

BALANCE RISKS VS. REWARDS IN CAREER DECISIONS

By John Kiernan, Managing Director, Management Pathways and Co-Chair, HLNDV Communications Committee



If you have entered a job interview process recently, you know first hand that employers are more selective than ever. And for good reason: With unprecedented healthcare changes, and uncertainty in the broader economy, identifying and hiring the right talent is critical in advancing an organization.

When a hiring decision goes wrong, for any reason, the real cost to organizations and stakeholders can be staggering. Employee turnover, decline in morale, missed opportunities, and program setbacks can be the unfortunate result.

Within the context of these realities, many employers are compelled to pursue a hiring process that is largely risk averse. At a minimum, a candidate must meet narrowly defined criteria, connect on values, and present the “right fit” in order to be considered. Frequently, final candidates will have undergone an extensive interview process, behavior-based assessments, and background checks.

Look beyond the position title to assess the potential for professional growth.

As a healthcare professional directing your career path, you are faced with risk-laden decisions that will have long-term implications on your develop-

ment and success. Career decisions should be made with careful thought about individual circumstances, preferences, long-term goals, current motivation, and work/life balance priorities.

For many, advancement in job title, position scope, and compensation will be highly influential in evaluating professional options. As important as these incentives may be, consider other factors to understand the full promise, and potential pitfalls, of a job offer or business venture.

Organization

What have you learned about the prospective employer’s culture, direction, values, financials and competitive position? A healthy balance sheet and consistency in achieving quality and financial targets suggest that the organization is operating from strength. In other cases, a turnaround scenario may present an ideal opportunity for a change leader. If you are exploring a job with a privately-held firm, what information can you learn about the company’s financial well-being and resources? The bottom line is that transparency on the part of the organization as they present an employment opportunity to you is essential to avoiding negative surprises that can derail a career path.

Leadership

The caliber of the senior leadership team sets the tone for the organization and should be a key factor in your decision making. What has been the history surrounding the C-suite? What are the leadership strengths of key executives and are you con-

fident they will support your professional goals? For example, if you are interested in quality and patient safety, has there been a vision expressed or specific accomplishments that speak to this priority?

People

Take into account the level of engagement of the employees with whom you interview. Did you observe any unusual dynamics or potential red flags? If you are interviewing for a leadership position, meet with as many staff members as possible. Learning about their challenges and needs will help to establish rapport and support should you become their manager. Observe a meeting, if possible, to get direct exposure to the organization’s working relationships and tempo.



Influence

How are major decisions made? Will you have enough support and authority to implement change? It is a good idea to do some self-examination to be clear about what type of environment suits you best. Is a high degree of control important? Or, are you more comfortable with a structured, group process?

Resources

What level of structure, technology, budget and talent supports the role you are considering? As healthcare providers are required to “do more, for more, with less - and do it better,” you will need to look carefully at the organization’s commitment to providing the tools necessary to succeed, as well as your ability to get the job done with lean resources.

Opportunities

A job that offers new and interesting challenges and exposure to projects that stretch your core competencies can be very rewarding. Look beyond the position title to assess the potential for professional growth. Successful healthcare careers are frequently built on accomplishment-based stories. Is there a two- to three-year story to be written in the new job that aligns with your longer term goals and interests?

Balance

The process of exploring a new opportunity or career transition is an ideal time to take a holistic look at your life’s journey, including personal well-being, relationships, health, and pursuing your passions. Give yourself permission to rethink your priorities even if it runs counter to traditional career advancement. The rewards may be profound.

Reach John Kiernan at jkiernan@managementpathways.com or 610-415-0888.