

## How Does Your [Career] Garden Grow?

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What better day than the Spring Equinox to wonder:

How does your career garden grow?

You should not be jobless or “new job” hungry to answer this question. These days, it’s a question that requires regular feeding, even when you’re in job nirvana.

Career landscapes were different a few years ago. I’m imagining a Monet painting – impressive yet monochromatic; one in which flowers – symbolizing our professional opportunities — were identical in shape, size, and hue, painted (or planted) under the exact same conditions. Today, the painting looks different. Our career opportunities need to be increasingly wildflower-like in their frame, varying in color and form with the knowledge that professional fertility depends on new and different arrangements.

The most vivid career horizon requires:

- Seed selecting and planting
- Seed tending
- Seed selecting (again)

### Selecting and Planting

In my neighborhood, Spring fervor begins literally overnight when the high school crew team delivers the mulch and frenzied garden work begins. When it comes to career landscaping, March madness doesn’t exist...it’s all-year long. Every moment of professional motivation, every professional question, every professional encounter is a “must” mulching opportunity – treating those “ah hah” moments as specially chosen seeds to fertilize further.

“Seed” planting follows – a set of critical behaviors (e.g. meeting and greeting, storytelling, experimenting, skill stretching, learning, risk taking) that we deploy to respond to job scarcity and, perhaps more importantly, to our own (current or anticipated) scarcity of inspiring career ideas. Visually speaking, scarcity is the brown shade that tinges patches of our otherwise single-hued career landscape. The more seeds we plant that promise diversity in job content, function, and conditions, the more likely we are to find a stimulating “palette.” Just imagine wildflowers.

### Tending

Counter-intuitively, “tending” is more promising when things are a bit unruly. I think about the person who craves one and only one job – in title or tasks. His/her single-stemmed garden can produce tremendous satisfaction if that one investment pays off. If the seed’s growth is too slow or fails altogether, a garden plot feels more like a conspiracy. While today’s career gardeners

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may have more seeds for which to care, they can be confident that at least some will germinate. Their gardens are the richest. Just imagine wildflowers.

### Seed Picking (again)

Even the optimally tended career gardens will have its thorns — the jobs that draw blood and the people in your network who sting. The great landscape painters continually look at their easels, making difficult decisions about which shades and textures to modify. Career cultivation requires the same attention to information and instinct – having the head and heart to adjust your professional vision when seeds birth weeds.

And...even when our wisdom and luck (sage and four leaf clovers) abound among the buds, Mother Nature ultimately controls her flowers.

- In periods of drought, we have to call upon our inner most resources and resiliency to find possibility in the most barren situations.
- In periods of flood, we have to be even more selective to avoid being unexpectedly overwhelmed by a blossoming future.

The truth remains that climate change is not going away and career gardening requires flexibility in response to the natural evolution and pollution of our professional world.

Tomorrow, we welcome a new season. Even if your mulch hasn't arrived, you can still prepare the ground on which you stake your career by considering the following:

- Is your career landscape monochromatic or is it vibrant with diverse shape and color?
- What seeds do you need to plant to add to its color and shape?
- What plants require more tending?
- When summer arrives, what will you have to show for your hard work? Just imagine the wildflowers.

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