

CAREER CONSIDERATIONS

How to chart a personal path to a career in public safety communications.

By Christine Brazil

This path may be familiar to many of you if you are currently finding your way through the ranks of your career, as I am. I have worked in the emergency communications field for 19 years and can say from experience that public safety communications professionals can move up no matter how long you have been a telecommunicator, whether you have worked in the field for two years or 19 years, for a local police department or for a large or consolidated emergency communications center (ECC).

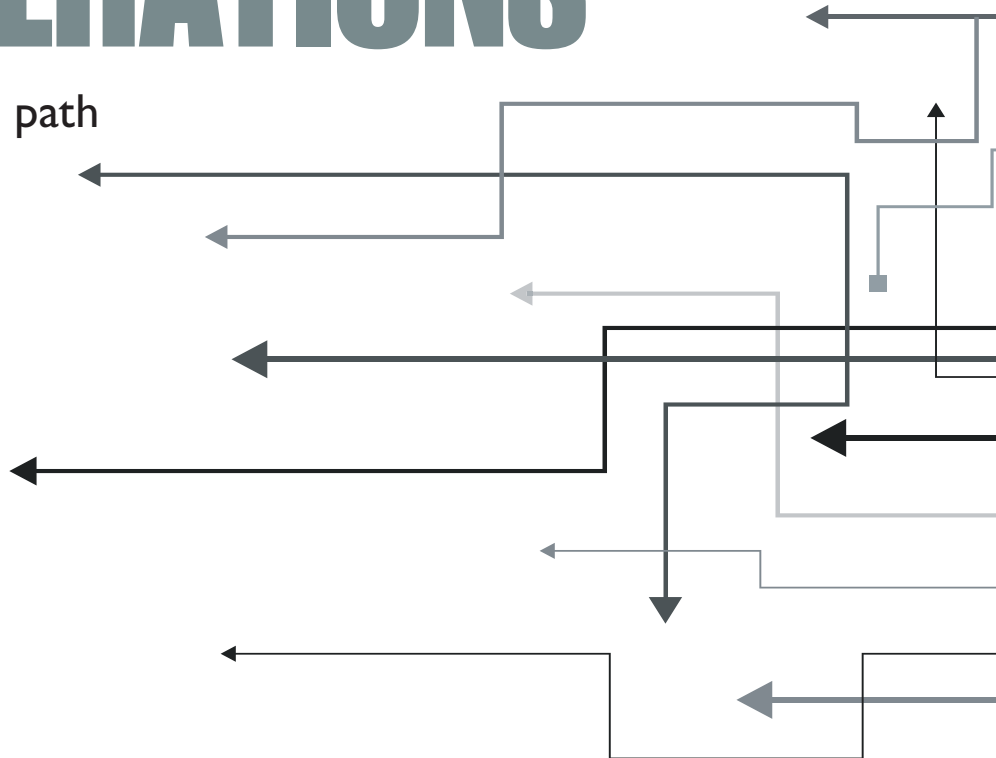
Wages in those first years can be less than desirable, depending on your location. Some telecommunicators spend years doing double duty as a full-time employee and a student. While some in these circumstances might start looking for a way out, many more focus on a way up. As telecommunicators, we genuinely feel that we are making a difference and enjoy the time spent in our old dusty dispatch rooms. We generally love the people we work with, and we grow together as a family. As a result, we want to find a way to make this job our long-term career.

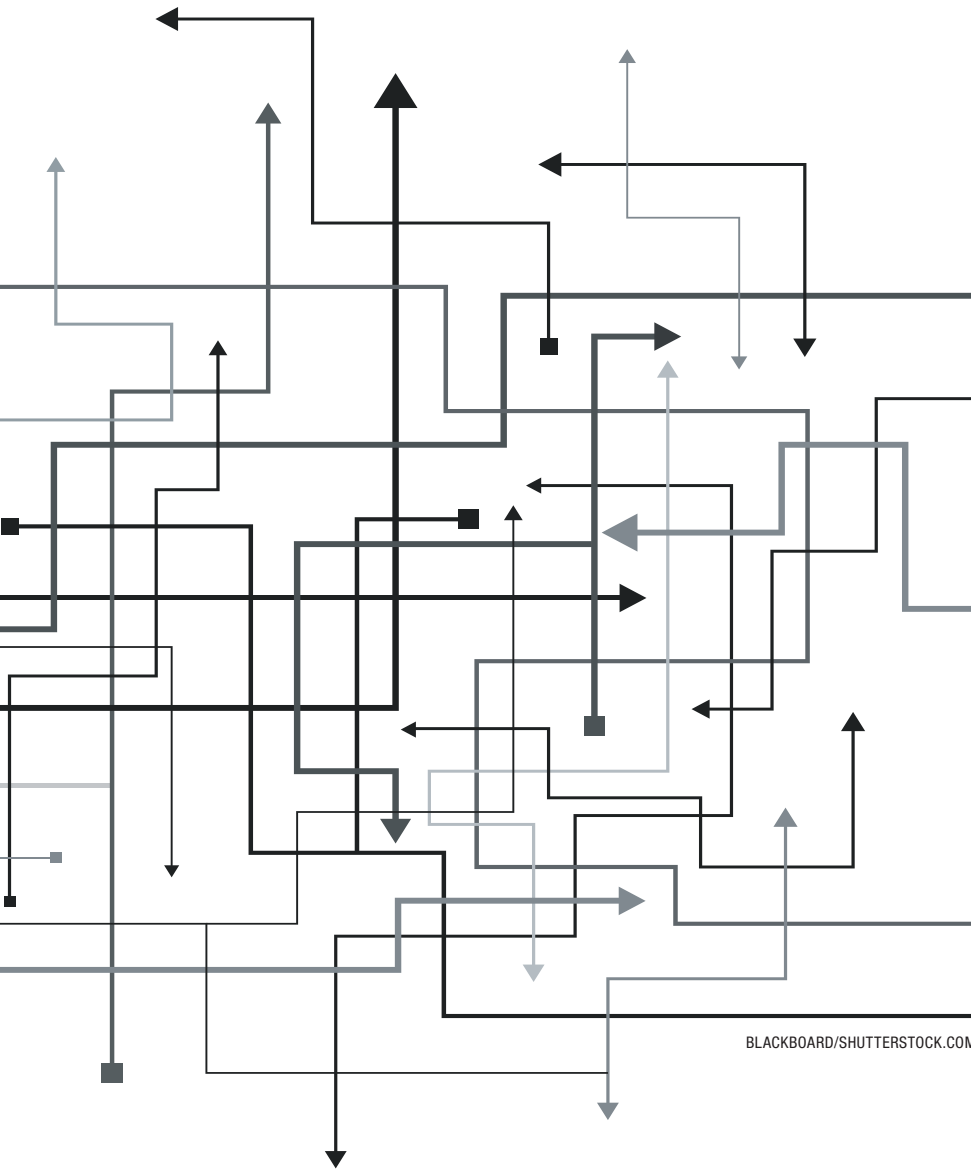
Choosing a personal path early in your career can be difficult. Finding your calling can be problematic and an experience filled with doubt. If you are uncertain about your place in the ECC, immerse yourself in different specialties to get a feel for the best opportunities. Once you have your mind set on your path, start building the foundation toward achieving your desired level in your field. Keeping the big picture in mind is crucial when you are enduring change.

TRY, TRY AGAIN

We are humans and subject to trial and error so view mistakes on the career path as lessons. Use missteps to develop alternate

routes toward your goals. For instance, if you present a new idea to your superiors that is dismissed, it is possible you don't have the right audience. However, it's even more likely that you are not answering the "why" for your intended audience. Scheduling a follow-up meeting to gather feedback after a proposal is rejected is an excellent way to adjust your proposal to meet your agency's needs. Go back to the drawing board and revise your original submission. Think outside the box. The age-old adage of "we've always done it that way" does not signify that it's the most beneficial way to proceed. Being the person who steps up and implements change can be intimidating, but leaning on your





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“There may be no available positions when you are ready to move up, but don’t be discouraged. Work to make yourself more promotable by taking online classes to keep your mind sharp and your goals focused.”

knowledge, ideas and those who encourage you professionally can smooth the way.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

If you wait for someone to recognize your skills or give you a chance, you have placed yourself at a disadvantage. Take matters into your own hands by educating yourself. What are the requirements for the position you wish to obtain? If you don’t know them, learn them. Many agencies offer additional training that may further your career. There is no time like the present to begin working on those certifications or requirements. Gaining position certifications is your preparation for what’s to come,

and it’s a beneficial stepping stone on your way up. Some of the information will be new and eye-opening, and other areas will confirm that you are on the right path. And once they are acquired, don’t abandon hard-won knowledge and skills. Stay up to date with changes or updates within your agency. Boost your skillset by taking courses such as APCO’s Registered Public Safety Leader (RPL) and Certified Public-Safety Executive (CPE). And take advantage of the opportunity for communicating and networking that arises in these courses.

One of the challenges you may face when attempting to move up is the agency budget; do they have the financial means to send you

to the courses you are requesting? If not, try applying for different training scholarships. Receiving financial aid by means of a scholarship award may show your agency you are working on the small targets to meet the long-term goal. Gaining the scholarship award will also show your agency that you are serious about gaining the knowledge needed to move up.

In addition to participating in formal education, track your movements in writing, journaling or charting to keep a visual reminder of how far you have come since beginning your journey. This also provides a better understanding of the work ahead. Checking in on this data renews motivation

in times of doubt and encourages new avenues to obtain your desired position.

RELATIONSHIPS BUILD CAREERS

Even more important than relationships gained through continuing education are work relationships that can assist you on your rise through the ranks. Nurture your work relationships, and the pieces will fit together with minimal effort. I have found on many occasions, after months of staring at the same material, that a set of fresh eyes has found what I had been searching for from the start. Get out of your own way and ask for help from those you have come to trust in the workplace. Be open to those who have walked before you and helpful to those that come after. You will never regret giving people a chance.

When you feel you have excelled in your current position, delegate tasks that don't require your immediate attention any longer to trusted individuals. Delegation allows you to dedicate more time and effort to your big-picture goal. Delegating also strengthens your mentoring relationships. It allows someone else to step up to the plate with an

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opportunity to demonstrate their strengths. Leaders should not fear the up-and-coming generation. Embracing work relationships and learning from each other is beneficial to yourself, the mentee and your organization.

RUN YOUR RACE

It can be overwhelming if you measure yourself against your peers' success. It's essential to keep your timeline in mind and remember you have a goal within the agency ahead of you. Remain humble and

encouraging when it comes to others' achievements. Should you allow yourself to wallow in your defeats, you are wasting valuable time.

Instead, act and work on yourself. Identify your flaws, acknowledge that change needs to occur and start working diligently in areas that will make you a better candidate, employee, person and leader.

Remember that your strengths will likely eclipse your flaws. Don't spend valuable time in a mental state that will not benefit you or your agency. While highlighting your strengths and what you bring to the table, remember to rely on others' strengths by building a team that allows coverage in the areas that are not your strong suit.

NEXT STEPS

You might achieve your milestones in your new position and realize this is not enough professionally. Once you feel as though you have mastered your current position and need more of a challenge, determine where your agency could put your skills to better use. There may be no available positions when you are ready to move up, but don't be discouraged. Work to make yourself more

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promotable by taking online classes to keep your mind sharp and your goals focused.

Education and self-appraisal can give you confidence to push forward and make changes. You must use your voice, training and work experience to climb uphill. A great place to start is the training coordinator position, although you may have no intentions of stopping here. On the other hand, never feel

as though you are forced to move forward from any position if you have truly found your passion. Some paths are short, and others are a long journey, forever changing and growing.

Your choices make a difference when it comes to the future of your career. Produce a promotional path you are proud to have others observe, imitate and discuss. Remain genuine and authentic to your beliefs and

learn while you go through the process, constantly changing and growing into the complete and professional version of yourself that you've envisioned. ●

Christine Brazil began her career in public safety in 2003 as a Public Safety Telecommunicator and now serves as Training Manager for Lake County ECC in Crown Point, Indiana.

CDE EXAM #61709

1. Finding your calling or personal path is unproblematic.
A. True
B. False
2. To find your path, begin with:
A. Doing what you have always done.
B. Immersing yourself in different specialties.
C. Create a vision board.
D. Asking others what they did.
3. When a challenge arises, its best to respond by:
A. Taking a week off work.
B. Agreeing you made a mistake and putting in your notice.
C. Reminding yourself that you are laying the groundwork for your success.
D. Recruit others to address the challenge.
4. If you make a mistake, the best way to recover is to:
A. Develop an alternate route.
B. Blame your co-worker.
C. Ask to leave for the day to think about what happened.
D. Try your best to keep the mistake a secret.
5. If you do not meet the requirements for your desired position, your next move is:
A. Wait for someone to recognize your skillset.
B. Hope your superiors like you enough to give you a change.
C. Do your homework and obtain the appropriate certifications/requirements.
D. Remain in the same position until retirement.
6. When you are ultra-focused in one area:
A. You excel in what matters.
B. You naturally lack in other areas.
C. Everyone looks to you as an expert.
D. You always complete every task on time.
7. The up-and-coming generation should be:
A. Feared.
B. Embraced.
C. Dismissed.
D. Removed.
8. Your strengths will likely eclipse your flaws.
A. True
B. False
9. Relying on each other's strengths in a team allows you to
A. Hide your flaws.
B. Cover the areas that you do not excel in.
C. Look like a team player.
D. Have others to blame when failures occur.
10. You should adapt to change, grow and produce something to be proud of.
A. True
B. False

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