decision, keep going and don't look back.*

*Create your own opportunities.*

If you have decided that you want another job or career option, there are some key issues you should consider:

- Make an assessment of your current job - what elements do you like, what aspects give you satisfaction?
- What do you really dislike or do not feel confident about? If these are prominent in your assessment you should look for jobs which have more of the things you like doing and which will give you greater satisfaction.
- What is most important to you in your life? Your work and career goals must be consistent with your broader aspirations and values.

Determine what aspects of work are most important to you. Consider the following:

- Do you prefer to spend your time providing direct services to customers?
- Do you like to give advice or information?
- Do you like to assist people with problems?
- Do you like working in a small or large work group?
- Do you prefer to work alone?
- Do you want to work with accounts in a computerised system?
- Do you like having a large computer function in your work?
- Do you like managing a budget?
- Do you like to analyse information?
- Do you like to write documents or publications?
- Do you like to develop ideas to improve outcomes?
- Do you aim at managing a work group?
- Would you like to build and maintain an efficient records system?

You can think of others that particularly apply to you. An analysis of your likes, dislikes and areas for possible improvement will give you a better understanding of your future job direction.

*The most important step is doing it yourself! Don't just think or dream of success. Do something about it.*

### **Identify your current skills. Do you need new skills?**

List your skills and experience from your present job and from all jobs and outside activities you have done. Many people underestimate the range, depth, and value of their skills and experience, so be sure to obtain the opinion of others. Many career planning books have lists of job skills which can assist you. Examples are listed at the back of this booklet.

## Specific skills

In order to be successful in obtaining the job of your choice you may need to improve or gain one or more specific skills. Examples are:

- the ability to use a particular computer software package
- the ability to analyse information and draw conclusions
- the ability to analyse financial data
- skills in statistical analysis and reporting
- the ability to write briefings to chief executives and ministers
- the ability to interpret and apply particular legislation.

For some specific skills you may need formal training. Other training may be available in your agency. Ask your Staff Development and Equal Employment Opportunity Officers for details. Appropriate courses could be available at technical colleges, community colleges and commercial training institutions.

Depending on the skill needed, you may be able to teach yourself with the aid of workbooks, videos or computer-aided instruction. Paul Stevens states:

*Retraining is often necessary, not only because of the nature of the information required for a new occupation, but often because of the job competition resulting from the increase in the number of people with tertiary qualifications.<sup>6</sup>*

## General skills

Many job advertisements refer to more general skills, examples of which are:

- demonstrated written and oral communications skills (eg briefings and oral presentations)
- ability to work in a team
- supervisory skills
- ability to effectively lead a team
- people management skills
- ability to communicate social/economics trends to managers
- ability to manage meetings
- organisational skills
- interpersonal skills
- ability to exercise initiative and plan own work
- ability to meet deadlines.

There may be training courses available in your agency for some of these skills, but you might have to go outside.

Courses are only one way to gain skills. Explain to your manager or supervisor that you wish to develop your skills. Become involved in committees such as occupational health and safety, enterprise bargaining, project groups, working parties and selection committees within your agency. Being a spokeswoman is an excellent way women can gain additional skills and support other women. Being a member of a consultative committee is another way of enhancing skills. All such experiences should increase your confidence and skills, make your

abilities more visible to decision makers and be valuable additions to job applications and your resumé.

Join organisations which can provide you with information to help progress your career. Examples of these are: Institute of Public Administration, Australia (IPAA), the Australian Institute of Management (AIM), Women and Management Inc. Membership of these and similar organisations demonstrate your interest in current information and trends. Make sure these are included in your job application and resumé.

### **Mentors**

If you feel the need for advice and support to help you achieve your work and career goals, or to help you find the right direction, you may wish to find a mentor.

A mentor is a person, usually a more senior work colleague other than your direct supervisor, who can give you advice and information on a range of work and career related issues. These can include:

- feedback on your presentation and skills
- guidance on how you can improve those
- information on suitable training or other courses
- detailed information on how your agency operates
- providing suitable contacts outside your agency, or introductions to people in other areas within your agency.

The qualities and skills you should seek in a mentor include:

- a willingness to share skills and experience
- sound knowledge of agency functions
- ability to maintain confidentiality, and
- an interest in helping others develop.

A mentoring program may be available in your agency. Ask your Staff Development or EEO Officers. See the resource list for more information on mentoring.

Learn to market your skills and abilities. Job seeking workshops can help you clearly identify the links between your experience and the requirements of your desired job. These workshops can train you to present yourself professionally and confidently. There are also many books available which discuss how to develop your confidence, motivation and self-esteem all of which are necessary for a successful career change. Examples are listed in the resource list at the back of this booklet.

### **How to find out about new jobs and careers**

*Students spend years learning how to dig data out of the library and other sources, but it rarely occurs to them that they should apply some of that same new-found research skill to their own benefit to looking up information on companies, types of professions, sections of the country that might interest them.*

Professor Albert Shapiro<sup>7</sup>

Regularly read job vacancies, both internal and external to your agency and assess them against your goals, preferences, skills and experience. Use your networks to find out about areas which interest you.

Newspapers, Public Service Notices, agency job vacancies and newsletters are the usual sources. If you have identified a particular area of work, branch or agency you are interested in, you may make yourself and your interest known to the relevant manager. Taking such an initiative may be valuable if a temporary or permanent position becomes available. You will still have to apply and compete for the job on merit.

Whether the job is in your current Public Sector agency or elsewhere, you need an understanding of the agency's overall aims and functions as well as detailed knowledge of the particular job.

A good starting point is the agency's Annual Report, which outlines achievements and provides details of major functions.

Agencies provide contact officers for job vacancies and some provide information kits to potential job applicants. The information generally outlines where the job and section or branch fits into the organisation and gives details of the job in a position description or duty statement.

There are a number of points you need to consider in researching a job:

- The efforts you make to find out about a job, the agency and its future directions are often seen by selectors as indicators of your interest in the position.
- Examine the material in the information kit and the Annual Report. Prepare questions about the job before you phone or visit the agency. Telephone the Contact Officer. Find out as much as you can about the position. What are the major duties of the position? What skills are they looking for? Are there any special working conditions?
- You may also arrange to visit the workplace for a short discussion. A visit gives you the opportunity to gain an impression of the climate in which you would be working. It can also demonstrate to the Contact Officer your interest in the position.
- In addition, you can often get valuable background information from people working in the agency or from people who have worked there recently.

### **What to do when your agency is restructuring**

Change is a constant feature of the 1990s working environment. The Public Sector, like other employment areas, is constantly changing in response to customer needs, economic trends, government commitments and demands for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Restructuring is generally a mechanism used by agencies to respond to these demands.

The process of restructuring involves agencies reviewing their functions, setting future priorities, determining different functional requirements, and deciding the skills and number of staff required to carry out key work. This can occur on an agency-wide, divisional or operational branch basis.

Employees may find themselves unsettled by their agency's restructure as there may be a change in the direction of the agency, and jobs may change and positions may be deleted. If you are in a restructuring situation:

- Be positive - changes may bring opportunities.
- Be informed - take every chance to find out what is planned from newsletters, meetings, consultative groups and your union. Do not depend on gossip and rumours, these are often wrong.
- Be open-minded. Newly created positions may be more challenging and satisfying than those which existed previously.

- If you are offered a change of job, be prepared to try it, and make sure you ask for any necessary training for new skills.
- If you choose redeployment, make sure you show your willingness to consider any reasonable job option within or outside your agency.
- You will need to attend selection interviews, so be sure you are ready by researching the job and tailoring your job application and resumé.
- If you are offered voluntary redundancy, be sure to get expert superannuation and financial advice before making a decision. Think about your long term employment goals. Consider what other employment options are available. If you accept the offer, your job-seeking skills will be valuable for obtaining a new position.

*With the increasing rate of change in the workplace, jobs disappearing and new ones evolving, it is more important than ever for people to think in terms of career, and employment survival, rather than just a job.*

Paul Stevens<sup>8</sup>

## **How to apply for a job**

If you decide to look for another position, a transfer or a promotion, you will need to submit a formal application and be considered for interview along with other applicants. The quality of your application and supporting material will largely determine whether you gain an interview. Some points to remember are:

- The presentation of your application is important. It is one indication to an interview panel of your ability to fulfil a range of tasks relevant to the position. For example, if writing skills or preparing correspondence is an essential criteria, your application will be seen as a measure of your ability to do the job. Even if there is not such a direct link, your application will provide the interviewers with their first impression of you and your skills.
- The application and especially the accompanying letter or statement of claims for the position must be directed to the particular job. Applications which do not directly address the essential and desirable requirements may not gain you an interview, especially in a highly competitive field of applicants.
- Make sure your application addresses all the essential criteria and gives examples of past successes and relevant experiences.
- It is useful to have a resumé (or *curriculum vitae*) which outlines relevant personal and professional details and gives a summary of your past employment and work responsibilities. Make sure you tailor it to the specific job by giving emphasis and detail to aspects of your qualifications and experience most relevant to the job.
- Selection committees are interested in your skills and ability to perform in the advertised position. These should be clearly described in your application.
- If you are applying for a position in your current agency do not assume that the selection panel already has a full knowledge of your skills and experience. Include all your relevant background and experience in your application.
- Concentrate on the parts of your work and personal experiences which are relevant to the job for which you are applying. It is not necessary to go into detail on every position you have held. It is, however, important to cover the different types of work you have done as this will demonstrate your versatility.

- When you have completed your application and assembled supporting documents, make a final check that you have addressed all requirements specified in the advertisement. Ask someone to check it for you, and keep a copy for your interview preparation.
- Your application should always be neat and well laid out. Even if you do not have access to a computer at work or home, most libraries have them available for public use. If you do not have good keyboard skills you can usually find a friend or associate who will be willing to help you. If necessary you can use a commercial service to do the layout and printing.
- Generally you are asked to provide the names and contact details of referees. It is commonly expected that referees will be at the same level or senior to the position you are applying for. When selecting referees, choose people who know your job performance and respect you. Where possible have referees who have supervised your work in your present position or in recent times. It is best to obtain their agreement before you nominate them. Check that they will be available for contact by the selection committee. When you know the time and date of interview, provide them with details of the job and a copy of your application.
- Read books on job applications and resumé writing if you do not have much experience with this. There are many books available to assist you in this process, some are listed in the Resources section of this booklet.

## **Preparing for job interviews**

The purpose of the interview is to confirm information supplied in the application based on the essential criteria for the position and to comparatively assess candidates to ascertain the best person for the position.

### **Preparation**

It is best to start preparation for an interview early to ensure you have sufficient time to prepare yourself adequately. Once you have gained an interview you need to prepare to effectively compete for the job in an interview situation.

- Review your application and other information and then decide what questions might be asked. The questions will be based on the requirements included in the advertisement.
- Think of questions you are likely to be asked based on the requirements of the job. Also ask your supervisor, Staff Development or EEO Officers to help you identify possible questions. Practise answering possible questions at home in front of a mirror. This will also help improve your presentation.
- There may, of course, be questions you have not specifically prepared for. These will be easier to answer if you have thoroughly considered the functions of the job, the expectations of the supervisor and corporate goals and priorities.
- Think about what job-related tasks you might be asked to complete in addition to the interview. For example, drafting a memorandum or letter, providing specific information, writing a short piece on a specified topic. For some positions where such skills are relevant, interviewees may be asked to give a short talk or presentation. Ask the contact officer if you will be expected to undertake such tasks as part of the interview process.
- Also ask who will be on the interview panel. Write down their names and positions. It will make it easier to remember at the interview.

- Gather together one or two examples of your recent work, which relate to the skill requirements of the job and which demonstrate your abilities. If you have shared responsibility for a report or project, outline your specific contribution.
- Make yourself a list of the skills, abilities and personal qualities you have to offer, and review your list with your supervisor. Recent performance reviews may also assist you.
- Be sure you arrive before the time of your interview.

## **The Interview**

You have arrived before your interview time and are thoroughly familiar with your application material. The committee convenor introduces herself or himself. What now?

- Almost everyone is nervous in interviews. Selection committees understand the situation. A way of controlling your nervousness is to take slow, deep breaths. It is not necessary to start your answer immediately the question has been asked. You can take a little time to consider your response.
- Indicate how you would prefer to be addressed. For example, you may prefer your middle given name to your first.
- You should be introduced to the committee and told their names, positions, and agency. Try to remember their names and use them when responding to a question.
- Answer each question directly. Do not ramble and keep your answer relevant to the question asked. If you do not understand a question, ask for it to be repeated or explained.
- If you are asked for more detail, it does not mean your reply was wrong. It may mean the panel is interested in more information.
- When the selection panel members have completed their questions, it is common for them to ask if you have anything to add or if you have any questions you would like to ask the panel. If you currently earn more than the base rate for the position and you have directly relevant skills and background, you may wish to raise the issue of commencing rate of salary.
- You may wish to clarify major issues relating to the functions of the job, structure or conditions of employment. Alternatively, you can wait, and if you are offered the job, you can clarify these issues at that time.
- You can make summary remarks about your application. These however should be kept to a minimum and be directly relevant to the position.
- If you have brought work samples and other supporting documents but have not been asked for them, offer them at the end of the interview. Always have original certificates available for the panel to see, but have copies with you in case you are asked to leave them for the committee to consider later.

### **If you are offered the job**

Generally the successful applicant is offered the position within about a week of the interviews. In some large or decentralised agencies the process can take a little longer for formal approval to be gained. Unsuccessful applicants are usually sent a letter at about the same time.

### **When you are offered the position:**

- You may need to ask some questions before making a decision to accept or reject the position.
- You may be able to make a case for a starting salary above the base rate, if you presently earn above that level.
- You may need to know management's attitude to issues such as flexible work practices, study time and staff development.
- You may need to find out if there are special requirements such as shift work or country travel and to what extent they operate.
- You will need to negotiate your starting date. If you are already employed in the Public Sector, your agency is required to release you within a maximum of 21 days from your acceptance and formal notification to your agency.
- You may wish to take leave prior to starting your new job, or you may have arranged to take a holiday in the near future. You will need to ensure your new employer is agreeable to your plans.

If you accept the position you may be working with different colleagues in a different workplace. When you arrive at your new job, it is advisable in the first instance to listen and watch more than you speak. Learn the different ways of operating, the agency culture, the expectations of your supervisor and your role in meeting corporate priorities.

Be determined to deliver the qualities and skills you demonstrated at the interview.

*The more you do the better you become — and until you actually do things you often don't realise how much you can accomplish and achieve.*

Anon<sup>9</sup>

#### **What if you do not get the job?**

*If at first you don't succeed, you're running about average.*

Anon<sup>10</sup>

If you do not get the job don't be disillusioned. Today's job environment is highly competitive. Being unsuccessful is not necessarily a reflection on you. Learn from the experience and try again.

To help you learn from the experience, you should contact the convenor of the selection committee to obtain feedback on your job application and interview performance. That discussion may be by phone or face-to-face. Getting this feedback is important to enable you to improve your performance next time.

Remember that you are competing against a different group of people for each job vacancy, so you could have more success in a similar job next time.

Sometimes you will be told you have been placed on an eligibility list. This means that you were considered suitable for the position should a vacancy arise within six months. The agency may, however, decide to advertise rather than use the eligibility list, particularly if the position requirements or corporate priorities have changed.

If you and the successful applicant are officers within the Public Sector you may have the right of appeal through the Government and Related Employees Appeals Tribunal (GREAT), or an industry-specific tribunal. Your Personnel or Human Resources Section can give you detailed information about any appeal options.

## Moving forward

*Work as a source of happiness doesn't necessarily mean doing what we like, but liking what we do.*

Paul Stevens 11

Changing jobs is not always achieved quickly. If you are having difficulty deciding which direction to take or in gaining another job there are opportunities and issues to consider in your current position and your current skills. You have time to develop both.

When exploring new job and career options, it is important to maintain your productivity and a positive approach to your job. Supervisors respond well to staff who deliver quality work and who are co-operative and constructive. Your current performance can determine your opportunities for gaining other work.

You could talk to your supervisor about modifying your duties so you can undertake different tasks or jobs to broaden your skills, provide new experiences and make your current job more challenging.

Gaining new responsibilities and experiences may be sufficient to give you the satisfaction you require to want to remain in your present location. They will also help you in your future efforts to obtain other jobs.

Moving forward with a feeling of satisfaction about your current workplace and skills provides you with an important attribute in your new role and in achieving your work goals and enjoyment of life.

*Success never came to the fainthearted.  
...success is never easily won. But trying can be stimulating, interesting,  
rewarding - and fun.*

Leonie Still 12

## Resources

Below is a list of books dealing with career development, job satisfaction and motivation which may assist with your work and career planning. There are many more. Use your agency library, local library or book stores to find those which are most useful to you.

Some of the work and external people from whom you can gain career information are also listed.

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Stephen Covey                     | THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE,<br>The Business Library, New York 1989   |
| Paul Stevens                      | CAREER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, William Brooks, Sydney 1984<br>STOP POSTPONING THE REST OF YOUR LIFE, Unwin Paperbacks,<br>Sydney 1984<br>WIN THAT JOB!, Centre for Worklife Counselling, Sydney 1991<br>WORK LIFE CRISIS,<br>Waterloo Press, Sydney 1985<br>WORK SATISFACTION,<br>William Brooks, Sydney 1984 |
| Catherine Smith<br>& J Hutchinson | GENDER: A Strategic Management Issue,<br>Business & Professional Publishing, Sydney 1995  |
| Leonie V Still                    | WHERE TO FROM HERE? The Managerial Woman in Transition,<br>Business and Professional Publishing, Sydney 1993  |

## Work Books

E N Chapman	THE FIFTY-MINUTE CAREER DISCOVERY PROGRAM, Crisp Publications, California 1988 ATTITUDE YOUR MOST PRICELESS POSSESSION, Crisp Publications, California 1987
Ann Rolfe-Flett	THE MENTORING WORKBOOK Synergetic Management, NSW 1995
Cynthia Scott	MANAGING PERSONAL CHANGE, Crisp Publications, California 1989 MANAGING CHANGE AT WORK, Crisp Publications, California 1989
Dru Scott	STRESS THAT MOTIVATES, Self-Talk Secrets For Success, Crisp Publications, California 1992
Paul R Timm	SUCCESSFUL SELF-MANAGEMENT, A Psychologically Sound Approach to Personal Effectiveness, Crisp Publications, California 1987

## Advice on career and course options

Within your agency, training and staff development practitioners and the Equal Employment Opportunity Co-ordinator generally have detailed information on courses available within the agency, in the public sector and at tertiary institutions.

Both Institutes of Technical and Further Education and universities employ counsellors, who offer advice on areas such as course selection, career planning and study techniques.

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