

CHAPTER 1

Introspection

*“If You Don’t Know Where You’re Going,
You Might End Up Somewhere Else”*

FROM THE SEARCH FILES

“Sam” had a strong background in Corporate Finance, but had just been “released” from his third Assistant Treasurer position in the last seven years. The first two times, he assumed that the problem was with his employers. But now he wasn’t so sure. Rather than initiate his typical job search “one more time,” he decided to seek the help of a professional career counselor. When she asked why his previous assignments had all turned out the same, he thought for a moment, then replied, “I’m really not sure, but I know that I was extremely unhappy in all three!” The counselor then assisted him through a series of self-evaluation exercises.

Through this process, Sam realized that the duties in each of his previous positions were pretty much the same, as were the personality types of his bosses. Finally, it dawned on him that he had not really changed jobs at all. He had only changed desks!

Sam’s introspection enabled him to refocus his search exclusively on opportunities offering a less structured environment, with a broader range of responsibilities, and more freedom to act. Within weeks, he accepted a position as Business Manager with a medium-sized law firm. It was just what he had always

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dreamed of doing, and he has now been happily employed for the past eight years.

If we're not careful we can become victims of our experience!



As mentioned in the Introduction, there can be myriad reasons why you may want to find a new position. But regardless of the motivation, once you've crossed that emotional bridge, it's time to take action. For many people, this means updating the resume, making reams of copies, acquiring mailing lists, stuffing envelopes, and beginning a mass mailing campaign. But beware; it's a trap—the *activity trap*. Staying busy only makes you feel as if you're accomplishing something. You're really just spinning your wheels!

While this type of activity may lull you into thinking you're heading in the right direction, it's a false impression, and a terribly inefficient method of locating the job that's right for you. If you fall into this trap, the worst possible situation begins to happen—you start getting invitations for interviews! The

Secret #1

Beware of the activity trap.

more resumes you send out, the more you compound the problem. You're suddenly confronted with an internal dialogue of questions you're completely unprepared to answer. "Which interviews should I take?" "Should I entertain out-of-town interviews, or wait to see if something develops locally?" "Should I interview with company X when I really would

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rather work for company Y or Z?” “Could I make more money elsewhere?”

You can't properly answer these questions without first going through the extremely important process of *career/life planning*. If you ignore this step and fail to consider whether the opportunity will take you closer to or further from your career objective, odds are that you'll soon find yourself back in the process of looking for another job. A position that's just a port in a storm is very unlikely to bring you nearer the desired destination. Your career becomes like a pinball machine, with you as the ball. Bounced and bumped from place to place, you ring up a few points, set off a few bells and whistles, but eventually drop into a hole, ending the game. Wouldn't you agree that your career deserves a better strategy?

Career/Life Planning

Your occupation has a tremendous impact on your life, as well as on the lives of your family members. In his book, *If You Don't Know Where You're Going, You'll Probably End Up Somewhere Else*, David Campbell, a leading specialist in vocational testing and career guidance, writes:

The most important influence on your lifestyle is your occupation. It will determine not only what you do every day, but it will also greatly affect how you live, who your friends are, what clothes you wear, where you take vacations, how much money you make, how long you have to work, etc. Most important, your work will have an enormous impact on how you think about yourself because we identify more closely with our occupations than with anything else.

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Self-Reflection

Having an understanding of who you are as a human being, not just who you are as a professional, is critical to self-fulfillment. Embrace and appreciate your role as husband, wife, daughter, son, mother, father, neighbor, and friend, in addition to your role as an engineer, accountant, president, or CEO.

Self-reflection and analysis is key to making the right career decisions. There are numerous tools available to help you through this process, including the ever-popular book, *What Color Is Your Parachute?* by Richard N. Bolles (Ten Speed Press, 2001). You may even want to consult with a professional career management professional.

This soul-searching requires you to dig deeply into your psyche, and since it's often easier to avoid dealing with these tough questions, many people simply fall into the activity trap. In fact, it's reported that professionals spend considerably more time planning a vacation or computing their taxes than they do planning their careers. Yes, it requires a significant amount of discipline to work through this process, but there's no doubt that the effort will give you the competitive advantage.

Goal Setting

Every manager is responsible for providing direction and leadership in the accomplishment of a specific goal or objective. If you're to be an effective manager of your career, then the first step in your personal job search must be to gain a clear understanding of your long-term career/life goals. Note that I referred to the goals as career/life goals collectively, rather than

Goal Setting

as career goals and life goals separately. This is because, as stated earlier, for most of us the two are difficult, if not impossible, to separate.

The concept of managing by setting goals isn't new. Peter F. Drucker crystallized the idea in *The Practice of Management* (HarperBusiness, 1993). Since then, Douglas McGregor, Rensis Likert, and several other well-known behaviorists have also written extensively about goal setting. But perhaps Dr. George Ordiorne, considered the father of Management By Objectives (MBO), is best known for his work in this area. In his book *Management Decisions By Objectives*, Ordiorne uses MBO to measure performance against the achievement of a stated goal or objective. And it's this "measurement" aspect that makes MBO a particularly useful career-planning tool. Establishing long-term career/life goals provides the basis by which you can measure the appropriateness of a particular career opportunity when it's presented to you.

Another significant benefit of managing your career by goals or objectives is "self-image psychology" as described in Dr. Maxwell Maltz's book, *Psycho-Cybernetics* (1987). According to his research, the mind and the nervous system combine to form a "goal-striving servomechanism." Maltz believes that once you form a mental image of a desired goal, your mind and body will automatically do the things necessary to achieve that goal. More importantly, he found that you also will be *happier* when you have a clear understanding of your goal and can see yourself moving toward it.

By establishing career/life goals, you're much more likely to take the actions necessary to reach your long-term objectives. Determine where you want to be by a certain time in the future, and set specific goals that will help you reach your target. If you don't, you're more likely to make a mistake in your

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job selection, less likely to be happy in your work, and are almost certain to find your career path leading in the wrong direction. If you're working with a career management firm, you probably already have access to a number of self-assessment tools. If not, they're as close as your nearest library, bookstore, or personal computer. Use them to the fullest extent possible. When it comes to your career, an old axiom really hits home, "Those who fail to plan are planning to fail."

Melançon's Dynamic Variables (MDV)

As you work through the career/life planning process, there are three crucial career/life variables that must be prioritized before launching your job search campaign. They are:

- Time
- Dollars
- Geography

To the extent that you must be restrictive on one variable, you'll need to be that much more flexible with the others. I call this Melançon's Dynamic Variables (MDV) since each variable is influenced by the others, and all are in a state of dynamic balance. For example, if you find yourself in a situation where you need to find a new position as soon as possible, then you must be prepared to be more flexible with regard to your geographical preferences and restrictions, as well as your compensation requirements.

However, if you decide your priority is to improve your compensation, then you must be prepared to be more flexible

The Career versus Company Decision

on where you're willing to live, and how long you're willing to take to find the right opportunity. Lastly, if you wish to avoid relocation or for any reason want to focus on one particular geographical location, then you must be prepared to spend more time in the personal search process and be more flexible with your expectations on compensation. The priority you assign to each of these variables will dramatically influence the course and direction of your job search campaign.

It's extremely rare, though not entirely impossible, that you'll be able to accomplish all three objectives in a single job move. So, it's important that you come to grips with these three dynamic variables before beginning your job search. If, after weighing the choices within the framework of your career/life goals you still decide to attempt this trifecta, you'll at least do so rationally, knowing beforehand that the odds against cashing the ticket are long.

The Career versus Company Decision

Another key area of reflection is deciding whether you want to pursue a career as a professional, or with a single company. This choice also dictates very different strategies. If you choose to pursue a career as a professional, your job choices should be those that relate to a logical path in your profession. For example, if you're an Accounting Manager and aspire long-term to become a CFO, then accepting a position as a Director of Quality Assurance is not only illogical, but it's also counterproductive.

On the other hand, if you're happy working for a particular company and see the possibility of making it to the top, then accepting assignments outside of your profession for exposure

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and development might not only be acceptable, but also highly advisable.

Organizational Fit

When I first started in executive search, decisions about candidates were easier. They either had the required experience in a given field or they didn't. They were either a good fit for the position or they weren't. Through the years though, I've come to realize the importance of subjective factors such as corporate culture, individual personalities, and work styles. Senior-level candidates are now evaluated much more heavily on *organizational fit*, that is, how well their personalities will mesh with that of their prospective peers and superiors, whether they can support the organization's goals and objectives, and how well they will be able to conceive and articulate the organization's vision. The further they move away from their college training, the more they must rely on their management and interpersonal skills. And the more senior the executive, the more important organizational fit truly is. The good news is that everyone fits somewhere!

You can identify where you fit best by first coming to grips with who you are as a person, and then focusing on opportunities where you can maximize exposure to your strengths while minimizing exposure to your weaknesses.

Keeping Pace

It's a brave new world. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the traditional business model is out of sync with marketplace re-

Keeping Pace

ality. There's a lack of allegiance on both sides of the desk. If you still think your employer is responsible for your future, you're in for an unpleasant surprise. In this age of free-agency, we all must be managers of our own careers.

No longer is an extended period with one employer considered a positive. In fact, it can be argued that it is actually a net negative. For one thing, merit pay increases rarely compare with the increase received when making a job change. And for another, the longer you have worked for a single employer, the more likely it is that you will have made mistakes or crossed swords politically. The fact is, many employers are more apt to fill a position with someone "from the outside" who carries no negative baggage, than to promote one of their own.

Corporations now place a premium on individuals who have worked for competitors or within a dissimilar industry. They believe the fresh perspective and stream of new ideas these individuals bring with them are competitively advantageous and essential in an environment that can quickly become stagnant without them. But be careful. Corporations say, "We want people who are risk-takers," but what they really mean is, "We want people who are risk-takers, *and always guess right!*"

We must begin to think of ourselves as *consultants* going from project to project and from priority to priority. Virtual organizations are becoming much more common, and the concept of outsourcing is growing exponentially. *Flexibility* is the key word in industry today. Corporations now bring in outside resources on a strategic basis to fill the roles traditionally held by permanent staff.

Consider this illustration:

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Then: Lifetime job security.

Now: Free-agent mentality.

Then: Under five years in the same position = job hopper.

Now: Over five years in the same position = lacks ambition.

Then: Companies look for stability and tenure.

Now: Companies look for new ideas and “out-of-the box” thinkers.

Me, Incorporated

One popular approach is to look at yourself as running your own company, “Me, Incorporated,” and not only are you the product, you’re also the Director of Marketing, the Chief Financial Officer, and so on. You must take charge and manage your career as though it were a business. A key component of any business is its Board of Directors. The Board for “Me, Incorporated” should include mentors, professors, acquaintances from professional associations, and a few others who understand your business and the industries in which you’re interested. You, as head of the company, are responsible for ensuring that you’re meeting the needs of your client—your employer. You’re also responsible for continually evaluating whether this is a client relationship that meets *your* needs as well as the long-range goals of your business—“Me, Incorporated.”

Dr. Donald Hanratty, Managing Partner of The Career Control Group, reports that people are showing more interest in career/life planning than ever before. But he still encounters

Locked In and Turned Off

difficult cases with individuals in their late fifties who have been in the same industry and function for their entire career, who have never availed themselves of any continuing education, and who have no real network aside from a couple of tennis partners and a few neighbors. When they suddenly find themselves unemployed, it's a very difficult and distressing situation. Take steps now to ensure this picture isn't the reflection you see in the mirror.

Put It in Writing

It's not enough to just *think* about "Me, Incorporated,"—put your business plan in writing! To ensure that your career remains on the right track, your written plan should include your current compensation along with your career and compensation goals for the next five to ten years. Evaluate this document every 6 to 12 months to make sure you're progressing on target. If you're not, proactively take the steps necessary to put your plan back on track. *You*, and no one else, must take responsibility for your career.

Locked In and Turned Off

Some people find that after spending many years in the same field, they're unsatisfied or burned-out. However, they feel "locked-in" by financial commitments or other circumstances that prevent them from changing careers. Sociologists call them "locked in and turned off."

If this sounds familiar, get to work on your "Me, Incorpo-

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rated” plan right away! If you’re craving change and desperately seek the opportunity for a fresh start at something completely different, then your plan should carefully outline your strategy.

If you’re unemployed it may be very logical for you to think, “Maybe I should consider a different field?” or, “I’ve always wanted to be self-employed.” These aren’t bad alternatives. However, the time to consider a career change is when you’re gainfully employed and have numerous resources at your disposal, not when you’re unemployed and emotions can cloud your judgment. No matter how turned-off you were in your last job, try to resist the temptation to change careers while you are unemployed.

Perhaps the best way to make a strategic career redirection is within your existing company. They know your track record and will be more open to a cross-functional move at a comparable salary. You’ll also know colleagues who can help you make the transition successfully. It’s far more difficult, if not impossible, to make a similar career change with a *new* employer. Just look at it from the prospective employer’s position. Why would they want to risk paying your salary for an unproven commodity with little or no applicable experience to offer? It’s a great deal for you, but a risky deal for the new employer.

Whether you’re unemployed, locked in and turned off, or just considering the best way to advance, you should think of your career as a game of chess. You must formulate your strategy in advance, and then carefully consider the consequences of each move. Learn to be objective and analytical, and resist the temptation to play the first move that comes to mind. Be aggressive, but play soundly, and don’t take unnecessary chances. Learn to think like a champion, and you’ll soon become one.

Introspection Checklist

Introspection Checklist

- Beware of the activity trap!
- Create a career/life plan.
- Set measurable goals for your career.
- Solve the MDV equation.
- Decide if your career will be “profession” or “company” driven.
- Avoid burn-out by taking the necessary steps to ensure career fulfillment.
- Recognize the job market is constantly changing.
- Manage your career as though it were a business—“Me, Incorporated.”

Notes:
