

HRM Experience



Career Management

We often think that successful people plan their careers out in advance and then work toward their goals in a very logical, sequential manner. Although some successes are designed and implemented this way, others are created through preparedness, insight, and taking advantages of opportunities as they arise.

Assignment

1. Form teams of four to six members. Identify three different people to interview about their careers. One person should be in the early stages of his or her career, one should be in midcareer, and one should be in the final stages of his or her career.
2. Ask each person to identify his or her career goals and how they have changed or are expected to change over time.
3. Ask each person to describe the sequence of events that led to where he or she is. How well does that story align with the traditional model of careers?
4. Ask each person what (if anything) he or she would do differently. Ask what advice he or she has for you about how to approach your career.

Case Study 1 Homegrown Talent: Mary Barra Rises to GM's Top Post

When Mary Barra was a kid, she used to hang out in the garage with her dad tinkering on cars. Little did her father, a lifelong die-maker for GM's Pontiac division, know that his daughter would one day become the CEO of the company and the first woman ever to lead a major U.S. car manufacturer. But that's what happened in 2013. Barra was unanimously chosen by the board members of General Motors to lead the company—a decision employees cheered when they heard about it over the loudspeakers at corporate headquarters. Maybe they cheered because unlike GM's previous two CEOs, Barra was one of them. Having worked in multiple departments at GM since she was 18, she knows the car business through and through. "There's nobody with more years of honest 'car guy' credentials than she has," says Ross Gordon in the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan.

Barra, who grew up in a Detroit suburb, initially began working for GM in the 1980s as part of a work-study program. In a work-study program, which is also referred to as a co-op program, students alternate working full time (for pay) and going to college. She earned an undergraduate degree in electrical engineering and GM later sent her to Stanford, where she got an MBA. During her career she has rotated through various positions at GM. Besides working in engineering and design, she managed one

GM's manufacturing plants and most recently was the senior vice president for global product development and quality control. Under her watch, the company has rolled out successful models that have helped bring the company back out of bankruptcy.

Barra has a reputation for getting results. Not only does she know cars, she knows people and how to manage them. When an updated version of the Chevy Malibu floundered in 2012 because of design and other problems, she mobilized a team of employees and found a way to fix the Malibu in record time. Her great people management skills might explain why when GM was going through bankruptcy, she was put in charge of human resources for GM, an area she had never worked in before. GM hoped putting her in job would prevent key talent from heading for the exits during the bankruptcy process. It did.

Sue Meisinger, formerly the president and CEO of the Society of Human Resources Management, says that Barra's being named CEO underscores the importance of HR personnel working in and understanding different areas of their firms. "If you're interested in a career path that extends beyond HR, you need to have experience in multiple facets of the business," Meisinger says. She notes that for many HR professionals, their crowning achievement is to be the head of HR. Barra's