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This newsletter features topics related to managing change and improving our work environments. If there are topics you would like to see covered or feedback you have about this newsletter, please submit your ideas and feedback to the following link: <http://www.anneoffner.com/contact.htm>

Recently, I've added recruiting to my consulting interests.ⁱ Recruiting is a great business to be in if you like change and it's often a starting point for larger-scale change. When a manager hires a candidate for a newly designed role, the two are embarking on a journey that will eventually impact their organization through new programs, products or services. It's an important opportunity for both the hiring manager and the candidate. In many cases, the recruiter can help the manager and the candidate think through the type and scope of change they want to make.



What To Look For

We've all gotten calls from recruiters. Often they are based in other cities and do the majority of their work over the phone and internet. In my experience, a good recruiter has a few key characteristics.

First, they don't waste anyone's time. A good recruiter uses a defined process to gather information about available jobs and assess candidates. They do not send candidates to interview for jobs just "to get in front of the client" nor do they exaggerate the job just to pique candidates' interest.

Second, confidentiality is maintained. Good recruiters never send a resume to a hiring manager without first discussing the job with a candidate and getting his or her permission to do so. Additionally, recruiters are judicious with the use of company names and candidate names until they find a reasonable fit between the two. This ensures that employed job candidates do not have their names unnecessarily spread across job searches. Additionally, it can protect the company from getting calls from unqualified candidates.

Third, good recruiters build relationships. They know that relationships establish trust. A relationship built today might never mean business for the recruiter, but it might lead to profitable future referrals.

Fourth, good recruiters know something about developing careers and making decisions. They become partners, helping job candidates assess potential career moves. Further, they can also be valuable for someone who is considering making a job move but has some reservations about leaving their job or company. In some instances, a recruiter acts as a job coach, helping candidates decide that the best career decision is to stay put or gain further experience or education before changing jobs.

Finally, a good recruiter is someone who runs his or her business as a service first and a moneymaker second. The objective is to match qualified job candidates with managers who are hiring ... and find the optimal match.



Change Jobs or Stay Put?

As I speak with people who are considering a job change, I ask them why they want to leave their current job or organization. The reasons vary. Some seek upward movement not available in their organization. Others want to work in a new industry or specialty. Still others have found that they're unhappy in their current job, department or organization.

Corporate change is accelerating. These changes have altered the implied contract between organizations and employees. Formerly, organizations provided career tracks or career development programs to employees. According to Douglas Hallⁱⁱ, a professor at Boston University, organizations are more likely to view career development as the responsibility of the employee. Hall uses the term *Protean Career* to describe a career in which employees guide themselves and define career success according to their own perceptions, values, and goals. The term Protean refers to the Greek god Proteus, who could change shape at will.

The Protean Career implies a new agreement between employee and employer, which Dr. Hall calls the *Protean Contract*. Within this contract, employees' careers develop "based on self-direction in the pursuit of psychological success in one's work."ⁱⁱⁱ Employees seek satisfaction and professional development in their jobs. They tend to be more loyal to their profession than the organization and seek flexibility in their work.

I've noticed that many of the folks I've talked with are mid-career employees who have amassed great depth and breadth of experience. Many are seeking opportunities in which they can contribute more to an organization. In some instances these folks feel as if they've been left behind by their senior management or have witnessed changes in their organization that no longer fit their idea of how an organization should

provide leadership to its employees. Finally, some of those I've talked to have simply become bored and seek a greater challenge.

These types of experiences are common to many of us in mid-career. Career development theories suggest that having attained a degree of mastery in our career, we wonder whether we are offering any value to the world.

According to Bob McDonald and Don Hutcheson, authors of the book, *Don't Waste Your Talent*, somewhere between the ages of 38 and 45 we enter a mid-life transition. They say that "the midlife transition can be one of the most important and significant events in people's lives. Or it can be an unmitigated disaster."^{iv} As we reach this transition point in our careers we find ourselves assessing and sometimes reassessing who we are and what we want our lives to be about and "It becomes increasingly important as you get older to feel that what you are doing is meaningful."^v

So the answer to whether to change jobs often depends on which career transition point you've reached. About every seven to 10 years, we reach a new turning point at which we step back and assess, redirect or strengthen our career path. The challenges we face at each transition differ but the commonality seems to be about ensuring we are satisfied with our career choice.^{vi}

Following are some questions you might ask yourself if you find that you're tempted to begin a job search.

1. Am I still learning and growing in my current job? Have I developed enough expertise to use it in another position?
2. Is my job still challenging or interesting?
3. Do I look forward to coming into work most days? Is it rewarding to walk into the office?
4. Where would I like my career to go next? Can I see it growing in my current company?
5. What are my core values and interests? As I think about each of these, does my current job reinforce or support these values and interests?

6. Do I have the emotional resources to take on a new job right now? What other demands do I have on my time and energy that might distract me from doing well in a new job?



The Managers' Role

It's disturbing to me when I speak with people who are loyal to their organization, have demonstrated their value, been promoted and yet still want to leave. From a business perspective, this is not the type of employee an organization wants to lose.

I've talked with employees who have excellent skills and technical capability, have received positive feedback for years about their value to their organization, and have been promoted recently. And yet, some of these folks find they have been promoted into jobs they don't like and would not have chosen for themselves or find that the organization has changed so much that they can no longer find a place for themselves in it. Somewhere along the way, their implied contract changed.

Some have described this as a feeling of being "left behind"; no longer part of the team that is driving the company forward. They have lost their line of sight between the value they bring and what the company relies on them to accomplish.

For example, a person who was hired for his administrative skills finds that his boss is now asking for more strategic thinking. Although the boss relies on the employee to perform his administrative duties, he leaves him out of strategic discussions that affect his department. This demonstrates to the employee that his organization sees no value in his perspective. It also keeps him from taking on the bigger challenge of strategically advancing his department. Or, someone who was hired to turn a department around finds that upon the successful completion of her assignment she is asked to lead the department when she'd rather lead another

turn around or start up in order to leverage the skills that satisfy her and make her want to come to work everyday. Once she is placed in a role to lead and maintain a well-running department, she will become bored, and less productive.

As companies move forward, department leaders want to move with the company. In some situations, the movement forward seems to outpace the employees' ability to keep up. This is *not* the situation I'm writing about. Rather, the situation I see in some organizations is that the department leaders leave their best employees behind. Their best employees are those who know their jobs well, seek growth and challenge, protect the company from liability, adhere to policies, demonstrate personal integrity, and manage their own employees in such a way as to keep them motivated and focused on the future. When department leaders leave their best employees behind, the best talent leaves the company.

Department leaders can be proactive when changes start to occur in the company. They can recommit to the Protean Contract. This often gets a valued employee's attention. Steps department leaders can take include:

- Hold regular meetings with employees to discuss their progress toward career goals.
- Recognize that many employees will seek opportunities that are not available within their department. Help these employees to network outside the department to enhance their careers while still giving their talents to their department.
- Advocate for the employees' development. Provide time and resources to let them attend relevant seminars or to get on-the-job experiences that will help them develop skills or gain exposure to new areas of the company.
- Allow employees to guide their careers. Act as a coach or mentor and avoid dictating or limiting their development.
- Ensure employees understand their value to the department as well as the organization. Provide them with specific feedback that demonstrates this value.
- Explain how changes in the organization will impact their role and help them to

- plan for enhancing their own value, and their team's value, to the organization.
- Finally, good managers keep their egos out of the way. They know that they will have some employees who will excel and outshine even their own capabilities. The best managers pride themselves on the career progression of their employees.



Next Issue

In the February issue we'll discuss the dynamics of skill mastery and challenge based on Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's^{vii} theory of Flow and its affect on successful organizations. Until then, enjoy your Holidays. All the best to you and your families!

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This newsletter is edited by Larry Offner of West Palm Beach, Florida.

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ⁱ If you have recruiting questions or needs, please contact me at aoffner@spspcorp.net. For recruiting, I work with SSP Search Solutions which recruits in the areas of Human Resources, Organization Development and Accounting/Finance.

ⁱⁱ Hall, Douglas (2002). *Careers in and out of organizations*. CA: Sage Publications, p. 4.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} McDonald, B. & Hutcheson, D. (2005). *Don't Waste Your Talent: the 8 Critical Steps to Discovering What You Do Best*. NY: The Highlands Company.

^v McDonald, B. & Hutcheson, D. (2005). *Don't Waste Your Talent: the 8 Critical Steps to Discovering What You Do Best*. NY: The Highlands Company.

^{vi} For further details on each transition point, read *Don't Waste Your Talent: the 8 Critical Steps to Discovering What You Do Best* by Don Hutcheson and Bob McDonald.

^{vii} Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is the C.S. and D.J. Davidson Professor of Psychology at the Peter F. Drucker School of Management at Claremont Graduate University and the director of The Quality of Life Research Center, a nonprofit institute that studies Positive Psychology in Claremont, CA. He is the author of *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* and *Good Business: Leadership, Flow and the Making of Meaning*.