

Anne Offner, Ph.D.**APRIL, 2006**

This is the first in a series of monthly newsletters that will feature a topic related to managing change and improving our work environments. This first issue focuses on the employee and managing change. If there are topics you would like to see covered or feedback you have about this newsletter, please submit your ideas or feedback to

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MAKING THE MOST OF CHANGE

Change impacts us in many ways. It can be messy, discouraging, exciting, or down-right exhausting. One way to gain control during times of change is to seize the initiative and make the most of our circumstances.

Research on "high-potential" employees shows that this is in fact what they do. In most organizations, these are employees whom senior managers have identified as having the potential to successfully take on positions of greater responsibility. These folks create their own careers by finding environments in which they can best use their talents and skills. Fueled by their confidence, passion for their chosen line of work and drive to succeed, these high potential employees move quickly into positions of influence within their organizations.

It's possible for all of us to be "high-potential" in our own careers. With preparation and foresight, we can create opportunities to use our talents with confidence, grow our skills, challenge ourselves and make a difference in the world of work.

Looking at it from another perspective, we see that the ever-changing workplace of 2006 compels us to frequently examine our careers. Mergers happen, restructuring occurs, and job requirements change. Within a relatively short period of time many employees discover that, due to changes in their workplace or industry, their talents have become outdated or redundant.

We - all of us who call ourselves "workers" or "employees" - must manage the changes we see coming.



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Once we've experienced a merger, restructuring or job-upgrade we learn a thing or two. We learn that as things change we also must change. We must gain new skills, become more open to new ideas or decide to find employment elsewhere. I once watched a talented vice president of a large service department lose her job at the start of a merger with another company. Because she was not open to the new company's requirements for how she approached her job, she was no longer a good fit for her position.

I have seen previously successful employees fall out of favor for similar reasons. The lesson here is to seize the initiative in managing our careers by knowing where we best fit and developing a plan of action to get us there when we're ready to, or need to, make a change.

Finally, it is important to consider the change that occurs with career maturity. As we move from being a new employee to becoming a mid-career or late-career employee, we find ourselves asking, "What am I doing this for?"

We ask ourselves, "Am I getting the fulfillment, the personal satisfaction, or the challenge that I want from my career?"

Seizing the initiative in this type of change is critical. Moving through the various stages of career maturity can be a confusing or frustrating period for some of us. If we don't periodically review our

career plans we may find ourselves in a "mid-life crisis" or perhaps "retired on-the-job" no longer finding fulfillment in our careers.

The good news is that with a little preparation and planning, we can manage our careers.

Preparation allows us to examine our natural talents along with the skills we've developed throughout our lifetime. To begin this examination we often use a variety of tools: self-reflection, career self-help books, discussions with those who know us well or assessments that can pinpoint our strengths and weaknesses. While all of these tools can provide insight, assessments can be a useful starting point.

Assessments can offer insight that is more objective than the feedback we might give ourselves or hear from our co-workers, boss, mentor, friends or family. This is because those who know us best are part of our social or work-group systems and often have pre-conceived notions or biases that they believe are in our best interest.¹

The results of an effective assessment process can help clarify what we're naturally "wired" to do as well direct us toward the types of work environments in which we feel most comfortable working.

Along with assessment, it is helpful to identify a systemic way of reviewing our careers. "Systemic" means that we look at our talents and skills along with aspects of our lives that

influence our careers and job choices. For example, we can examine how our goals, values, interests, or personal history influence our career choices. I advise clients to rely on assessments, examination of systemic influences and an individualized plan to create momentum during an initial or periodic career review.

When working with clients, I use the *Transitions Program*. It is a systemic, assessment-based approach rooted in the work of career experts Donald Super², Bob McDonald and Don Hutcheson³ and provides participants with a tangible, step-by-step method for examining talents, skills and career-related influences.⁴

Change inspires us. Whether driven by organizational change or our ambition, our career opportunities are always right in front of us. We need to pay attention to the road ahead. The way to job security is to create it ourselves - to have a strong inner sense of our own

talents and skills and where we can best contribute to an organization's success.

Gathering a little data and seizing the initiative in creating our career plans is the beginning of defining who we are in the context of our careers.

To be high-potential in our own careers, we need to have a solid sense of who we are and confidently move toward the career that best suits us.

So, yes, we can seize control of our careers and yes, it is an opportunity to increase our sense of job-security and engage our talents and skills in a manner that we find personally fulfilling.

We know that in the workplace of 2006 the one thing we can control is ourselves. Through career management we can harness this control and give ourselves the direction we need in order to have a great career.

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References

¹ For an interesting discussion of influence, systems and how they impact our choices see Chapter One of *Don't Waste Your Talent: the 8 Critical Steps to Discovering What You Do Best* (2005) by Bob McDonald and Don Hutcheson. Larchmont NY: The Highlands Company.

² For an excellent overview of Donald E. Super's theory, see Richard Sharf's textbook *Applying Career Development Theory to Counseling* (2006). Australia: Thomson Brooks/Cole.

³ Bob McDonald and Don Hutcheson are the authors of *Don't Waste Your Talent: the 8 Critical Steps to Discovering What You Do Best* (2005). Larchmont NY: The Highlands Company.

⁴ To learn more about the Transitions Program: <http://www.anneoffner.com/services.htm>

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