

# the employee handbook



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observations

by jim



## ANSWERS TO SELECTED EXERCISES

↓ (ALMOST) NEVER TURN DOWN A PROMOTION.

↓ TRY TO FIGURE OUT WHAT IS NEEDED ... NOT WHAT WAS ASKED FOR....

↓ SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO FEED THE DOG.

↓ PARADOXES CANNOT BE SOLVED ... TURN THEM INTO PROBLEMS THEN SOLVE THE PROBLEM.

↓ NETWORKING ... YOU MUST HAVE CONTACTS FAR AND WIDE.

↓ COMMUNICATIONS ... GET GOOD AT IT ... I MEAN REALLY GET GOOD AT IT ... PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.

↓ YOU SPEND AT LEAST 8 HRS AT YOUR JOB... YOU NEED TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO ENJOY IT.

↓ HAPPINESS IS YOUR RIGHT ... EXERCISE IT.

↓ STAY OUT OF STREET FIGHTS.

↓ STUBBORNNESS CAN BE A VIRTUE ... OR A FLAW... YOUR CHALLENGE IS TO FIGURE OUT WHICH.

↓ IF YOU THINK SOMEBODY ELSE IS THINKING ABOUT YOUR CAREER ... YOU'RE WRONG.

↓ IF YOU MAKE THE JOURNEY INTERESTING ... THE DESTINATIONS WILL FOLLOW.

↓ IF YOU BASE YOUR LIFE ON WINNING AND LOSING ... PICK YOUR OPPONENT CAREFULLY.

↓ FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU WANT TO BE IN 2, 5, 10 YEARS AND CAREER END ... GET STARTED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN.

↓ PICK YOUR BOSS.

↓ YOU WANT TO BE VICE PRESIDENT (OF THE COMPANY).

↓ BOSSES ARE APPOINTED, LEADERS ARE FOLLOWED.

↓ IN TIMES OF CRISIS OR DISRUPTION... GREAT THINGS CAN HAPPEN ... OR NOT ... IT'S UP TO YOU.

↓ PLAYING IN THE GAME IS BETTER THAN WATCHING THE GAME.

↓ SUBSTANCE IS GOOD ... SUBSTANCE AND GLITZ IS BETTER.

↓ INSPIRE SOMEONE ... IT MAY CHANGE YOUR LIFE.

↓ THE COMPANY IS NOT DAD.

↓ YOU NEED TO DISTINGUISH YOURSELF AT SOMETHING VALUABLE.

↓ FAIRNESS IS OFTEN IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER.

↓ BE NICE TO PEOPLE. .. ITS A GOOD THING.

↓ YOU HAVE AN IMAGINATION ... USE IT.

↓ YOU CAN DO MUCH MORE THAN YOU THINK YOU CAN... BUT YOU HAVE TO TRY ... I MEAN REALLY TRY.

↓ PERFORMANCE RATING DAY IS SELDOM A GOOD DAY.

↓ THE COMPANY IS IN BUSINESS TO MAKE MONEY ... DONT FORGET THIS.

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Perhaps starting with the epilogue is a bit of a bad omen. I thought it appropriate because just as I was finishing waxing eloquently about the ins and outs of successful employment, the recession of 2009 became a serious event. A certain bit of sobering reality was brought to our lives. These experiences are met with such a complex set of emotions that it is hard to capture them in words. Confident ... almost cocky attitudes get replaced by anxieties and fears. Self-importance becomes self-doubt. The job we were complaining about just a few months earlier is now almost sacred to us. Denial is rampant in the early phases. It won't happen here, or to my company, or my area or to me. It's better here. But it can and it does. I don't need to fill in the blanks or explain to you how you felt during all of this. Stress would be the operative word but if you were directly impacted by the recession ... laid off, fired, demoted, or re-deployed then you have far more intense emotions. It has been such a long time since we had such a wide spread and deep economic downturn that many employers and employees had never seen such a thing. They didn't know how to react. I remember every economic period from my past and I very vividly remember the one of the early 1980's where I felt some of the sting directly. These times helped shape many of my attitudes of how I faced my work-a-day world. Perhaps this one will do the same for you. I looked over the material I prepared for you to see if anything needed changing. It didn't.

It was very clear to me that the lessons I learned in the early 80s were alive and well ... and engrained. It is pretty obvious to all of you now that change is a constant. What you thought was a given...is not. Companies go in and out of existence, people get jobs, people change jobs, and people lose jobs. No one is immune. You must learn to embrace change and use it to your advantage and not let yourself become the victim. You can help yourself here and do better. There are no guarantees but there is risk management.

The idea of an employee handbook to someone who has just lost their job may seem to be a bit of a disconnect, but it is not. We often express the edges of our lives in our conversations and emphasize the trivial parts of our days and forget to connect with our core thoughts and beliefs. It is so easy to fixate on the small things and forget to take care of the real you. There is goodness and greatness in each of us but it sometimes gets covered up with all of the dirt and dust in the air. Office politics, interpersonal competition, unexpected assignments, boring tasks, mistakes, personal responsibilities and family can overwhelm us. Perhaps my choice of words in the handbook will not resonate with you but the intent is there. An intent for you to define yourself, to deal with your happiness, to downplay your competitiveness, to increase your competence, to be nicer to each other, to embrace change, and to position yourself to excel. It sounds like a tall order but I know many of you can do it. Please be assured that things will get better economically and then they will get worse and then they will get better...and so it goes.

You already know that it is good to save for a rainy day, that you should diversify your portfolio ... both economically and personally, you should live within your means, don't acquire too much debt ... both economically and personally, and being skilled at what you do should be your quest. Add to this that change is a constant, being proactive should be the preferred option, and treating everyone with respect is fundamental. I believe very strongly ... to the point that you might consider it an axiom ... that crisis breeds opportunity and that great crisis breeds great opportunity. This is when houses of cards collapse and the deck gets reshuffled. This is when leadership vacuums are exposed and leaders are discovered. For those of you who have it in you (and many do) it is time to have a thought, a plan, a strategy, and to act, encourage, explain, and lead. For those of you who have never thought about all of this ... now would be a good time to start pondering your future and how you will shape it. You understand by now that all of this is not easy ... and it's not easy because you make it hard. Just remember risk is a two-edge sword.

For those of you who are skeptical, unimpressed, jaundiced, or just don't want to invest time in reading through the handbook, I have included here a quick list of thoughts that you should ponder. The short form of that list, or what might be called the fundamental "trifecta" of success, is: (1) know what you're doing (craftsmanship), (2) be able to articulate your point (communications) and (3) be able to build the support (drive action).

## HERE IS THE EXTENDED LIST

- Work for a good company.  
(the vast majority try to be good companies)
- Help the company be the company you want it to be.  
(why not ... it's your company)
- Help the company be prosperous  
(... sure beats the alternative)
- Drive enthusiasm ... yours and others.  
(It's fun being excited)
- Find out how the company makes money and learn how to directly help.  
(get close to the fire)
- Have an original thought.  
(I'm drawing a blank here ... most people do)
- Drive action.  
(most seem content to be followers ... and critics)
- Get good at communications.  
(... its amazing how many are not)
- Distinguish yourself at your craft ... know what you're doing.  
(very few actually do this ... or even try)
- Grow thicker skin  
(you will be criticized)
- Encourage (Inspire) others ... don't be a whiner  
(this a powerful oft unused force of nature)
- Be tenacious and not stubborn  
(... learn the difference)
- Figure out how to get rid of your job (not you)  
(if you don't somebody at the competitors will)
- Play fair  
(... if you don't...it will catch up with you)
- Be constructive not a critic  
(... help not hinder)
- Build an extensive network of confidants  
(... relationships still run the world)
- Do not create paradoxes  
(... don't paint yourself into a corner)
- Be brutally honest with yourself regarding your work performance  
(... don't share these thoughts with others ... just take action)



I quit. This is really your story and I could wax on forever telling you things that may not pertain to you or you think you already know. I have a lot more to say but I don't want to waste your time or my time with useless prattle. Because it's really your career you're dealing with you should make some notes and comments along the way about something you want to tell yourself. I've left plenty of white space for you to jot your thoughts. I would choose pencil because it's a bit like a crossword puzzle you might want to change something along the way. And if you do then I'm going to guess that it is for the most part ... good. In fact it becomes a metaphor for your career. If you're adding, erasing, changing, and editing then you're taking some time to think about a very important part of your job ... you. I'm pretty sure your book will be better than mine...after all ... I quit.



I must be nuts to write a book that will try to provide guidance to the vast world of employees and attempt to improve the lives of those who have chosen the path of the "career". The upfront disclaimer is "This book is not for everyone" "Egad" you say ... the man is stating the obvious ... he must be brilliant. Ahhh ... yes alas, you know the truth ... I am brilliant ... and stupid...and experienced ... and a novice ... and ... so on. I want you to think about the content of this book a bit differently. I don't want you to think of this as advice. That would assume that I understand you and your circumstances very well ... I don't. I doubt if I'll tell you anything you don't already know ... my challenge is to help you listen to yourself. You're smart enough, clever enough, and strong enough to help yourself but sometimes you don't listen enough ... to the sounds around you... those coming from yourself, your family and your co-workers. At some point the word honesty will creep into all of this and the old phrase "being honest with one's self" will once again be a useful quest. You will have to talk to yourself about who you are ... and you need to listen. You need to be truthful, blunt, and sensitive. Truthful because we want to believe we are smarter, more ethical, more important, and more valuable than others ... we are not. The word more is the operative word. We are smart, we are ethical, we are valuable, and we are important. You need to be blunt with yourself so you do not soft peddle your shortcomings and believe me you have some.

This is not meant to be a put down or discouraging but a reminder that you are human; and because you are human, you must be sensitive to your feelings but not so harsh as to disrespect yourself.

Not everything will apply so pick and choose. Don't forget to be yourself because nobody can be you better than you. When you figure it all out, and you will ... if you really want to ... pay it forward.



Employee Satisfaction is a concept that conjures up thoughts of an oxymoron and sends skeptics and cynics running for the bathroom. I want to help you but I really want you to help yourself. I am aware that there is no way that my counseling can help everyone or perhaps even ... anyone ... but I am convinced that there are some of you out there that will benefit from some “re-think” of your careers. So you're skeptical ... so am I. There are so many personalities and so many unique career challenges with special circumstances it would be difficult to believe that there would be any way to address them all ... so I won't. I think we'll spend some time helping you fix yourself. That way you can't blame me if it doesn't work...you can blame yourself and you'll be right back where you started. (You can tell I'm management material!). In my years of mentoring and trying to help people through their work dilemmas I certainly got to be exposed to a broad spectrum of personalities and their associated challenges. Some were shy, some were bold, some puzzled, some assured, some just curious and some desperate. Some had unusual problems, others had unconventional circumstances, some were openly frustrated, and some were guarded in what they revealed. Some were embarrassed others very matter of fact. All were clearly in need of something. Some say that just having someone listen helped a lot. There is something to that but it seems to me that most people could use more than just someone to listen...they need some tools and techniques to find their way through this maze.



I believe the raw materials are already present and that it's worth some investment in time to actually change the course of human events. One disclaimer is important here. Some people have more serious emotional and physical problems that need to be dealt with by medical doctors and licensed professional counselors. If you feel you have significant mental health issues you should seek professional help. What I can provide are some activities, questions, and suggestions that can help you deal with the stressful world we call employment ... maybe...If it helps pass it along if it doesn't ... pass it along.

P.S. If you think all of this is easy ... you're wrong ... the journey is always bumpy. If you are a bit or a lot overwhelmed ... then you're normal.



This book is really a story that has no end. It's a saga that you are writing everyday as you spend your life toiling away in the middle of institutional America. Opinions or advice are not solicited here nor will any be given. There are hundreds of other places that will give endless input on how you can find a job, write a resume, get a job, keep a job, find a new job and how you should, dress, act, react, get along, and not screw up. I'm sure it's all good advice but a strong personal desire to succeed and a good dose of common sense will go along way here. So don't dress funny, act too stupid, or behave like too big a jerk and you will be ok. This book is more about you and how you might define your own personality in the bump and grind of the work-a-day world. They don't teach this in school and they don't deal with it in a weekly column in the newspaper. Finding tools to help cope with what your job deals you can be an important way to keep your sanity. The goal is simple: happiness. You spend eight hours or more a day at your job and you might as well figure out how to enjoy it. At times it seems like a lofty goal but if you don't try you'll never figure out if you can do it. Most people have a few shadows in their personalities that need attention from time to time and perhaps we'll expose them so they can be dealt with. When times are good and jobs are plentiful we are more vocal about why the system is not dealing with our needs. When times are hard and jobs are scarce we mask our discontent and try to avoid controversy.

I would like to introduce you to an approach that is sure to enhance your mental health regardless of the economy. Good and bad times will come and go but your happiness is not a negotiable product. Happiness is prosperity and before you file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy or even take a dip in your portfolio now would be a good time to put together your plan to insure maximum return on your effort with minimal downside risk. This is your story, your trek, so be honest with yourself and do a serious self-exam. Don't forget that your capability to succeed is far greater than you imagine.



So let's set the mood by telling you up front that I never imagined that I would have a job. Now that I have had one for thirty-six years, I'm still amazed that I had a job. I was not only the first generation of my family to go to college but also the first to spend his life working for someone else. How can that be you say? Well all of my ancestors on both sides were always self-employed... farmers, butchers, and the like. My father had a job for a number of years due to his family history of poverty but as soon as possible he shed that and became his own boss. The words "employee satisfaction" would have been a useless term to my ancestors...so any insights that I give here are entirely a one generation, learn it while you go, make this up on the fly experience. I've learned things that may help you so I am not here to dispense advice but to offer some thoughts that helped me keep my sanity, my self-respect, and for the most part my happiness. I hope you find some of the thought valuable. If so, combine it with your knowledge and pay it forward...we must respect our past but invest in our future.



Well we might as well get this one out of the way. This one is bumpy. This is one of those dirty little secrets that are not so secret. There are those that believe that most of the work is done by 20% of workers. Those that believe this think they are in the 20%. It is true that I believe that useful work is spread unevenly throughout the workforce and that a minority of workers makes a majority of the impact. But, I look at this a bit differently than the cynics crying “unfair!” First of all, everything in life I have ever been involved with has apparent unequal contributions. A closer look reveals, what might be called, a team dynamic that allows the outcome to be greater than the sum of the parts. People who continually contribute more, and who work on the most important products should be rewarded with merit increases and promotions in a timely and appropriate manner. If an individual contributes little or has a negative impact, then that performance deficiency needs to be addressed. It’s the big grey area where things get goofy. Instead of wading in and trying to figure out the proportions of who contributed the most I will make an underwhelming claim that the company has already figured out how to deal with this and it’s called bosses. You don’t like the answer but it is the right answer and the best answer. They are assigned to sort this out. You may roll your eyes but in most cases they do this okay. Yes the world could do better and the companies that do it well are called profitable and those who don’t will struggle.



## → Change Jobs Every 2- 3 Years↓

Sure that’s easy for me to say. I know there are many good exceptions to this rule ... but heed the thought. Variety in your diet, though at times uncomfortable, can be important to your growth and growth can be integral to your happiness. Lawrence Peter in his book “The Peter Principle” suggests in his now infamous line “people rise in an organization to their level of incompetence.” In the full contact work world we live in it is sometimes difficult to tell whether we are rising or even more difficult to determine if we have already arisen and are incompetent. Since I don’t want to leave my happiness and well being to chance I find new quests and challenges are just what the doctor ordered.

Some people say, “Now is not a good time to move”. Those people are sometimes your boss and sometimes they are you. If it’s your boss then you have situation. Why did he/she say that? Do you agree? Is this a minor situation or a major one? Is this a continuing problem? Could you delay and should you? What strategy could you develop to allow both of you to be better off. (There’s that win-win thing.) Is it time to get creative on how to solve this? Are you job- hopping or is it really time to go? Just remember change is usually good. Is it becoming a battle of wits? Are you the problem here? Maybe you’re nervous about moving so you help them say what you want to hear. If now is really not a good time then set an approximate date when there would be a good time. This is not a selfish action.

If you are a capable and dedicated employee then jobs in which you are challenged (growing) are jobs in which you are more likely to prosper and become win-win situations. This is not assuming your job is Pleasantville all of the time. There are deadlines, serious problems, people issues, mistakes and calamities. That's pretty much life. Having lots of variety in your tasks gives you the right stimulus to keep your interest and focus on achievement. It's one of the natural forces of life.



## → Civility ↓

This is another one of those topics that is hard to pin down but then again aren't they all when it comes to the softer side of life? I'll come right out and ask the burning question "Are you civil to others?" Only you can really answer that because of the broad interpretations. In a sense are you comfortable with the way you act, speak, and treat others? This actually is a very important part of creating a framework for your happiness. We constantly get reminded of the golden rule "Treat others as you would be treated". This is a good rule...but some of you like to mix it up out there and are far more tolerant of being bounced around a bit and consider it normal. So I'll revise the golden rule a bit for the workplace to read, "Treat others as they would like to be treated". Well I'm sure that conjures up both good and bad images...good when you think of "nice" people (whatever that means) and bad when you think of sniveling, whining, spoiled brats who try to get there way (that pretty much says it like it is...doesn't it?). So to use this revised golden rule (RGR) you have to do some work don't you? You have to figure out or guess how others wish to be treated. There is good news here, society has spent a lot of time sorting this out and there are a lot of examples of good ways and bad ways out there. Without restraining your free speech rights there is plenty of room for honest self-expression while not being offensive to virtually anyone. Your mother told you to be nice and play fair. That was good advice. If you scold people, stop it.

If you are a “bull of the woods” find other woods, if you can’t seem to control your temper, seek professional help. If you are saddled with the presence of one of these people in your life you’ll need to get creative on dealing with it. I mean it. You don’t want to become like them. Before you behave in an uncivil or disrespectful manner out of defense try to find alternatives. You might find this is easier than you think once you focus on solving the problem.



## → Competitiveness (Ambition??) ↓

It all began when you started kindergarten, and you drew the picture of the tree better than the red headed girl sitting next to you and the teacher smiled at you. The race was on. As you went through school there were the signs...advanced classes, college track, vocational studies, etc. The undercurrents were everywhere. If you did well there were the signs, subtle perhaps or even overt. You got the validation that burned in you and it became a growing need. The better you performed the more you needed. The race continued. In high school there were awards, honor rolls, SAT scores, scholarships, sports, music ... whatever the area, achievement became the driving force. Each step narrowed the competition ... only 10% got into the special classes only 20% of those went to the best colleges and there was always the top 10% of that experience etc. and so it goes. A life built on competition and personal performance, one on one, mano e mano. Don’t look at the other person’s paper, keep your eyes to yourself, do your own work. And then it happens ... you decide to get a job and suddenly ... without warning ... you’re expected to team with others. It’s not a foreign concept but it is definitely not what you practiced all of your life. You were use to relying almost entirely on your own skills and efforts to complete a task and now you’re sharing the responsibility, taking instruction, giving instruction, compromising, taking on challenges that could not be done alone. The dynamics of this emerging collection of interaction, we might call a team, brings out a whole new cultural experience.

People that were “average performers”, as measured by the “lone wolf” scale, suddenly became influential and people smiled at them and some of the greater achievers suddenly became technicians and became marginal. These events play out somewhat different throughout a career as people adapt to the new challenges but the adjustments are made with varying degrees of success as measured by the individual's satisfaction. It's a natural selection process and it breeds some serious emotional responses ... some good ... some bad. So if this process has been good for you ... congratulations. If this has created considerable angst then perhaps some intervention is warranted. Becoming a frustrated or “bitter old engineer” is most unfortunate and by all measures ... avoidable if you want it to be ... and believe me you want to avoid this situation. Fixing it is not easy and takes a fairly long time and remission is always a possibility. If you have been at your job for a while you have met these eternal cynics that can make a dark cloud appear on an otherwise sunny day.

Perhaps you have never faced your own competitiveness and were not aware that it may have more destructive powers than you realize. A simple test you might use to gauge your competitive spirit goes as follows: Do you feel terrible when you lose? Do you feel relieved when you win? (Not good ... only relieved). If so you need to deal with this emotional force. If you base your life on winning and losing then pick your opponent carefully. I've had to deal with my engrained competitive nature all of my life. It was causing me great discomfort and was only marginally a positive force in my drive to accomplish.

My intense competitiveness to do better than the others around me had always yielded successful results ... but something had changed. It took me quite a while to get around to thinking about this aspect of my life. It was such a part of me that I assumed it was innate. I eventually learned it wasn't. In my world the goal lines were pretty clear. If I did better than the person next to me, I win, and I should be rewarded. Others weren't seeing the same goal line that I saw because they were “getting ahead” and I wasn't. I eventually made a decision to refocus my energy on the absolutes and not the relatives. Instead of competing against someone I would measure my progress only by the ultimate accomplishment. It seems a simple truth but for those of us raised, as I was, it was a big change. I made sure that the absolute goal was a biggie so I wouldn't become a slacker. It really worked. I found many new creative ways to deal with the impossible and both the company and I were rewarded. I found new challenges, new solutions, and more happiness. I treated the system like I use to solve problems ... there was objectivity. People's actions were now facts and data in my solution. Organizational barriers were just problem constraints to be dealt with. This may not resonate with you but get in touch with the competitive you. This can be a much more powerful force than you can imagine. Do not dismiss this lightly. You can remake this part if it is not serving your best interests.





## → I'm Concerned... ↓

Okay, so this may be more of a pet peeve than any great insight into survival in the institutional world but I do believe there is some value here. I hate the word “concern”. Yes, you heard me right. Well actually to be more precise I hate the way it is being used in-group interactions. I have seen this second tier word ascend into the pantheon of day-to-day verbiage and I don’t like it. Twenty years ago it existed right where it should be ... as seldom used word that was only uttered when there were true personal feelings about someone. “My wife was concerned about your health”... “We got concerned when we saw the papers pile up on the doorstep”... “I got concerned when the fever didn’t go down”. This is a word that had value. It was meaningful when used in personal situations and to show that you cared about someone’s state of mind, health, safety or well being. But now it lurks as a near buzzword in-group interaction. Now I hear it everyday... “I have concerns about that approach.”... “I’m concerned about the staffing levels on the project.”... “My concern would be how the worker will....”

Somehow people have figured out over the recent past that this is a great way to engage in dialogue or debate or conversation and help color the process without really committing to anything. This is much akin to sitting in the bleachers and critiquing the play, the refereeing, and/or the coaching without any skin in the game. This is the most used format.

Others use the opening line “I’m concerned” as a signal that the present stream of conversation is about to be amended and that a new force is about to exist and a new stream of logic is about to be heard. So what’s wrong with that? Well ... it’s overused for one; it has been adopted by the naysayers of the world for two, and if you have a better idea ... say so you don’t need to subtly dis the other ideas.

So you go into your boss and say, “I’m concerned about my lack of promotions over the last five years” so that’s what you are ... concerned? You probably would have liked to have said, “I haven’t been promoted in five years and I want to be promoted now!” You decide that’s too blunt so you make a first edit. You think about saying “I haven’t been promoted in the last five years and would like to understand why.” You correctly surmise that that seems too aggressive, so you re-think and try out, “Bob just got promoted and he hasn’t been here as long as me...” You scratch that one out and move onto... “I need to understand what it takes to get promoted around here”... that one has traditionally been a non-starter so you eventually settle on “I’m concerned...” So you’re thinking right now... what’s wrong with that?... It avoids the bluntness or negative aspects of the other approaches. It moves the conversation toward the real topic without an apparent sharp edge. Sounds good but it isn’t. It shows a sort of one-dimensional thinking. You’ve become fixated on your own emotions. So what is one to do? There are many, many other ways to approach this that are better than being “concerned”. I have been able to accomplish blah, blah, blah and I would like to take on

challenges blah, blah, blah. I have set some goals and objectives and want to blah, blah, blah. These are action statements constructed by someone who has a focus and has goals. People who have concerns have doubts and by unintentionally admitting them you lose some power in the conversation. So let's pack up the "concerns" and only pull that word out when you truly are dealing with the welfare of others. Thank you and have a good day.

### Activity

So let's have a little fun and run a little experiment. I want you to count how many times in a week you actually hear the word, concern, used in the work setting. Also reflect on why and how the other person used it. Also be sure you count the times you use it.



## → Inspiration ↓

Have you ever inspired anyone? Not a word that is used much or a concept that is talked very much in the corporate setting. Inspire: to give rise to, bring about, cause; to influence, to impel; to fill or affect with a specified feeling, thought, etc. Wasn't in your job description was it? It's okay to be inspired but to inspire ... not sure you're up for that. There is a lot of responsibility here. It typically means you're confident enough to take a position, to set a course, theme, and strategy. That you have something figured out and in a way you're selling it...trying to get others to buy in. What if you're wrong? What if you fail? Other people would be affected. You would feel terrible. You would have led them down the wrong path. But on the other hand what if you were right and success followed and everyone was okay and the day was saved? Okay this is a little too black and white and melodramatic but it makes a point. It challenges you to think about whom you are and who you want to be. Being inspirational is one of the choices. It has a tinge of danger because it threatens the complacent. It asks; do you just want to be a critic or a follower or do you want to take a stand and be the potentially criticized? Do your actions inspire others to do better, achieve more, be happier, make a better world, and do the right thing? Think about it. In the corporate world this is all clumped under what is referred to as leadership. But I don't. To inspire someone is a higher cause. People who inspire are leaders. People who lead are not always inspirational.



There isn't the pay for performance aura stuck with leadership. There is sometimes pride (cometh before the fall) associated with being a leader. Being inspirational doesn't have all of those icky things associated with it. It's a gift. The gift receiver gets to interpret it and use it anyway they want. Usually good things are done from inspiration and if you were the reason for the inspiration then you have made an impact far more than you know. Being inspirational is not the privilege of the bosses, the leaders, or the executives. It's within us all and all we have to do is have the tenacity, patience, and courage to set ourselves on a unique day-to-day course that creates a positive influence on those around us. Who knows, with a little effort you may inspire someone to do good things. Put it on your to-do list for today. Somebody may do great things or at least good things because of you.



## → I'm Inspired ↓

Other sections have talked about inspiring people and one in particular deals with "Who do you admire and why?". Well, I'm going to tell you a bit about where I get my inspiration and I admit it's an infinite well. I look for inspiration from all the people around me and those I bump into in my day-to-day life. The person who does the routine but does it with professionalism or the person who shows an act of kindness. Very seldom do I wait for some notable figure to make a gesture that is worthy of admiration. When they do, I acknowledge and try to learn from it (I lost 30 pounds when I found out how good of shape President George W. Bush was ... I figured if he could do it ... I could do it!) But mostly it is just trying to emulate the good people and deeds I see everyday. My good friend N.J. has never said anything bad about other people in the entire time I've known him. I want to be like that. My wife works for the community good everyday of her life with no expectations of reward. I want to be like that. My former boss J. A. was tirelessly dedicated to increasing his knowledge. I want to be like that. My former professor R.M. was an energetic and an enthusiastic teacher. I want to be like that. My dad never expected anyone to do the dirty work for him; I want to be like that. The lady that cleans the office works hard and always is cheerful to me. I want to be like that. These guideposts are placed in front of us everyday and are reminders that many simple things make up greatness.

I will admit that extraordinary people accomplishing great deeds do inspire me. Discovery of new medicines, humanitarian gestures, extraordinary courage, and brilliant inventions encourage me to try harder. Grand vistas, great art, and great deeds that are complimented by great kindness, great effort and great ideas that I see all around me are food for my soul. We often talk about managing or leading but seldom about giving the most important thing to yourself ... and to the people you work with ... inspiration. It embodies management, leadership and greatness. It is not the exclusive property of any particular salary grade or boss. Don't feel you haven't got it in you ... because you do. Don't ignore this ... stop and think about it and determine where you are and where you can be. I not only hope you take the chance to inspire someone but that you learn to inspire yourself.



## → Heaven or Hell ↓

Someone once said "If you don't know where you are going any way will get you there". In my world people like that are called annoying. However in this case there is some truth to the saying. We often create a paradox in that our laissez faire, happy go lucky attitude of what will be can sneak up on us later in life and reveal the ugly reality that we didn't want to be where we were. A certain panic sets in and frustration, disappointment, and discouragement follow close behind. The ambition that was so cleverly masked and suppressed for so long rears its ugly head. You suddenly see the speed at which your life is moving and "bam!" you come to the realization that you were going exactly where you had planned on going ... nowhere. This is usually not a pretty moment ... but don't worry it will get worse. After the panic is gone and the more hard-core disappointment sets in ... self-doubt can't be far behind. Perhaps your cynicism will wick up and the early signs of "the bitter old engineer" will rear its head. This process can unfold over various time periods but usually it is measured in years. Most of these journeys entail a variety of ups and downs and thus it is not a continuous glide into hell. Just remember that redemption is much harder than prevention in this case. The cement of cynicism can set up pretty hard.

The world of Dilbert is taken to the next level of cynicism. This is definitely not the place to be. Most of us have reached this destination once or twice in our lives but by some good fortune have been able to get the next train leaving.

But some take up permanent residence there and that is really too bad. It's a waste ... a waste of time, energy, and talent. It is a drag on you, family, co-workers, and society. Why the bitterness? Simply put it is an out growth of a feeling of low self-esteem caused by not having a career you didn't plan on. Huh? You find a need to ridicule and put things and people down to cover up your disappointment for not getting to a place you hadn't planned to reach. Huh? It can also be evidence that a person is overwhelmed or over their heads in what they're doing. Not only do they perform at less than their full capability, they poison the environment around them and lower morale, productivity, and ... happiness. It is a selfish act but seemingly necessary for them to cope. So this is to be avoided at all cost. If you are on this slippery slope...stop and go back. The road ahead is paved with unhappiness. If you are already there... well you are probably making snide comments, if you actually read this far. But if you've hung in there then maybe hope is in the offering. Now I get to confess that Dilbert is not all bad. I actually laugh at some of the skits and I think it brings the necessary counterpoint to people who connect way too closely with an institution's propaganda. Whoa! Now you're confused. You just thought you heard me say "don't be a cynic" and now you're telling me "don't buy the company line". What would be healthy is building your own world, one that forms a solid foundation from which to view the surroundings and allows for prudent selection of what to do. The caution is to build in a certain amount of open mindedness and flexibility.

You should be prepared to interpret the input in a way that creates a healthy response ... it should not be used to fuel negative thought. You already know this but you just can't help yourself. It is just too easy to slip into the cynic mode. Its okay once in awhile but be careful not to let it stick and it can stick. We've all met someone like this and they are no fun to be around. Can you say "Avoid like the plague!" So what do you do if something like this has crept into your pores? Well, you do some nice things for other people. In particular you compliment someone and make it sincere. Then you do again and again. If you're using your pie hole for something else besides whining and complaining it is to be considered a good start ... better yet if you're saying something nice to someone you just took the first step to recovery.



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## → Reframing ↓

This is a powerful tool. It's useful when solving ordinary day-to-day problems and it is essential when targeting the bigger, more impossible, people problems that seem totally intractable. We all do it and we have all used it ... look at something from a different view, approach a problem from a new angle, and think about an issue from a different perspective. It works. I mean it really works. Why more people don't use this is beyond me. It should be a process that is invoked very early in the dilemma. We tend to take a very narrow and sometimes rigid view toward an issue. We dig in our heels and rigor mortis sets in. The situation paralyzes us and we are stuck. So there you have it. You use it but you don't, it works but it takes work. Some have a notion that reframing is akin to compromising, maybe even a copout, and some people draw a very restrictive line when it comes to their viewpoint. Remember you can't solve a paradox so you have to first turn it into a problem ... then solve the problem. Reframing is all about turning paradoxes into problems and problems into solutions.

It is really, I mean really, easy to construct paradoxes in the job world. Some are contrived just to demonstrate how challenging their job is. "The project is due in 6 months and I don't have the staff or money". Others are just stubborn. "Well I can't move ahead until they finish their part." Look for the "buts" in theirs or your problem statements. "I need to get blah blah done BUT I can't get them to give me the resources."

They refuse to change because they refuse to change and of course others just are overwhelmed and can't imagine there is a way to figure this out. You won't make any headway unless you put some thought and time to the paradox. Disassemble the paradox ... why is it a paradox, what things could be changed that haven't been considered, what kind of solutions would make a win-win situation? Imagine that all the options were gates and in front of each gate was a gnarly guard dog protecting the gate. "Not through here you don't!" is the message. That's how you feel...there is no solution ... but unknowingly you have made progress. If you did your due diligence and used your creativity you identified most of the solutions or gates. If it is a technical problem you have identified and understand the physics, if it is an organizational dilemma you have a clear map of the processes and if it is a people problem you have a mental dossier of whom these people are. Usually the problem/paradox is a combination of technical, organization and people and the people may represent both the gate and the Rottweiler. I know you're wondering if this is truly progress but this is a big step. You now understand the challenge better and the options. Now start looking at the options differently. Play the "What If" game. Connect some dots by thinking how the system should/could work. Try to understand what makes the clock tick as it does. Look for things that can be traded or shared ... anything to alter the status quo. I am confident that if you use your noodle you will eventually get one of the Rottweilers to blink. None of this is easy, at first; it does take work. Once you get good at reframing impossible

problems you'll have an incredibly powerful tool. Alas! Not all problems are tractable (you wanted me to say that!) but we throw up our hands way too easily. Most paradoxes can be made into problems and most problems can be solved.



## → So Who Are You And Who Do You Want To Be. ↓

When I participate as a mentor, one of the assignments I make after the first session is to have them make a list of five or six people they admire and to tell me why. There often is a wealth of information that gets communicated in the next session as we talk about the list. It's obviously not the people they revere but some of the characteristics they articulate. Talking about the people and their traits often stirs up the passions in people about the kind of person they want to be. It gives great insight into how to create an effective way of communicating ideas and assignments through analogies and references to the people qualities they admire. It certainly allows people to review and discuss what they feel life's axioms are, and it is good for them to hear themselves talk about what is good and just.

I often find a sense of relief that somebody actually asked. They had to put their thoughts together and they could recalibrate their beliefs but in the context of their workplace and career. This is not about judgment but alignment. The work world and the personal world should only have one set of values. This expression of their personal values often gives the first hint of any disconnect between what they believe and how the company behaves. Sometimes it's a very blunt introduction and other times a weak insinuation. It's the first hint as to who "they" are. Sometimes it takes more sessions and more assignments to see if there is a "they" and who "they" are.

So go ahead make a list of the people you admire and list the characteristics that you find appealing about them. I'll just wait here until you get done ... (whistling...) O.K. you got that done. So who was on the list ... maybe Colin Powell ... leadership, integrity, or maybe your father ... strong, kind, supportive...Dr. Albert Schweitzer ... compassion, caring, giving ... your wife/husband ... nurturing, protective, understanding ... Michael Jordan ... focused, hard working, talented ... Albert Einstein ... brilliant, creative, accomplished ... and so it goes. Maybe it's the next door neighbor or a teacher. It's your list. It's the qualities you admire and in a way the composites of all these traits is who you want to be. This is definitely a start. You have just told yourself who you want to be and now we have to find a career path that lets you be that person. It seems at this time like an impossible mission but ... hey ... what's the alternative? You don't want to (I mean you really don't want to!) become the "bitter old engineer".



## → Tell Them What You Want Them To Do↓

... then tell them again. The challenge of course is in knowing what it is you want to do. You have more influence over your career than you wish to admit. I find that a lot of people are intrigued by or seduced into letting other people direct or coach their careers. There is some satisfaction in having people show interest in your career path and helping you develop it. In some cases this can be good. More often than not, it is a distraction. Networking is important, even critical to career development, but dependency or a trust in others to act in your best interests is dangerous. Don't depend on it. If you think there are others thinking about your career ... you're wrong! This doesn't mean unexpected job offers or new opportunities won't happen. Options that were not on your radar-screen are always a possibility, but do not leave things to chance. A catalyst for these opportunities is often the career initiative you have demonstrated. Your actions and communications alert the organization of your needs. Once again, the journey that you lay out will bring you to some unintended but satisfying destinations.

When you've put together your philosophy, defined who you are, looked at all of the qualities you admire in others, started building a network of people, become more tuned into the heart and soul of the organization, then you'll be ready to build your road map for the near term. Short trips ... blue highways. Once it starts it stirs a bit of passion and you sense you are gaining some control over your life.

Nothing tangible has happened but you sense you are strengthened by your willingness to take charge. You've decided, in a broad-brush way, how you want to play out the game. You come to understand that there needs to be a lot of flexibility because the needs of the organization must also be considered. "Win-Win" they call it. In the movie City Slickers they talked about "knowing that one thing"... you may not have reached that point but sense you're in the zip code. A plan is emerging out of the primordial soup and ... it is good.

You now have to build some courage or resolve to make it happen ... maybe this is not a problem for you, for some it is a huge step. Some find the development of the plan to be the biggest challenge. Whatever your impediments, don't hurry, think it through, talk to everyone then ... tell them what you want them to do. One reminder ... be very careful of letting others define your career.



## → The PHD Effect ↓

Congratulations on your academic achievements. First of all, I mean it and second of all you like hearing it. Along with your achievement come some unique opportunities and challenges that may crop up along your career path. There are several factors that contribute to the mix. I work with a lot of people with their Ph.D.s and I see the situations first hand. The Ph.D. is often associated with words like, Big Brain, Specialist, Academic, and Smart. These characteristics that you may view as positive can create some unintended consequences when dealing with career options. You may be willingly or unwillingly participating in creating the image. Your organization may primarily be heavily weighted toward Ph.D.s and thus this alert may be meaningless to you. But many companies have a minority of Ph.D. employees and this, I will dare say, will make some sense to some of you. I will jump right in and see if we can understand what I'm talking about. Here it goes. So what are your career goals? You say you want to use your expertise and support the organization with your technical skills. You're attracted if not committed to a technical career path and your quest is to be the best in your chosen field. You are motivated by detailed technical challenges and want to do in-depth study on some problems you see as potential problem spots. You're feeling a bit uneasy because there doesn't seem to be budget to do the kind of detailed study you believe is needed.

You note that some of the other Ph.D.s that have been in your area for awhile seem a bit cynical. They struggle with the gap between the fast pace the company needs and methodical pace you feel is dictated by the call to do good analysis. A sort of limited promotions path further perplexes you. It seems the PhD's start at a good salary but then don't advance like others. You start to join the crowd that asks for a dual career path organization, one technical, and one management. Many companies have sort of complied with that demand.

Actually the details of this mini-drama are not that important, maybe some of the details resonated with you and maybe not, maybe you could wax on about other scenarios that could make up an entire mini-series. Regardless of the nuances there is a real opportunity to follow a path of unfulfilled expectations, which can lead to chronic cynicism, job hopping, (for the wrong person) and unhappiness. So what to do? What to do? I think a lot of it has to do with how you play your cards (isn't that always the case?) and you have earned a very nice card, your education. First of all don't hide behind it. You need to strip this thing down to the bare bones. Unwind it then rewind it. Look at the rest of your cards. What do they look like? Your personality, communications, creativity, drive, and leadership; what do you look like here? I would remind you that you should never regret the educational level you have achieved and you should not let it be an impediment to you reaching your goals. Your Ph.D. is not your problem.

It's how you fill in the rest of your hand and how you play your ace. So let's take a side bar. Let me ask you this; when you sign your e-mails that go within the company do you tag PhD after your name? It has become very popular to do this in recent years. I would suggest that this is a symptom of what I'm talking about, the conflict between prestige and performance. You're telling everyone you have a Ph.D ... and that is supposed to mean ... what? You need to have a good read on yourself and the culture to understand if this will provide any value. Your PhD is not a trophy but an accomplishment and an experience that can help you continue a rewarding career journey. Use your experiences wisely or they can become millstones!





## → Whining ↓

So how many times a day do you whine? Do you spend a lot of words complaining? Do you find yourself defending your negative comments by saying things like “Hey, I’m just telling it like it is” or “I’m just telling the truth here”? First of all if you do a lot of this it’s just plain annoying to the rest of us. You’ll make our lives better if you keep it to yourself. Even worse situations are when several whiners get together and have a real whine tasting party. Man they can make a sunny day cloudy real quickly. Not only does this addiction to the negative draw in employees who are vulnerable but the whole thing spirals in. So if you find yourself being drawn to the whine party find some way to avoid it ... do not join in. If you are the penultimate cynic then you need to read this book, twice, and put yourself on a course to change your polarity. How you can always see the dark in everything is beyond me. Just remember not everything is A or B, black or white, good or bad. Your attitude is your choice. It’s a seductive siren to be drawn to the dark side. Resist it for you sake and for everyone around you. Have a nice day once in a while and help others to have one also.

A corollary to whining is what I will call “dising your bro”. Ok, so I’m using a bit of slang here ... obviously for effect but it hopefully catches your attention. Some of the malcontents find themselves drawn to putting other people down. We all know people that we ... well let’s just say ... just shake our heads at what they say and do.

It is difficult to avoid openly criticizing them but we must find other ways of moving forward (choice management words). There are very few people that have avoided making some sort of disparaging remarks about someone in their career (I know of only one ... I never heard my good friend NJ utter a bad word about anyone). Perfection is not necessary just prudent restraint. If you do it a lot then it reveals a sort of dark side to your personality that needs to be dealt with ... it is a destructive force that serves very little purpose. Perhaps you need to read the section on competitiveness. Never the less, too much whining is a negative. It serves no useful career or happiness value and should be considered an inhibitor.



## → You Want To Be Vice President ↓

Somewhere in my mentoring process I will get around to asking the person what they want to be when they grow up. I am almost always surprised at the modest positions they aspire to. My inquiries as to why that position always reveals a part of their inner self. I've noticed that while answering they don't make eye contact with me and they appear to be staring off in the distance. Their voices vary from apologetic to ones that appear to be trying to convince themselves. I usually say something to the effect that "I see no reason that level can't be achieved". This always surprises them. I quickly raise the stakes and ask about the interest in jobs one or two levels higher. There is an immediate discomfort. Oh, I'm not sure I would want that job. "Why not?" I ask. "Well family is important to me" and then it just sort of tapers off. I continue to press the issue. "I want people like you running the company and we all need to help each other so one of us breaks through". There seems to be some reluctant acceptance but one can detect significant doubt. This whole line of thought does conjure up quite an insight to where most employees position themselves in this company/employee game. Doubt seems to rise up from a couple of areas.

First there is the cynical, jaded, value challenging seam of ore that speaks to the company as soulless profiteers that have no character. There is the belief that the faces of the leaders are far enough off that they lack human feeling.

Most people are not quite that severe in their view but it is a kind of datum from which we can start. This would be ground zero for the Dilbertonians. Secondly, and more of interest to me, is the masked but obvious personal doubt. The kind of doubt that springs from deep inside and stems from the place that fear of embarrassment comes from. We all seem to have some core fears. Yours maybe (and are probably) different than mine but there are a few that we all seem to share. Fear of failure, fear of being inferior, fear of not being in control, fear of dying and many others including fear of embarrassment. Interestingly enough if someone else steps forward and does something or takes on what you "feared" there are complex reactions that range from "Why them?" to "It should have been me." or "They were lucky." to "They're just like all the rest." (whatever that means). Perhaps the more civil "Good for them." is adopted. The reality is that many, if not most, of these emotional responses stem from negative feelings toward the situation, the company, and the person. This is not your finest hour. Petty jealousy is a part of it. If it hits close to home it sort of hurts even if it didn't directly effect you ... two departments over Sally gets promoted and you feel inadequate ... seems like we have our control system a little over sensitized. If it happens far off and you read it as one of a thousand e-mails that informs you that "Somebody is pleased to announce that somebody else is being promoted to fill the blah, blah, blah". You usually tune out but there is a residue of cynicism that creeps in." "Glad somebody is getting ahead", you mumble. The guarded you is alive and well. You will create a barrier and live in a world immuned to

outside influence. Perhaps you are more positive than this and it doesn't become a nail in building a jaded you. Good for you. No matter where you are at on this topic you have to learn to face it because you decided to get a job and play the game ... even if you object and claim that you refuse to play the game. So let's scoot back to where we started. You want to be vice president. So what does that mean? If you're bright, (I'm going to assume you're bright), if you're a good people person (kind, thoughtful, motivational, inspired, team player) (I'll assume that too), tough but fair minded willing to step to the plate with good ideas and a willingness to help others with their ideas, (I'll assume that also) then the reason you want to be vice president is because ... "I want you to be the V.P.". You're just what the company needs, smart, capable, driven, people oriented with courage. So if you're missing some of those qualities this would be a good time to start building the rest of your skill set. One more important thing to consider ... they get paid very well and their work is very interesting. They put in long hours but so do you. I think you'll enjoy it. So start acting like you're the vice president. You might find that you work in the 11th best place to work in the country! (see section 11th Best Place). So have some confidence in yourself, raise your expectations a bit and set yourself on a journey that could take you to be the vice president that you would want to be. I have confidence in you thus you should build that kind of confidence in yourself.



## → So How Tough Are You? ↓

You may not be ready for this section but maybe... just maybe you are. If you have had the privilege of experiencing a highpoint in your career this may have some meaning. So if it resonates with you...see if this discussion does you some good. So how did you feel at the apex? Maybe you received a promotion, or won an award, or perhaps were recognized in some satisfying way for your efforts, or brilliance, or compassion. So perhaps you felt some sense of reaching a plateau, a sort of break-through that you arrived at a destination. Maybe you felt you climbed a mountain and that all of the hard work had finally paid off. Perhaps you accomplished all of that and felt smooth sailing was ahead. If it was or is, then you're very fortunate ... good for you. You may now give this book to the next person you meet ... you won't need it. But let us continue with what is the experience of the vast majority of people and that is the continuation of a very bumpy journey. When you're at the top you can't quite imagine being at the "bottom", whatever that means to you, and I dare say when you're at the bottom you can't imagine being back on top. Well more likely than not that is your lot in life. The bad news: when you're on top you will find that you will experience, in your opinion, a decline in your career stature. Also, when you start to realize the decline is happening your actions to stop it will largely be ineffective. That's right! You will not stop until you hit bottom. You will go through all of the phases, denial, followed by denial, followed by denial, followed by disbelief, followed by desperation, followed by despair and maybe

loss of hope. If you make it that far you have a real chance to fix the problem or slip into becoming the “bitter old engineer! It is your choice. Now there are some things that are given here. You must be a reasonably competent person, and I kind of assumed that, because you had to get at least one-career highpoint ... perhaps a long time coming. So now you’re sitting at the bottom. You really didn’t do anything wrong but now you feel “average”. You seem to have lost your luster. You’ve just explained to me you’re doing the same thing you’ve done in the past but you’re not in sync with your new boss and the other managers are clamoring for more of what you’re doing. You look at me and say “I don’t know what to do”? I look at you and ask in a matter of fact way... “How tough are you”? You glance at me and look a bit puzzled and continue your lament as you look off in the distance. I wait for the break in your speech and ask again... “How tough are you”? This time you just stare at me and then after a while I ask... ”Let’s say that in two months you had several options for jobs and that people we’re crying for your services essentially on your terms ... would you be able to deal with that”? There was that bit of a look in disbelief and then the words ...”Of course but where I am now, I can’t get my boss to tell me what I’m doing wrong”. I say, “So if you were sitting here in two months with several good career options, you won’t ask me which one you should accept because you want to do all of them ... will you?” The response was “Sure ... I can’t imagine that happening”. Well you can imagine that it did happen and it has happened on many more than one occasion.

The interesting thing is that almost everyone comes back to me, forgetting their final promise, and wants my input on which job or course of action to take. I always smile at this time.

Not everybody fits into this category and I don’t ask the question unless I know the skills and potential of individual. The good news is that many people fall in this category and that they just need to remember what got them to the top in the first place. So when I ask them “How tough are you?” it is the warning shot to get their attention that they have to make some changes. Most of the time they have wandered away from the uniqueness that defined them as they tried to be what they thought others wanted them to be. This all seems to feel a bit underwhelming and a bit obvious but it underlies most career dips. In some cases it’s a bit unavoidable but correctable. You must re-baseline yourself ... what is it that stirs your passions, what do you do well, what are your most effective actions, what do you want to do, what do you think the organization needs, how can you make yourself and your management happy? Does any of this jibe with your career plans, oh by the way, had you forgotten to make your career plans or update them? Now would be a good time to redraw your map so you can find your way to your destination provided you had one and if you didn’t, now would be a good time to get one. (See the section on what do you want to be when you grow up). So maybe you’re starting to get your life back or at least your confidence. You’ve reviewed the you that got you got to the top ... hard work, good analysis, bold moves, creativity, good strategies, excellent communications,

leadership or whatever recipe that you used. It's almost a statement of your values. You also have reviewed or at least created a destination of what you would like to accomplish. This speaks to the person inside that wants to achieve self-actualization and to feel that you've contributed to something. This is good for you and good for the company. You're raising the quest to a more noble challenge. This is good. You're removing the selfish you from the equation, you're adding the dedicated you to the mix and you're silencing the well meaning but misguided advice that you think management is telling you. Your base confidence is re-growing. Now you have to figure out how to get the ball rolling without offending or annoying anyone while building a positive thrust in the organization. Each one of these dramas is different but building a strong proposal of what needs to be done and making sure you have a non-threatening communication plan. Some politicking will be required, this is where your networking can pay off, building some support, making sure the focus is strengthening the company. If you're good you will be able to entangle multiple departments and numerous managers. With a skilled execution you'll get the organizations fighting over your proposal and maybe you. This may seem far-fetched but it's not. It is also good for the company because if your efforts are that valuable then they should be permitted to go forward. The multiple eyes and ears will be a good test for the proposal. Perhaps your circumstances are a bit different but much of the action applies. You must come to grips with your basic values. Review your strengths, your direction and include the company's needs.

You must build your confidence, have faith in yourself and take charge of your life. Some skill is required but don't be afraid to try ... you will have to compare it to the alternative. It has always been important to me to be myself, define my own path ... no one can be you better than you. So I want you to be you. It's a good thing. This takes some moxie. "So how tough are you?" Are you ready to change your career and your life?



If I told you that you might want to think about being an actor at work you might react with a certain amount of cynicism. You might think of such a role as disingenuous, hypocritical and perhaps even dishonest. One definition points to an actor as a theatrical performer, someone who portrays someone else. It also has another meaning that says that it is a person who does something, a participant, one who takes part, a person who acts and gets things done, a performer in a play. So lets try this again ... I want you to think about being an actor. The role I'm going to give you is the star of this drama. In fact you will be the hero/heroine of the play ... the protagonist.

I've chosen you because you're clearly qualified for the part and you bring a lot of intrinsic skills that will allow the character to be unique and compelling. Let me describe to you the play and the part so you can get yourself mentally prepared for the role. Jack (short for Jack ... or Jaclyn) is a person who has been around the block once or twice, taken a few curves from life but showed toughness, a resilient pliable soul that can take a punch. Jack has a certain air that exudes confidence but not cockiness, the kind of person that doesn't let friends down. You can always count on Jack ... a rugged individual ... smart, resourceful ... plays the game to win ... looks out for the little guy. Jack's not perfect though ... at times takes things a little too serious and stubbornness makes for challenges. The right kind of people like Jack and the bad guys see nothing but trouble.

So there's a quick bio ... an overview of the person you will play. The play is about an idea ... an idea that Jack has ... or so he thinks. This is no ordinary idea but a big idea. It's an idea whose time has come. The story line chronicles the journey of the idea that Jack tries to bring into fruition. It tells of the highs, the lows, and the people that help weave a tapestry of intrigue as the journey unfolds. We watch as Jack has to convince his doubter friends that the idea is big ... that they should invest time and money and join the effort to sell others on the big idea. There is a poignant moment in the play when things fall apart and it appears that all is lost, Jack has failed. All but a few of his friends have deserted him. But just as the Phoenix rises from the ashes Jack gets a second wind. He is inspired by the faith in him that people around him have and with a renewed courage and with the help of his friends saves the big idea from the scrap heap. They track down Mr. Big and in an impassioned plea get Mr. Big to listen to the Big Idea. The Big Idea becomes the biggest thing since bread and all is saved!

Ok you're the star of the play. You're Jack. What parts do you have to act and which parts are you. Are you bold, brave, sincere, honest, creative, friendly, compassionate, inspirational, or thoughtful? So if you're not all of those things you certainly can act the part ... after all, you're the hero of the play. When people ask me what I do for a living I often say I'm an actor. After all I play many different roles ... sometimes I have to be the inventor ... creative, remote, detached; the leader ... instigator, driver, director; the manager...organizer, recruiter, communicator;

the follower ... doer, supporter, team member; the inspirer ... the mentor ... the seller; etc.

Some of these roles require that I utilize skills that are not of my natural personality. I could avoid the situation or let somebody else do it OR I could become an actor and play the role. I choose the latter. So what did I have to do? Well for one, by nature I gravitate toward technology and invention. In order to convey my ideas I had to get good at explaining things and to develop a communication style that was appealing and effective. I watched others, some at work, some in my home life, some on TV, and some in public life. Then I practiced, practiced, and practiced. Also it became obvious that to accomplish all of things my imagination could think up I needed to be able to sell a program or product. I needed to be able to create and portray strategies in an appropriate business thought process. I also had to figure out how to get the right kind of access to the right people. None of this was my natural inclination. I felt comfortable being a bit of a loner but frustrated because the world wasn't doing the things I thought it should. It was obvious I wasn't going to be happy unless my voice was heard and I had my say. So I had to become an actor of another role. Eventually I became a supervisor and had a new role assigned to me. I had to learn my role as a steward for the company and additionally I wanted to be inspiring and motivational. I thought back to all the people who had motivated and inspired me. I remembered being motivated but not inspired by my basketball coaches. I rejected that style. I chose to follow the style of my father, and a couple

of my professors. They had the ability to make me want to reach higher than I thought I could reach. They let me feel good about myself. I was inspired. When I was inspired I was able to accomplish great things. I had never imagined myself in these new roles but suddenly it seemed like the right thing to do. Supervising people opened me to new challenges... how to be honest but not hurtful ... how to accept responsibility by giving it ... how to represent an organization and not lose your identity or your self-respect. The nuances of the roles you play are many and varied. You don't always get it perfect so you try to do better the next time. The role evolves. 'The real you' challenges the character at any new behavior exhibited and helps resolve the direction that the role takes. It's a good partnership. 'The real you' keeps the hero of our play a hero, the actor gives flavor and personality to the play. Everyone is better off. So perhaps someday when you have to introduce yourself to a room full of people by giving your name and your job function ... maybe you will tell them you're an actor ... you play what ever part that is needed. Break a leg.



## → Bad Days ↓

Everybody has a bad day once in a while. Sometimes the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune can turn even a sunny day to clouds. It's normal. If you start having a lot more of the cloudy days than the sunny ones, then I have to ask, "Is there something I can do to help?" You often get back what you project. If you express a demeanor of happiness, helpfulness, encouragement, and thoughtfulness, you will lay the framework to receive such respectful behavior. If you have a bad day, do your best not to torture yourself or others. Nobody likes to be around gloomy Gus. Bad days can bring out the worst in us. Some people get aggressive and act out (showing anger, shouting, scolding, arguing, etc.). This is not healthy for you or the people around you. You have got to put this in perspective (easy to say but harder to do) and avoid being a jerk. Bad days are reserved for health and family crisis. The business world can heap a lot of bumps on you but the routine bump and grind of the work a day world should not be taken with grave seriousness. It is truly a game ... a game to be played with intensity, focus and sincerity, but after all ... it's still just a game. Do your best, everyday, to tell yourself and others "Have a great day". It is very therapeutic ... perhaps you will actually come to believe it.



## → Communications ↓

You want to get really good at this. There are so many ways to get your message across that it would be difficult to advise you on exactly which one to use. Oral, and in particularly face-to-face oral communication is an essential tool that you should concentrate on. This may make some of you uncomfortable or cynical because this may be a weak point due to shyness or other issues. Even in this day and age of e-mail it is wise to be able to utilize verbal skills to get a viewpoint expressed. The pervasive use of PowerPoint underscores the continued demand for live presentations. They have become mini-dramas where you play the star. Get good at this and if you're not ... well ... then practice. Take opportunities to try and improve. It is, of course, important what you say but also important that you find ways to impress the viewers.

This should carry over into the one-on-one meetings and small work group interactions. Verbal skills become a tool that you use to get things done. Expanding your vocabulary is a good way to improve your ability to use words. You'll find over time you will be more comfortable expressing yourself because you will have words to more accurately color your conversation. You may find yourself more expressive, which will aid in your ability to show some enthusiasm and to inspire people to your way of thinking. Another device you need to develop is the so called "elevator speech". It gets its name from just what you would expect: If you got on an elevator with a corporate executive, it's obvious you have an opportunity to communicate your idea, proposal, or thought but, and it is a big



but, you don't have much time to get your point across. Perhaps it's a simple idea and easy to convey in a few words but more likely you have a more complicated strategy with a few twists and turns ... not amenable to an elevator ride of five floors. A paradox, I have a great story but not enough time to tell it. Here is what you do. You need to develop your "elevator speech". You need to work your idea over and over like kneading bread, until you have all of the extraneous parts removed and it is consistent in that you can tell it over and over to whom ever will listen and (here's the tricky part) it doesn't lose its flavor.

So let me summarize, you need the following ingredients for your communication recipe:

- 1 cup – Presentation Practice
  - Tell them what your going to tell them
  - Tell them
  - Tell them what you told them
- 1 Tbsp – Vocabulary
- 1 new word a week...forever
- 3 cups diced – Elevator Speeches
  - Package your ideas in enticing ways
  - Hunt down people and tell them your story
  - Have more detailed explanation ready (see first ingredient)

Let me introduce you to another contrivance I'll call "shooting over their heads". Figuring out to whom you should communicate becomes a detail that is very important as your skill improves. In the beginning talking to anybody who will listen will often give you practice but eventually in

order to make progress you have to gain the attention of those that can help you. Your peers can be your biggest supporters and your biggest drags. If the status quo (whether it is people, processes or culture) has become your enemy you must think about formulating a plan for success that is inclusive but has unique, provocative and game winning strategies. This plan needs to be explained in a presentation that exudes confidence and enthusiasm ... and the presentation needs to given to the most senior management that will listen.

Ok, so that was the short form of the explanation of the "shooting over their heads". You're are bit under-whelmed because it seems so routine and obvious ... but it is not. It is usually very poorly executed because people do not have a unique thought, have not run the people trap line or have not done the homework to build the support. It is a really powerful process BUT one that takes some craftsmanship to execute well. Do not try this at home unless you are a trained professional.



## → Heart To Heart Talks ↓

This is usually not a good thing. Sure we've all had circumstances where we needed to have a "heart to heart" talk with someone or we just needed to clear the air. In general avoid this like the plague. Things have probably gone a bit too far if these kinds of words are being used. But it is what it is. You need to get creative (there goes that word again) and figure out how to move the whole thing in a new direction. "Heart to Hearts" are like the last thing to be tried so if you must, you must ... good luck.



## → So You Don't Like The Way Things Are... ↓

What would you do? Let's get very specific. This is your space so it will be recorded for posterity. When you become a manager you'll already have written the manual on how you will behave. So I'll let you finish the following questions.

When I am supervisor/manager/CEO, I will:

- 1) treat people \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) value \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) commit \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) go out of my way \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) act \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) help \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) make \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) feel \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) not \_\_\_\_\_
- 10) finish \_\_\_\_\_
- 11) stop \_\_\_\_\_

So are you happy with what you wrote? Will this make you a great manager, a leader, a person? Did you need more space? Were the right questions asked? Now put yourself in your boss's shoes and look at the

people in your group ... think about how you would act or what you would do. This is called practice. Decide who you will be before something or someone tells you who you are. Take care, take the reins, but for gosh sakes, practice, practice, practice!



## → Are You A Good Co-Worker? ↓

So do you annoy the people around you? Do you care? Well, the right answers to the questions are ... No ... and Yes. No, you don't annoy the people around you and yes, you care. Not everybody gets along. It is not easy to like everybody and being admired by co-workers is a good thing. It goes to the fundamental tenet that you are there to help make the team productive. Ok, that sounds good on paper but you haven't met Ed ... who by any measure is a pain in the neck, counterproductive, and a big de-motivator. First of all, this is an extreme and extremes sometimes need extreme measures. Most of the time you work with reasonable people and your goal is to be a part of a harmony that excels. In other words play nice and be nice. Take the time to read each of the players and try to figure out what makes them tick. Try to become an enabler. I should tell you my definition of a good co-worker is a person who not only is nice, participatory and supportive but also one who inspires others, finds ways to allow the team to excel and raises everyone's job-satisfaction index a few notches higher. So if you are the type of person who continually has a bad day, then you need to think a lot about what you need to do to have a good day. At a minimum don't multiply the woe by bringing everybody else down or unknowingly irritating everyone you meet. Monitor your behavior. You can achieve everything you have set your sights on AND also be nice doing it.



## 63 → Avoidance ↓

Avoiding someone as a way of dealing with vast personality issues can be a very effective way of creating peace. This has actually worked for me but one must use it sparingly. The opportunity to apply this is rare so be careful not to build a long list of these people. If the number is larger than two then you better read the book again. This is not the same thing as “I’m not speaking to that person”. This is more along the lines of: I can accomplish and excel without their approval or interaction and we will all be better because it. If and when we cross paths my actions will speak for themselves and I will not try to seek their approval or recognition but convey my progress or accomplishments. I usually refer to these people as “Not of my breed” which is my short hand way of saying they may not understand or appreciate my methods, but I will respect that the organization has positioned them there. If I can avoid them and all will benefit then that is what I will do.



## 64 → Bold Goals ↓

So there you are...a young person and all of these people are telling you to have ‘stretch goals’... you can be anything you want to be. I bought in to it and set some lofty goals for myself. I imagined that if I ran for public office I would be a U.S. Senator, not exactly sure why I didn’t pick President but I didn’t. If I became a scientist I wanted to win the Nobel Prize in Physics, since I had an avid interest in sub atomic particles (Ouch! I’m embarrassed!). I envisioned that if I was in business that I would own that business therefore the CEO position comes to mind. So there you have it, my bold goals that I created when I was a teenager. By any measure pretty lofty goals ... U.S. Senator (there are only 100), Nobel Prize winner (once a year), and business owner/CEO. So how did I do? Not good. I never ran for office, the reality of the political world dimmed a bit as I came to understand that not all public servants are altruistic. I became an engineer and not a scientist so the quest for the top quark ended before it started. The reality was you either won the Nobel Prize or you starved ... I wasn’t that confident of my skills and I get hungry. The competition was fierce. So, I did what you did. I got a job. Somehow I never pictured myself as the job type. I was born and raised on a farm. I worked independently in isolation with occasional but very explicit instructions on what needed to be done. They were short-term goals. More like chores. Cultivate the corn, weed the beans, and fix the machinery. There were no team dynamics, no need for intricate communications, no job performance reviews. Your role model was you. The characteristics

you showed were ownership, accountability, and independence. With such qualities it wouldn't be a stretch to imagine the power of a Senator, the creativity of a Nobel Prize winner, or the head of a company. I was well prepared for the role. But alas, you come to realize that there are a lot of other people vying for those positions and that society has created processes that seem to be required to get you there. You must pay your dues. All the dreams, hopes, and goals temporarily take a back seat because you realize that you need to make a living so you go search for a job (101 things to do). I wasn't really trained to do that, besides you often find yourself asking the question "Who would hire me, what do I know?" So you are the perfect mark and companies in need of talent start their search. In my case, once the searching began in earnest it was less than six months and I had a whole new world to learn about. So was I ready to set some new bold goals? Was I ready to become that company man ready to do whatever was necessary to become CEO? Was I ready to change? Well, the answer to all of the questions was ... no. I was quite happy with who I was, after all they hired me because of that, didn't they?

So the beginning of the bumpy journey begins. I had no compass, no roadmap, no vision, no bold goals except I knew I wanted to do well but I had no clue what that meant. I was trained that if you solved problems that others couldn't, they gave you A's, put a star on your paper and smiled at you. So maybe I was looking for a smile. I couldn't believe that people would actually pay me for doing what I was paying to do ... solve problems.

So the career journey started. I had no idea where this would lead so to help myself I started creating guideposts. It was like I was dropping corn, trying to insure I could find my way out if it all went bad. For sure I felt like I had only one foot on the train because I was always looking over my shoulder and trying to find a way to the independent life style I had grown accustomed to ... but not really. The independent life style was mostly an illusion. You come to realize you have spent about eighteen years of your life going to school where everything is pretty well scripted. Even playtime was organized. Whether you played baseball, basketball, or engaged in all sorts of extracurricular activities, there were always people telling you where to go and what to do. It definitely was not an independent life style but it was one that centered on the individual. Certainly some of the team sports dealt with collaboration and 'group think' but in the sum total of things it was a minor occurrence. It was probably more about the coach than the team. So as I reflect on my bold goals I can see they were obviously a product of my individualism ... Senator, Nobel Prize, CEO. It was lone wolf kind of thinking. It was accomplishment oriented and the photo on the wall only had me on it. I was raised and educated to achieve ... as an individual and my bold goals were examples of great individual effort. Now as I started a job/career/journey my bold goals were inconsistent with what I was doing ... except for maybe CEO which in my case was a substitute for my dream to own a company. I didn't really want to be hired to run a company, I wanted to own it. Not really understanding all of this I needed some 'new think' in order to rewire myself to address all of the

discomfort I was feeling. I felt the loss of control (that I didn't really have). I sensed I lacked the skills that would allow me to define myself (I was sort of defined by family, teachers, and society) and last but not least I was sure that the wires were severed that would ever get me to my bold goals. So I replaced my bold goals with something a bit more flexible, more near term, and every bit as challenging. I started to build a (are you ready for this one?) personal philosophy (PP). Whoa! I can sense you uttering, "LAME-O". Before you throw the book, I would suggest you think about this and not rush to judgment. In fact, I suggest you try it on for size and put one together. Go on! What's it going to hurt? If you have read some of the book you already have some hints on how to get you started. You might try the section on "Who do you admire and why?"... a great place to get some ideas. Even though you may think this is a questionable activity, I am sure you will find this a valuable building block in defining who you are. It's kind of like home plate, a place you can return to when things get nuts ... and, I assure you, they will get nuts. So you're saying, "this is kind of fluffy stuff ... I just want to get the big corner office and get rich." So your bold goal is to move 100 feet away from where you are and make more money ... that's all you want? "LAME-O". You can do better than that. So let's replace the 'bold goals think' with your personal philosophy. Go on put something down and see where it leads. One of my first entries was "Use my education". As I was trained as an engineer with a bias toward simulation and innovation, I committed myself to a life-long quest to insure that a part of my life derived from this tenet. Another

axiom was "I want to work on interesting things...and I get to decide what interesting meant". This works well with my desire to learn about a lot of areas so it gives me flexibility to try things. I wanted my life to be a continuum. My personal life, my professional life and whatever is left over is all one sheet of paper. I don't have to have one set of values, objectives, or philosophies for home and one for work ... I am me everywhere. I committed to life-long learning, I wanted people to see me as inspirational, I wanted to take the harder path, I wanted to be easy to work with, kind to my co-corkers, I wanted to do good deeds ... etc. So I changed from setting bold goals to defining a bold journey. It was to be an interesting journey to me. One in which I had control over meeting the objective, steering the direction, setting the course. I focused on the ride and let the destination take care of its self. I think it was a good choice. I was able to be the individual but also the team player. I didn't lower my expectations, I actually raised them because I had very near term concrete objectives that I created and in which I was interested. In addition it was easy to be in rhythm with the organization.



## → Hatfields & McCoys ↓

Natural instincts are powerful forces and the need to create conflict and feuds are at times unavoidable. Some people believe “It’s good for kids to duke it out, makes them tougher”. I’m not good with this one. These individual or department battles are not where we want to be. If you’re part of one ... stop it. If you enjoy being part of the gossip crew that perpetuates the conflict ... stop it. Believe me, I know it’s hard, even seductive but it is counter productive. Some not very nice people usually drive this and that hardens your heart to not feeling guilty about participating. It’s easy. They’re always screwing up, they try to put lipstick on the pig, and they blame you. Why should I feel any differently? This paradox building is the wrong think. If you are only given A or B you can’t “move forward”. If you were able to de-personalize this thing (not easy to do) what would you do to make this go away or to marginalize this conflict? It is easy to say, hard to do. Most interdepartmental feuds can be made to go away, and they should go away. Most are surrogates for personalities who are assumed to represent the department and that person evokes strong passion. We need to minimize these street fights and reduce the sniping. Making a concerted and SUSTAINED effort to make these family feuds disappear will be rewarded. I repeat stop the internal department bickering. Become the catalyst to build a new culture. Learn to take a punch and turn it into a hug. This is a skill that has many rewards ... both on a personal and company level.

Personal feuds, animosity or dislike are much harder to fix and are set much deeper in the day-to-day fabric. It is not easy to like or even get along with everybody. It always seems like someone has your number ... they are capable of making you feel uneasy (at best!). They are able to make you feel frustrated, unsure, and just bad about yourself. They can ignite your anger, your disdain, or your disrespect. You just don’t like the person. Avoidance as mentioned in another section is a legitimate and realistic action to take but it’s not always available. It’s natural to have a short list of people you do not wish to deal with ... the operative word is short. Becoming interpretive is important. Most people are good people (vast majority) and being able to interpret people’s actions within a given context is healthy. Some are more direct than others, some are bold in action some are shy and uncertain. Don’t assume the worst in people. Try to focus on the accomplishments and adapt yourself to the people that are working with you. That includes communication. Take a moment to ask yourself, “Why is that person acting the way they are and what do they need?”. This will go along way to giving you the needed data to determine what your role will be in this drama. (See section Actor)





## → Networking ↓

The word networking has come to mean many things but it is one of the lynch pins to understanding your company career potential and developing an effective work-life plan. I can sense you're underwhelmed by this advice and since everyone talks about networking the word sort of takes on a numbing quality. It can have a dim connotation that concerns sucking up or it can have the feel of the old school, the past way of doing things. In reality it's what I said ... it is one of the essential parts of fulfilling your career potential. (There he goes using that word potential...I want action ... I've got enough potential!). The culture of the company is made up of the people who work there. What the company does ... makes, sells, or whatever ... is represented by someone. So the people define the breadth depth and width of what you face in your job. To know them is to know the company. To know the company is a first step in knowing your career challenge. Regardless of whether you're aggressive, passive, bold, meek, cynical, or just a suck up, you need to build a network of people that can be used to help craft your career. It would be helpful if some of these people had enough rank or position to span enough of a portion of the organization to reflect the opportunities that exist or might exist. Having good relations with your cube mate is good in general, moment-to-moment harmony is hard to beat, but it may not afford you with the contacts that provide you with the insight and access you need to satisfy your career quest. So it's probably time to get on some manager's calendar and have a "chat" to get an understanding of what these

areas do and try to determine if there are possibilities. This is not an interview, just a fact-finding mission. You are shopping. You're not entirely sure of what you are shopping for so have your antenna up. Maybe they'll give you insight that will help you, maybe you'll find a place that may be a great next move, maybe you will sense a weakness, a strength, a need, or something to avoid. They'll get to know you exist and you'll get to know if you want them to know if you exist! If you're shy about this sort of thing, get your boss to set it up. If your boss gets "concerned" about these excursions get inventive about quelling his/her discomfort. You have to have some interpersonal skill to manipulate the situation because networking is too important to be left to anyone other than yourself. It is key to understanding where you want to go career wise (perhaps it's "out" of the organization!) Look around the company and then set something up today. Procrastination should not be your option. Do it now!





## → The All Rope Team ↓

Here's the concept. You're hanging by a rope over a cliff. You have no way of rescuing yourself so who do you want on top of the cliff working to save you? My All Rope Team is obviously made up of people I know, trust, and admire. They are people who would not ask questions like "How did you get yourself in that predicament?" They would drop whatever they were doing and no matter where they were, they would try to figure out how to help me. My list is very short 5-7 people ... max. It seldom varies in number but slowly changes players based on new acquaintances and life experiences. They are all solid citizens. They all have a variety of characteristics that I admire but they all have one thing in common ... concern for my welfare. Some of these people I haven't seen in years but hearing of my distress they would engage themselves to help resolve my serious dilemma. Several are creative problem solvers, some are no nonsense "getter done" people, others exude compassion and sensitivities to my emotional needs. Some can organize an army while others work best alone. They are all tenacious and will not give up until I am safe. My hope in life is that you make someone's All Rope Team and that most of all ... I make someone's All Rope Team.



## → Creativity, Imagination & Innovation ↓

This is perhaps a bit of an ad hoc topic in the middle of an employee handbook but one that needs mentioning. I believe the human spirit contains vast amounts of CII (creativity, imagination, innovation) qualities and that parts of our happiness can be directly and indirectly linked to how we are able to express these traits. Some of us get to express these CII urges in our vocation and others must use our avocations while others may just suppress them. First of all, I hope you have taken the opportunity to use your CII skills in your work. It will most likely have a significant positive impact on your satisfaction. This may seem obvious to some and not so obvious to others, encouraging to some and disappointing to others. Those that have had the opportunity and have taken it will most likely understand as well as those that are frustrated by not having the opportunity. People are driven by this important self-expression and feel satisfaction and reward when they have the opportunity to exercise it. We are not robots...things are not really logical...at least not always. So you claim you're not creative? Baloney! I don't believe it. You say you're not imaginative ... nope!... I don't believe that either. You say you're not innovative? OK, so maybe you are innovative challenged. So what's the difference in the three? Creativity is the act of taking the sum total of your experiences and knowledge and combining them to produce a fitting thought for the situation at hand. We all do it. Some seem to have an amazing proclivity for producing very original thoughts

and products that are immediately recognized as unique. Someone is always creating a new song, poem or painting or maybe a new mechanical device, a product or a drug. We continually create options as we face the daily problems and life challenges. We are all creative but we are all different.

Imagination is akin to creativity because it is the non-tangible process that we defer to when we need to create something. It can be as simple as playing out a couple of options or be as bold as a “What if” kind of inspiration. The point is we all do it. We are definitely fascinated by those who can imagine the things that we can’t ... and yet our recognition of such imagination suggests your own imagination engine is working well.

Innovation maybe a slightly different beast from the other two in that it depends on how you define it. Making money from creativity is the definition I use. I know that maybe a bit capitalistic thinking but it does draw a clear distinction between innovation and imagination and creativity. You may not feel you’re innovative (based on that definition) but I will claim that it is a learnable skill. Creativity and imagination are part of your personality, whether you were born with it or whether it is a product of a life experiences ... I don’t know. But it is a definitely a part of you. Innovation is a skill which maybe a part of the DNA but is definitely a trait that can be altered. Your biggest challenge is whether you want to or not. This immediately translates into your personal interest, your drive, and how much work you want to put into it. So if you tell me you’re not creative

and imaginative, I don’t believe it. If you tell me you’re not innovative, I can accept that.

The first two you need to exercise as a part of life and if you have a job that permits your creative expression you will be a much more satisfied employee. If you have the privilege of innovating in your job you will find that both you and your company will be rewarded.

Look at yourself and your job and figure out how you can express your CII. It’s not only a good thing. It’s a great thing!



## → The Paradox ↓

It is inevitable that in everyone's life comes the belief you've been dealt the no-win situation. A paradox: I have to get A done but it takes B resources to complete and THEY won't give me B resources because THEY need to cut the budget. First and foremost, you must learn to recognize when a paradox is forming and to understand...you cannot solve a paradox. I repeat you cannot solve a paradox. You must somehow find a way to turn the paradox into a problem...then solve the problem. There are a variety of cousins of the paradox dilemma. They are innovation, tenacity, and stubbornness. That probably was not a surprise but people are pretty stubborn and often refuse to accept options and without flexibility difficult times and sometimes-difficult careers are the result. It's important to be able to wire yourself to focus on the prize. You will hear this from time-to-time in other sections but it is an essential quality that must be learned. To focus on the prize is to be able to decide and then identify what the prize is. This is where all the human traits and emotions can be both helpful but can also get in the way. The selfish 'short term you' may fixate on actions that enhance your image, 'the compassionate you' anguishes over the impact on others, 'the competitive you' wants to feel that you've won the battle, 'the rebellious you' wants you to feel unique, 'the responsible you' wants to feel the right thing was done. Somewhere in all of this we can set up a vortex of paradoxes, which frustrates us to no end, and we wind up screaming out loud, "What do they want from me???" In reality there is very seldom a "they". It's really our frustration in

trying to solve a Rubik's cube that has been tampered with. Don't be so stubborn that you refuse to recognize a paradox. You must maintain a flexible mind and always ponder creative or innovative or, at minimum, multiple options to the logjam. On top of that, I will insist that even in this impossible situation that you (dare I say it?) look for a win-win scenario. (Whew! I did say win-win ... didn't I). If you are lucky perhaps a brief moment of de-personalizing the situation will clear your mind and lead you to the way forward. The more difficult situations usually require consideration of changing the constraints of the problem. This is not easy for some people because they believe rules are rules and ... rules are not to be broken. However constraints are sometimes not rules but cultural manifestations. I usually imagine the organization in which I work can be divided into individual compartments. Each compartment has a gate and this gate is the only way into each of the areas. Obviously the gate represents all of the constraints that revolve around working with that area. Normally, a person like me would have no compunction against tinkering with the gate to suit my needs. Alas, that is not usually accepted. So in my picturing of all of these areas with gates, I also imagine that each is guarded by a Rotweiler. A clear message to people (and to me) that the paradox is far more challenging than you had hoped. So here's my imagery again. I'm faced with a difficult problem that is most likely a paradox. I stand in the center of a large circle with gates on the periphery and in front of that gate is a large stoic but scary guard dog. The symbolism is obvious. Go away! Don't try to change anything in my backyard! Don't

you see the gate and the guard dog? The smaller pyramids that make up the larger pyramid are not to be bothered. This is really a short hand way of representing the many kinds of constraints that are seemingly intractable and that you have to deal with from time to time. They stem mainly from organizational structure (the tyranny of the pyramid) but also can include a myriad of other impossible quests such as application of technology, cost reduction challenges, short timelines. If you have done your homework and understand ... really understand ... what is impeding you from going forward, you will have identified most of the Rottweilers. You may not realize it but your making progress ... you're going forward. You have eyed the Rottweilers and it is becoming clear which one might blink. The people who have constructed this organization, now reduced to guard dogs and gates, have a vested interest in making the system work ... as designed. You on the other hand need it (along with other constraints you see, i.e. technology, cost, etc.) to change or adapt to the work at hand. It seems like we have made the paradox even more forbidding than when we started. Hey! I didn't say this was easy ... did I? So what are your tools (weapons?) to attack this? Well it is usually sorting through the alternatives and working the problem backward and forward until a scenario makes sense. You have to consider the various Rottweilers here. If it's physics ... you can't violate the rules, if it's organizational...you're figuring out which manager or system is most likely to blink when given a good reason? You need to consider a multi-move approach. This is really a chess game ... but the best news is ...

you get to make up some of moves and also some of the rules. You should feel empowered. Really I mean it. You are very much in control of your destiny at this point. You faced a paradox, identified the gates and the Rottweilers, created some options solving the problem (yes I said problem not paradox) backwards and forward, decided on a way forward with consideration of who or what the Rottweilers really were. Not too bad for a situation that started out as intractable. Now as you move forward you must remain flexible. If you have treated this as a chess game you have already considered a variety of moves in response to the Rottweilers reaction. Don't get frustrated if it doesn't go in a straight line. Sometimes you switch from chess to volleyball and in volleyball keeping the ball alive is a critical part of success. So there you have it ... the secrets to life. I'll assume you're a bit underwhelmed and largely skeptical. So let's make it even simpler ... you have a problem ... you think it's impossible to solve as things stand ... you are right...you must change something ... you create a symbolic world where you simplify the landscape so as to recognize the pieces (areas) and the interaction (gates) as well as guards of the status quo (physics = constraints, Rottweilers = NIMBY (not in my backyard)). You use your noggin and consider the endpoint and solve backwards and then forward and look for a way forward. You decide on your approach having prepared contingencies (chess). You execute your plan with flexibility knowing things will not go with precision. Be prepared to go to plan B if things don't work out. BUT don't jump too quickly; make sure you work the system if you feel you have a preferred solution.

If necessary don't feel so proud as not to give credit to others with coming up with the solution. (Keep the eye on the prize). There is always an infinite well of credit so be sure to apply it liberally. Do not let up until the prize is captured. (Some people short arm it and don't finish the quest). Also, don't hang around after the prize is captured. Your satisfaction should be in the deed not the awards. You maybe disappointed at the awards ceremony. The dais gets crowded and nobody likes crowds of people you don't know. You may not be very good in the beginning with executing this sequence or creating the theatre that goes with this, but practice makes perfect. If you use it multiple times you will get better and better at it and with some patience you will find that there is usually a way out of Dodge! Don't forget ... don't give up and ... practice, practice, practice!



## → War Stories... Plenty of Time To Tell Them When The Dealings Done↓

No matter how long you have been employed, you are always telling war stories. This is the moniker we give to the fascination we all have about telling people about our experiences, both real and imaginary. The longer you have worked at a place the more the stories focus on "the" workplace. "War stories" can sometimes be a way of describing a situation or used as an analogy in order to instruct. When used like this I think they have legitimate value. War stories, unfortunately, also can be a mechanism to counter a person's feeling of low self-esteem or feelings of low value. When used in these ways they allow people to live in the past, the good old days. Avoid these habits. You need to live in the present and plan for the future. Use your experiences as examples of how a challenge was successfully handled in the past and not a hammer to beat someone with while explaining why things used to be better. It's also a symptom of marginalizing and over cataloguing. It's easy to reduce the energy of an idea or a proposal by equating it to something done in the past...so be alert when you do this. "We tried that once and it didn't work". "That's how they used to do it over in purchasing before...". Also there are those of you who try to fit ideas into a neat patchwork so as to understand them. "That is just an efficiency program". "That's the same thing as what we are doing now". If one is not careful the uniqueness of the thought is lost in the attempt for the idea to fit into neat little bins. So when you feel the need to tell a "war story" make it constructive.

I recognize that life is not always about telling the good news so be cautious not to only dwell on the negative.

If your career has been long and rich in experience there is a danger that almost all of your conversations somehow get related to the past. There are some complex interactions between the need to validate your self-worth by providing what you believe is valuable insight and a gnawing self-doubt about your usefulness. The ebbing of the competitive juices and the continually replenished staff of a fast-paced world make for a very honest internal conflict. So monitor your story telling, it HAS value, it IS valuable but be very honest with yourself so as not unwittingly marginalize yourself in others' eyes because you always live in the past.



## → How's That Working Out For You? ↓

So maybe Dr. Phil uses this comment but dang it, it's a good one. Our inability to see or entertain options can put us in no-win situations. If you haven't guessed it by now ... losing usually sucks. Sometimes it's the stress of the situation that keeps us from being creative; sometimes it's stubbornness that is brewed from the thought that someone else might win, so in some contorted way the thought of everyone losing is more appealing. This is not where you want to be. Rid yourself of these thoughts and replace them with competitive juices that focus on win-win situations. The operative word is ... win ... now all of this is obvious, sounds reasonable, you've heard it before, trivial, blah, blah, blah. BUT not everybody does it. More sinister forces are at work here. Some people are overly focused on the process and some overly focused on their own self-promotion. A little of these is probably good but too much is toxic. Focusing on the goal is the winning way. It doesn't always work but the success rate is nothing short of extraordinary.



## → Employee Satisfaction? ↓

OK, so any time you hear the words “employee satisfaction” your autonomic nerve system flinches. Some think it’s an oxymoron. The work world has recognized these words as hot buttons and they have sometimes are replaced with words like “employee engagement”. I don’t think a person should run when any of these words or terms are heard but I also wouldn’t stand in one place too long. Let’s just say most companies are really clumsy at this. Three words come to mind ... hype, reality/truth, and cynicism. OK ... hype is actually derived from the word hyperbole, which means obvious and intentional exaggeration. Truth is a verified or indisputable fact and cynicism is an attitude of scornful or jaded negativity. The three words and their meanings sort of collide and form a nexus that we corporately call “employee satisfaction”. A company actually wants you to be happy or even ecstatic with your job (I know there are exceptions to this ... hey there are exceptions to everything!). But we know their actions befuddle the mind from time to time. Let’s cut to the chase ... a company is in the business to make money. (Yes read the period at the end of the sentence). You work at the company to make money. (Period). If they didn’t pay you ... you wouldn’t show up and if they didn’t make money they wouldn’t be in business. Pretty simple ... everything else is negotiable. How good they are at making money comes into play here. That’s where you come in, along with employee satisfaction. Just remember a contented cow gives more milk (How do we really know?) The company wants to hire you for the least amount of money as possible

while getting the most value. You on the other hand want the most money for the least amount of input. If we start from here everything gets a bit simpler. The more you can convince them of your value and the more they recognize it, the win-win (did I actually use win-win!) situation gets formed. You don’t have to buy the hype but you don’t have to become too cynical either (note: some degree of cynicism is always justified just for the humor in it) when the employee satisfaction survey is distributed ... fill it out with objectivity. Honesty ... especially with yourself...is the best policy. When at work try to make the place a better place to exist. Just remember there are not just two options “For it or against it”. The third option is the most important ... what can I do to improve my happiness and satisfaction. You have more impact on this than you can imagine. Accepting your lot in life actually may mean you have to change. We would like the people, organization, and world around us to change according to our dictates ... but “that ain’t goin happen”. Some people are saddled with real jobs ... drill hole and grind burrs, do as many as you can then go home. Some people live in the cubical world ... its warm and dry but the challenges deaden the brain ... and Bob is a real pain. Some people struggle to climb the corporate ladder while others take two steps at a time and both or neither may like their jobs. Some are lucky in their careers and others are not. But this discussion is not about someone and their lot in life. It is about you. You can curse the darkness or light a candle. From now on the words are not ‘Employee Satisfaction’... but “My Satisfaction”. Live long and prosper.

## → Ambition... Where Are You Going? ↓

I am thoroughly amazed at how modestly people view their future organizational desires. (That's code word for promotions!) When I first open this can of worms to a mentee, it's usually as an assignment about the third or fourth session. I ask them to think about and come back to me with a description of where they want to be in six months, one year, five years, ten years, etc. and at end of career. Invariably they describe a modest plan with a mid-manager position at career end. They seem a bit uncertain as to whether even that can be attained. I usually probe as to why not higher ... like a V.P. or CEO? They immediately seem a bit fidgety and apologetic. "Oh no, I wouldn't want that job!" I always wonder why. I push on and goad them further. "They get paid a lot and they get to do a lot of neat things in a lot of neat places. So you don't see yourself doing that?" They fidget more. "Too much pressure. My family comes first, mumble, mumble, mumble". If a person is very talented but perhaps a bit modest ... I push harder. "Why you're just the kind of person they are looking for... talented, smart, and focused. I think you would be a great V.P. In fact, I want you to be a V.P. because I'm selfish. I have a lot invested in this company. I want superior leadership and you're just the person for the job. I smile ... they smile ... then you see them playing out scenarios in their brain (I know because I see the bubbles above their heads). I shock them back to reality by blurting out, "I mean it! How can I help you get to V.P.!" They kind of shake their head and look a bit dumbfounded. But my mission was accomplished. I planted the seed. Maybe

they won't make it to V.P. but the talented ones should try. Somebody has got to do it ... it might as well be you.





## → When Are You Going To Step Forward? ↓

This is an interesting question for you to answer. I want you to think about it before you blurt out the first thing that pops in your head. This is akin to those dirty little secrets that we don't talk about. Many people's career dilemmas center on stepping forward and taking a risk. The majority of us avoid the limelight and the controversy, but we often can be found sniping at those who do. In fact, this is where many less talented people learn to distinguish themselves and talented people marginalize themselves. Accepting responsibility and accountability is just the beginning, the first rung on the ladder. Seeking responsibility and accountability is the next rung on the ladder and then acting responsibly and accountably is the final step. We can all achieve the top rung with some part of our job or life but the scale of the challenge is really the determining factor. We are all peripheral players sometimes in our careers. Many employees never move beyond being on the outer edges of the company's big challenges. I am recommending that you maneuver yourself closer and closer to the core strategies and decisions to learn about "feeling the heat" of responsibility and accountability. You need to understand your tolerance for the pressure and stress of being a leader. You're testing the waters and in some cases acclimating yourself as you gradually raise your tolerance. So, why should you do this? The simple answer involves the...downside of not doing it.

There are many hues to the downside but they center about a certain negativity that can set in. There are a million signposts that are the warning signs ... here are a few:

"They don't ask me because I'll tell them the truth."

"I told them that was a bad idea."

"I want to remain technical and the company doesn't have a technical career path."

"They are just in it for the promotion and I'm just doing my job."

"I don't know what they want anymore."

There is always a little bit of truth in what is said but mostly they're just excuses. They blame others or circumstances for their own fate. Obviously, sometimes they are right. There is no denying there are bad decisions and criticism is warranted. By and large most of this is just sniping. It is seeded in a frustration because they don't feel important to the decision making process. Paradoxically they are also relieved that they don't have to make the tough calls. Those that can ... do ... those that won't ... criticize. I am not suggesting that you stretch yourself beyond your breaking point. I am suggesting that you commit to exercising your responsibility and accountability muscles so as to increase your flexibility and to seek out high but acceptable levels of ownership. You may find great reward in such an effort.

Remember: no one wants you to fail and being over your head or beyond your skills is not a good scenario for anyone ... including the company. It is my opinion that many/most employees short arm this (basketball term for not completing the follow through on their jump shot). The unfortunate result is the company does not tap all of the talent and the employee does not enjoy his career to the maximum. In fact, if you do not do this there is almost a certainty that you will be another sniper complaining about how things are and spreading the negative toxin. The ultimate responsibility to take action is yours. So ... when are you going to step forward?



## → I've Been B Rated ↓

Don't you just love performance ratings? Personally, I don't like the way it is traditionally done but I learned to deal with it ... sort of. People don't realize it but they are the ones that demand ratings. Of course, it looks like a company-sponsored event. Pay for performance ... that's what they call it. Our culture is pretty well engrained with the "grading" (or degrading as it would happen) of our work performance.

Performance ratings are one of the greatest sources for employee discomfort that exists in the corporate world. Bad bosses are probably the most talked about but the number of bad bosses is actually quite low ... unfortunately when you get one... "it ain't pretty". Ratings are different though. Ratings are for the most part a no-win situation. One of those ... can't live with them ... can't live without them. Companies don't actually do this very well, but they try very hard to make it work. I mean they try really hard. They hire consultants, they have focus teams, they receive vast amounts of opinions from the workforce ... and it still is a source for great dissatisfaction. This of course is all rooted in our well-honed competitive nature. (See Competitiveness). People don't like to think of themselves as "average"! I know I don't. Even with quite a few talks with myself I still have some degree of discomfort with being rated. It reminds me of all my shortcomings, my flaws, and my failures. During rating season, I can see the stress on the people ... both the bosses and the workers. Most people handle it well ... externally. Internally it eats at them. The highest rated are ecstatic for a few hours or days, then they

turn their fixation on the desire to get promoted. The next highest rated wonder why they didn't get the highest rating. The upper middle of the pack doesn't understand why they weren't rated at least one higher and are mildly frustrated they may be branded average. Who would promote an average worker? The middle of the pack has become disenfranchised with the process but always holds out a glimmer of hope as they enter the performance review. Most often that hope is quickly dashed. Those in the lower part of the middle are usually not surprised but they are a bit befuddled, frustrated, and sometimes angry. Those at the bottom have feelings all over the map. The feeling of potential job loss is prevalent.

So, why do institutions do this performance rating thing if there is so much negative reaction? There are many factors but I would like to focus on one that I believe is the number one driver that perpetuates the performance review. That reason is ... you! That's right you're the driving force behind the performance review. Whoa! You object. The company uses it to cull the employees and have an objective process that allows them to tap the competitive spirit, motivate the worker, and drive a certain behavior. I am sure this is true, but I believe they could accomplish all of that without the performance review process. Do a thought or imagination experiment. Imagine a career without the individual performance review process. The company could/would move forward quite nicely. They would promote and reward as needed and avoid the expensive demotivating process called performance reviews. Even if this worked well for the company, the competitive spirit in all of us will eventually ask...so

how am I doing compared to my peers? It will eat at you and the others until the clamor will begin to strike at the "unfair" system of rewards. Eventually a performance rating system will grow out of the primordial soup because you demanded it. Companies can accept this because it seems logical that such a system can provide them with some valuable leverage. The most important to the company is a certain amount of legal compliance and protection. Even with such compelling rationale the predominant reason for performance review is ... you.

Since you are so competitive ... I'm curious what have you done to insure your happiness when the review time rolls around? Have you done something to distinguish yourself? Did you establish some aggressive goals and achieve them? Did you inspire some people with your actions? Are you recognized as an approachable person that people can work with? Do you exude a can-do spirit? These are just some characteristics you might find helpful. There are a lot more details that need to be dealt with ... do you finish the work, do you get things done on time, do you reach out and help others ... etc? At a minimum, the people who score better are aggressive. They drive action. Bosses are there to decide whether the action was good or bad. Seldom do the passive score well on a continual basis. You may be the smartest person in the organization but if you can't figure out how to create impact and then communicate the value of that impact, the performance review scores will disappoint. Take action and insure a satisfying score on your performance review by not leaving things to chance. There is a lot of latitude here in terms how

you do this but ... do it. Step forward, make things happen, be nice, help others, distinguish yourself and the rewards will be better than the alternative.



## → 11th Best Place To Work In The Country ↓

So you might find this a bit hokey but for some of you out there this could be helpful. Imagine if you worked in the 11th best place in the country. Ask yourself to describe the actual way things would work and then place yourself in that environment. Why did it feel better? Were you more important, happier, less stressed, more respected, less busy...what was it? Were your co-workers different...your bosses? Was the work more interesting? Now that you have that firmly in mind, what are the specific differences between where you work now and the place you feel is the 11th best place to work? Ask yourself how you can find a way to get your workplace to that spot.

You might ask ... why the 11th best place to work? Well the thought goes a bit like this: Everyone wants to be #1 but there is a lot of attention that goes with that lofty position. No chance to improve. Some of that can be said about the top ten ... lots of attention, lots of expectations. But the 11th place has a catchy aura about it (Spinal Tap made it famous). It seems achievable and where I'm going to guess you are right now, it would be an incredible improvement to get to #11. It seems like a great spot to be. Now that you think you know what the 11th BPTW looks like, let's see if you can start to make it happen. I recently noticed that a particular company was listed as the #1 return on equity on one of the stock indexes. I also noticed that it was in the top 50 most admired companies. When I looked in the top 100 best places to work, it was

not listed. As I looked at the list I noticed the Container Store was in the top ten best places to work. I also noticed that it was in a similar range over the previous years. So here is a company that sells wastebaskets and boxes ... retail ... and they have employee satisfaction through the roof. The people stock shelves, unload trucks, manage inventory, and interact with the customer. Meanwhile, the highly admired, shareholder bonanza didn't even make the top 100. They have higher paying jobs, interesting high technology work, excellent benefits but a less than ecstatic workforce.

You start to understand you are what you think you are. It's not quite that simple but you realize it can be a big part of it. It's easy to be hyper-cynical, easy to be guarded, but with an almost magical flip of the attitude switch you can be lively and working in the 11th best place to work in the country. Try it...it just might help.

When I said I worked in the 11th best place to work ... in the country ... people looked at me with that bewildered expression that speaks, "your joking ... aren't you"? They usually keep their wits about them and coyly ask: "How do you know you work in the 11th best place". "Because I made it that way", I boldly announce. You can tell a cringe almost appears and you feel skepticism and disappointment welling up in them. Skepticism based on the "put a positive spin, on everything and it will be better" crap and because for a fleeting moment there was hope there was a cure for the "workday blues". "There wasn't a test or a survey or something that ranks you?". They fire back in an indicting way. I don't

answer but boldly pronounce. "I choose to work in the 11th best place to work and I work to make it happen" I lose them, cynicism is back but I made a few points and perhaps in their quiet time some of this "think" will slowly take hold. Maybe somebody will eventually create a test that will definitely determine what or where the 11th best place is but interestingly enough, I probably won't take that test. I make my own choices.



## → Now Batting (Your Name Goes Here) ↓

This is the section that will make you a bit uncomfortable...maybe. At some time in your career you are going to have to get in the game... the real game. When you are in the game there is a significant level of responsibility, accountability, and ownership. Most people don't really like to think about this and in some cases they are a bit dishonest with themselves when confronting it. If you are going to have a rewarding career you're going to have to deal with this, and might I add, with the preference of it being done on your terms, not others. This is not a simple subject...lots of twists, turns, and sharp edges. First of all, let me do something that I shouldn't do but I will anyway. I'm going to put people into similar think groups for illustrative purposes.

Group A: You really are drawn to the sidelines, the bleachers; intense responsibility/accountability in a corporate setting is uncomfortable for you. It could be because you're shy, lacking the kind of self-confidence that such a position demands. Perhaps you guard that kind of intensity only for your personal life. Perhaps you can't deal with the oft criticism that can happen in such an arena. Perhaps you don't like the people that are in those jobs or are drawn to them. It could be anyone or all of these reasons. The fact remains you need to find YOUR way into the game.

Group B: Not afraid to get in the game but don't seem to know how. Maybe you're pushing hard, aggressive, trying to shove your way onto the field because no one is picking you to play on their team. You get frustrated and show your frustration. You want to be at the front table, but you're seated by the restroom doors. You're grumpy.

Group C: You're in the game ... sort of...you have what seems like a lot of pressure because you have a part, albeit a bit part. You seem to have no control over what goes on but a lot of responsibility for this one small piece. Because you do this one small piece so well, you get to do it over and over. It's Ground Hog Day for you. You feel like you never get anywhere.

Group D: You're often-included in discussions considering key issues. Your opinion is solicited. You have a variety in your diet of work that allows you to utilize your analytical skills, your creativity, your communications skill, and your leadership. You occasionally get to motivate people and even once in a while inspire someone. Opportunities always seem to drop in your lap ... and you enjoy a good challenge.

Ok, so Group D gets to pass go and collect \$200. The reason I included it is because it is real. Some people do experience this kind of work experience and if they are wise they will continue to do things to sustain this lifestyle. It is not guaranteed and insurance is not available.

You have to work at it to make it happen. Besides being flexible and positive, improving your skills in what you do is critical. Work on your communication skills ... practice, practice, practice. Think about things like the bigger picture, strategies, how to get rid of your job (no surer way to move somewhere else!). Find ways to help the company make money.

If you see yourself as a Group A person then you need to create a persona that you can live with and move closer and closer to the fire. Continually challenge yourself with steps that slowly increase your participation. I think you will look back and see this, as a rewarding effort albeit a discomforting one. Don't be a critique...be a player.

If you see yourself in Group B you need to take a critical view of yourself and not necessarily complain about the system. You may not have as yet accomplished something that has distinguished yourself in a positive light. You may be abrasive. You may be stubborn and lack the flexibility to fit yourself into the needs of the battle. If you're willing AND you're flexible you will find a way to the big table.

If you're in Group C then you need to take a serious look at how to take control of your circumstances. Few people want to be just a cog in the gear. It will eventually become boring and stressful (yes ... boring AND stressful!). Complaining and fretting about your predicament is useless. You will start to feel better if you begin asking yourself: so how would I make life better for the company and myself? I'm sure you have had some false starts at this and probably gave up in frustrations figuring no one would listen anyway. You actually were probably right. You need to

be a bit less emotional about this and a bit more objective (easy to say; hard to do). You can fix this but not without some serious effort. You must have a little patience because changing an organization and the way it works is not easy. Respectful tenacity is the phrase of the day here. You need to actually design the better world ... and I mean you need to think more than just about you in this plan. Keep working your thoughts until they really glow. Then start testing some of the elements of the plan with parts of the organization to start the indoctrination process and also to find what points resonate and which don't. Then keep expanding your message and your audience. Don't get discouraged if things don't go the way you want right off the bat. Be flexible and incorporate reasonable (you get to decide what is defined as reasonable) ideas and don't forget to build alliances and be sure to share the stage. Your communication skills and salesmanship will be taxed and I'm sure you will need to take it to a higher level. This process will all take time but you will learn a lot about the untapped skills you really possess. Regardless of how you grade the outcome of your mission, you will be a happier and more satisfied with yourself because you took a small step to take charge of what you do. If you are in Group D then give the book to someone else and don't forget what got you there. From time to time your career will drift from the ideal and you will have to remember the pathway back to the center. This will not be obvious or easy because we all change due to the voices and signals around us and sometimes we inadvertently become someone else. You need to be yourself.



## → I Don't Like My Boss ↓

Then I don't like him/her either! This is a bummer when this happens (It has actually happened to me). It was the time that influenced me to adopt my policy of "pick your boss". Who I work for weighs very heavily on which roads I take in my career. Most of my bosses have been terrific...which speaks well of my philosophical position to "pick your boss". It's easier than you think but you have to work the system. It is important to me that I feel my boss and I are a team that is focusing on common and uncommon goals. I have adopted, from my point of view, reasonable criteria for what makes a good boss. I don't like it if they yell or otherwise show their teeth in anger. It is inexcusable if they ridicule people and if it looks like they're playing the game mostly for their own promotion, I want no part of it. I prefer they take the initiative to make the place a pleasant place to work...and that means motivated and engaged co-workers. It's a lot more fun to work around those kinds of people. I prefer a boss who is interested in improving things and is willing and eager to try new techniques. Last but not least they have to put some effort into being a good boss ... it's important to me to respect their intensity and passion for excellence. I actually don't think I demand too much since I recognize I'm a handful as an employee!



## → What's "Bugging" You ↓

If I asked you, what was wrong with your career, your job or the place you work you would/could crank out an impressive list of malfunctions that would fill a page. Soooooo let's go ahead and do it...make a list, let's get this out in the open. We'll compare lists and see what we can do about it.

- ↓ I don't resonate with some of the people I work with.
- ↓ I tried to apply for another job but the boss wouldn't let me.
- ↓ Younger people have been passing me by
- ↓ They don't want to listen to me because I'll tell the truth.

(Pssst you're suppose to write something in the blank areas above ... go ahead ... it won't hurt ... it might do you some good.)





## → Possible Top 11 Reasons People are Unhappy In Their Jobs ↓

### ↓ Variety (Is this all there is? Syndrome?)

Not enough or too much

### ↓ Co-Workers

80/20

Other people getting promoted

Keeping up with the Joneses

### ↓ Inability to adapt

I don't know what they want?

### ↓ Feeling of lack of control

Unfulfilled self-actualization

### ↓ Bosses

### ↓ I really don't like what I do

Too much rote work

Too much time in the cube

### ↓ Overwhelmed

Too much to do not enough time

### ↓ Value Clash

### ↓ Fairness

### ↓ I don't understand how to get ahead!

### ↓ Other

## → Management Addendum: Bosses Are Appointed Leaders Are Followed! ↓

So if you are a good boss or would like to be a good boss let's develop a checklist to provide you with the ingredients.

Are you mean? Yes  No

Do you use management by walking around? Yes  No

Do you use the phrase "my people" when talking about the people that report to you? Yes  No

Do you inspire your team? Yes  No

Do you actively manage people/s careers by seeking out opportunities for them? Yes  No

Do you help make work challenging AND interesting? Yes  No

Do you ask people how you might help them? Yes  No

Do you monitor the team's happiness? Yes  No

Do you take sides when there is a company

– employee issue? Yes  No

Do you adapt your communication style to the employee? Yes  No

Do you encourage people to use their vacation? Yes  No

Do you delegate well? Yes  No

Do you treat others as they wish to be treated? Yes  No

## → My Team Not My People ↓

Ok, maybe you think this is a bit picky but I don't. I believe it shows a sign of respect and clearer understanding of your role in an organization when you make reference to your direct reports as my team and not my people. This is subtle evidence of how you view your position and how you empower your co-workers. Hubris is a weakness. People are, employed by the company, work for a living, and report to a supervisor. End of discussion.



## → Postscript ↓

All journeys have a beginning and an end but the real adventure is what lies in the middle. There are not only the hills and the curves but also the bumps and bruises. No great odyssey is ever completed without overcoming great obstacles or testing ones perseverance and feeling some discomfort. Deciding whether to turn right or left or to accept “danger” over assurance is part of growing, competing, and ultimately becoming stronger. It's not only an extraordinary effort of the few but also the sustained effort of the many that bring success ... and success is never guaranteed. The doubts we have along the way stir our emotions, challenge our skills and stretch our talents. The grand highs and deep lows of the journey make up the fabric of our lives and the moment-to-moment interactions provide the texture. To say “oh its just work” is a sly way of coping with the complexity, intensity, and difficulty of what we do. But the subconscious knows better. It knows how hard we all try, how flexible we try to be. It feels the burn that drives us to want to do our best and succeed. In the beginning there is great exhilaration to “Take the Mountain” great hope ... great determinations. Halfway up the mountain it starts to get cold and the terrain foreboding ... there is discomfort. Three quarters the way up ... the slopes become cliffs, the air becomes thin, and teamwork is strained. Some want to go forward, some want to go back, some seem to want to do both. But just as in life...there is no “go back”, it becomes obvious that staying put is not possible...so onward you go.

As you near the top the conflicting feeling of “I can’t take one more step” verses “it’s just a little further”, “I don’t care anymore” verses “The team is counting on me”. At the top as you collapse, not sure of what you feel ... a bit numb from the experience, bruised by the adventure, satisfied with the effort, embarrassed by what you had said, disappointed that it wasn’t perfect, happy that it was over, wondering whether it was worth it and perhaps a bit wiser, a bit older, and a bit humbled. As you ponder your life ... your career ... you realize that each person has to take their own journey and any guideposts along the way are welcomed. It is not always clear who to listen too or which of the many voices tells the true story, but you can sense wisdom. You get to vote on who you will be and you get to be the star of a show called YOU. Make your journey a grand one. Good Luck.



good luck

jim

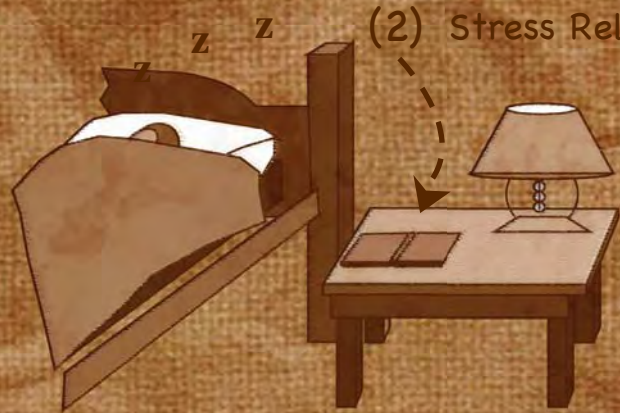


# How to use this book

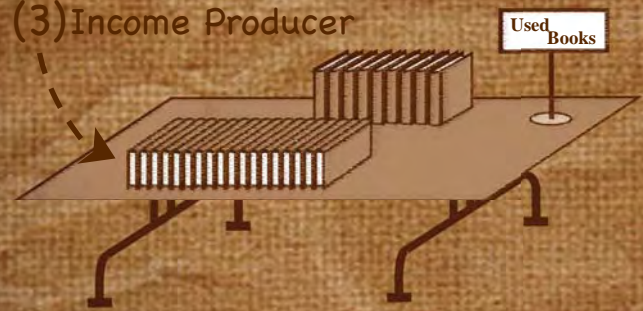
(1) Career Leveling



(2) Stress Relief



(3) Income Producer



(Open Other End)