

Managing Your Career in the New Millennium

BY EILEEN SHARAGA



HOW MANY PEOPLE were swept into a career because they didn't know the choices that were open to them, the options they had, or more commonly, didn't even know what they had to offer?

Today people can no longer be "swept" into a profession, because the American workplace has changed forever.

Corporate restructuring, downsizing, and new techniques have changed the rules of the workplace. Full-time jobs in corporations are diminishing and full-time work in an organization will be only one of the many options open to us. Management consulting, contractual work, freelance, and self-employment are but a few of the new work arrangements. This means that we've gone from a job-structured society to a skill-structured society. Actively planning and managing one's career has never been more important. The workplace of the future requires skill security rather than job security. Therefore, the identification of skills and competencies becomes critical in developing a successful career. It is the person, as well as the job, that has become important.

SELF-ASSESSMENT. Self-assessment has become the backbone of career management. By self-assessment, I mean a systematic process of exploring your values, interests, skills, and personal style. Understanding the environments that let you shine, the interests that excite you, the roles you would like to play, and the skills you enjoy using will allow you to express yourself in ways that will be

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more fulfilling. Work needs to fit your personality and knowing yourself is the first step in career management.

Some people enjoy making high-level management decisions; others want to make a contribution to society. For some people, money and status are top priority, while for others, expressing themselves creatively is more fulfilling. Some people are most comfortable sitting at their computer analyzing data, while for

others, analyzing people turns them on.

The right job is personally fulfilling because it nourishes the most important aspects of one's personality. When they think about a career, most people focus on a subject matter, industry, or job title that interests them. For example, we hear people say, "I think I'll become an architect or graphic designer" or "I'll go into the field of publishing or advertising." But there are more important questions to ask yourself:

Do you like working with people or paper?

Do you want to do something different every day?

Do you like being part of an organization?

Do you need freedom and flexibility, or structure and security?

Understanding your style is often as important as knowing your skills.

What are the environments that allow you to do your best work?

Do you place image before function?

Do you enjoy visibility?

Do you like working with large groups?

Do you need a lot of interaction?

Do you enjoy the collaborative process or would you rather work alone?

Knowing what your values are is as important as knowing your skills. Values are emotional vitamins and are at the heart of every career choice.

What are the values that drive you? Is it recognition, pride, status, the thrill of meeting new challenges?

Do you crave intellectual stimulation?

Do you enjoy coming up with new

ideas, being given a lot of responsibility, or being your own boss?

Do you prefer being part of a team, supervising or being supervised?

Why do some products attract you and others do not?

By understanding your style, knowing your values, and identifying your skills, you will then possess the tools to make decisions based on self-knowledge. Developing a successful career is like a

mosaic: the right blend of your total person, a perfect merging of your whole self. Any part of the mosaic that is missing minimizes your chances of success.

INFORMATION GATHERING. The contemporary workplace contains new job possibilities and emerging career fields. Many job titles are becoming obsolete while other are fast emerging. In some industries, the function changes but the job title remains the same; in other instances, job titles may be deceptive. Career management means learning about the nature of these new occupations and what these job titles mean. Here are some examples:

Instructional designer is a new job title that has emerged within the multimedia technology industry.

Cultural diversity specialists have been

are some excellent books available at your local library and bookstores (see sidebar for suggested reading). You need access to more information so that you can be better informed and therefore make better decisions.

THE SKILLS CONNECTION. Skills are what translate into activities and roles. Transferable skills are those skills that can be adapted from one industry to another. You should understand very clearly what your transferable skills are because you need to link your self-esteem to your job skills rather than to the company itself. Whether you're developing a marketing plan, analyzing a research project, or writing an ad campaign, what are the skills that you're using? Is it quantitative analysis,

programming them. A research analyst involved with consumer-response statistics might use her same skills more effectively in conducting focus groups, where sensitivity to people and behavior is more important than the linear aspects of the project.

One of the more critical but often overlooked aspects of career management is understanding your internal barriers, those psychological roadblocks that keep you from moving forward. Too often we have difficulty implementing a plan of action because of internal resistance—fear of change, overcommitment to routine, problems with authority, or interpersonal issues. You're in a strategically better place when you can see the source of your problem. Understanding your barriers is liberating because it expands your self-definition. It will allow you to take risks and make changes that you would otherwise not be able to do.

Career management today is complex and subtle, internal and external. It means knowing yourself, gathering information, and learning about new opportunities. Once you do this, you are in a better position to match those opportunities appropriately to your self-profile. When you have put all of this together, you will be better able to make conscious choices in managing your career, so that you will find both personal fulfillment and financial success. ■

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added to human resource management.

Art directors are becoming computer graphics technologists and Web site designers.

In some companies the term "market intelligence" has replaced the ubiquitous "market research."

Account executives need a more technical background and advertising directors need to be more business-oriented.

Brand managers are still brand managers, but the scope of their functions has changed.

You need to understand the nuances of all these changes. You not only need more information about emerging career tracks but need to become aware of the new approaches (collaborative teams vs. traditional hierarchical management), so that you can transition into new employment opportunities.

Another essential part of the information-gathering process is to access available self-information resources. Self-assessment tests are available through counseling services and will give you a good handle on your personal profile. The preference for many counselors is the Meyers-Briggs Personality Inventory, which provides an excellent foundation for self-awareness. Additionally, there

researching, synthesizing information, strategic planning, conceptual implementation? Ask yourself:

Do you solve problems creatively or analytically?

Are you attracted to computers and technology or to people and places?

Do you enjoy verifying data step-by-step or solving problems intuitively?

Discovering your transferable skills and knowing which of your skills you can package will be the key to career management. Corporations may change but your transferable skills remain the same. You can take them anywhere. Developing a "portfolio" of skills is your career anchor in today's marketplace.

MOVING TO THE RIGHT OR LEFT. Many people may be in the right position but in the wrong industry—or the right industry but the wrong end of it. A minor adjustment is all that's needed. For example, a person might be doing research in a conservative corporation. Moving to an advertising agency or a small innovative company might be better suited to his style and temperament. A computer programmer who is outgoing and people oriented might be happier selling computers rather than pro-

Eileen Sharaga, president of Career Resources, has had seven careers herself. These careers span the fields of marketing, advertising, product development, academia, telecommunications, and executive search. She is currently a career counselor who specializes in career transition and self-assessment tools. Sharaga also lectures, teaches, and is currently writing a book on emerging careers in the twenty-first century. She can be reached at 212/826-0685.

Suggested Reading

Targeting the Job You Want, by Kate Wendleton (Five O'clock Books)

Shifting Gears, by Carole Hyatt (Simon & Schuster)

How to Find the Work You Love, by Laurence Boldt (Penguin)

Putting Your Talent to Work, by L. Capacchione/Peggy VanPeet (Help Communications, Inc.)