

Conquering Your Workplace: From Mail Room to Board Room—A Sourcebook for Today's Workforce!

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The following are excerpts from the book that show the flavor of the contents in each chapter.

From the Preface:

Although my job coaching focused on the transitional nature of the clients' needs, my career coaching focused on how to succeed in the "quiescent" workplace. I think that perhaps turbulent would be a better adjective. A transition is typically prompted by some turmoil or disruption in an otherwise predictable life. So, when a client landed at a new place they were surprised not to find the respite of stability with some security and peace that they were expecting.

The purpose of this book is not to provide a replacement for what has disappeared from many organizations. That would be a daunting task. Its content is aimed at providing career employees some basic knowledge that they can internalize, allowing them to be productive at work in today's flux. In this context the word "employee" is used broadly: it applies to anyone who works inside an organization, including its CEO and the members of its Board. This is how the book's subtitle was chosen.

My own experience suggests that the basic need to understand how organizations behave stems from an employee's inability to see beyond their own situation and to understand why people around them behave in ways that baffle them. Many personalize that treatment and rationalize it by trying to find something that they themselves might have done wrong, regardless of how untoward that treatment was. This gets even more interesting when such treatment comes from their superiors: their boss, someone with seniority, or someone who they consider should know better! This scenario is not much different from someone who gets abused at home and rationalizes that abuse by convincing themselves that they deserved that treatment because they must have done something wrong in the first place. This way to personalize their plight can be pervasive throughout an organization.

Chapter-1: Today's Workplace

Today's workplace is vastly different from the one that our parents were used to. This is even more so in the U.S. than it is in other western countries and even Japan. The changes to the workplace accelerated after the mid '70s, when the expectations of both the employees the employers started shifting towards each other rather dramatically. Until then, the employers enjoyed an implicit authority and power over their employees and, in return, provided a certain degree of security, protection, and a sense of personal belonging to the organization.

During the past 50 years the entire employment scene has undergone a sea change. Over time, this pace of change has accelerated, particularly during the past couple of decades. Many of the rules that people had accepted and had steadfastly held as given since the advent of the

industrial revolution have dissolved over time and new rules have emerged to replace them. The pace of change of these rules gradually accelerated over time. During the past decade that ushered in the new Millennium, the employment scene resembled the battlefield. Under battleground conditions, you make your own rules.

Despite the sea change in the way organizations have evolved and how they are managed, a few things have *not* changed. For one, the way an enterprise looks at its value-creation process. Creating economic value is at the heart of any enterprise. This is even true of the government or charitable organizations. This latter allusion may seem farfetched, but if one looks at the long-term horizon of the purpose of such institutions they fit this bill. Social organizations create similar value at a more human level, whose long term effect is economic, but which is difficult to measure in a transactional context.

In this context, then, the other aspect of what remains unchanged of an organization is its human ethos. No matter how much technology drives an organization's mission and no matter how fast a technology is being assimilated in an organization to "automate" its operations, it has a basic purpose. This purpose is the final outcome it provides as a human experience. It is this purpose that will determine the ultimate fate of a business. This human dimension is the overriding factor that will ultimately dictate how an organization succeeds.

To appreciate how far we have come in a short time in the context of organizational thought, it is instructive to look back and see the starting point. The modern industrial enterprise is not that old, although the concept of an organization dates back to the armies of the Romans and the Greek empires. The first industrial enterprise was the weaving mills started by Frederick Engels in England in 1834, which had about 200 laborers. In fact, it was Karl Marx, a friend of Engels, who wrote his first white paper about communism based on his observations about that enterprise.

Chapter-3: Management Basics

Not many distinguish between management and leadership. In fact, many assume that once you have "manager" in your title—or something similar—you are a leader. Nothing could be further from the truth! In this chapter, we define both and clarify key concepts around these terms. In this section we define terms in the context of their historical evolution and how they should be viewed in today's organizations.

In the new role, the manager must understand the functions of managing. There are four functions that a manager must perform to be effective:

- Lead
- Plan
- Organize
- Set up Controls

The management work gap refers to the difference between the manager's work (lead, plan, organize, and set up controls) they should perform and the amount of management work

they actually perform. Most managers spend too much time performing inappropriate management work and meddling in technical work, which does not belong to their positions. This results in their spending less time *doing the management work that only they can do*.

The Management-Work Gap is a symptom of how managers, at all levels, fail to see their proper role in the management process that drives an organization and the business it supports. The effects of the Management-Work Gap are at many levels, the most important of which is at a personal level for everyone in an organization. It creates a pervasive culture of everyone working well below their potential and capability, frustrating those who can see what needs to be done, but are unable to articulate the syndrome or its cause. At a personal level, those who fall victim to the pernicious effects of the Management-Work Gap, suffer from stress that accelerates their health-related problems, including mental health.

Key Principles are a set of reminders, to managers and employees alike that guide their thinking, actions, and reflections when they are at crossroads. Being aware of these principles helps in everyday existence in the corporate world and can save much of wasted effort, trial and error and surprises. Key principles are presented for each management function. On their face they may appear self-evident, even trivial. And, *that* is the point. Despite their simplicity and obviousness, their diligent application in everyday organizational encounters can mean the difference between success and failure. This aspect of managing is not different from what we see in our everyday life: often people think that although they understand these principles, somehow they are immune from it because of their simplicity. Some managers believe that they are smarter than these simple principles; hence they do not apply to what they do. For these people, experience is the best teacher.

Chapter-4: Managing Your Own Journey

This chapter provides a foundation for many of life's transitions and challenges, including your quest to lift humanity a little higher. We reach a stage in life when we start to find its meaning. This is when we finally grow up. But, this, too, is a journey that we all embark on, and for which we need some rules as well as tools. Although much of the material provided here is applicable to job, career, and work-related issues, its applicability is quite broad. The material is more an arsenal of tools and rules one must learn during rites of passage, in our life's journey.

When we are confronted with a challenge, we are assessing our capacity to deal with that challenge. In a way, during such assessments we are in a transition. Managing a personal transition comprises understanding the forces that drive it. How best to deal with these forces, common to all transitions can make these transitions meaningful and provide some degree of control to those facing them. It is this control that makes the transition a positive experience. The learning that comes from each experience validates our capacity to deal with them and gives us the confidence to confront even greater challenges. The following discussion presents the anatomy of a transition so that it is not a mystery.

A transition is a journey through which we travel to get to the destination, navigating through both time and emotional space. During critical transitions, our sense of time is warped and our emotions run deep. Many analogize such transitions as emotional roller-coaster ride.

During transitions, our life is changing; not ending!

This is the second factor that needs managing during transitions. It has to do with how others react to you. We, as chemical-generating organisms, are able to generate, among others, two hormones, and, in turn, *induce* the same in others. These two hormones dictate how others respond to us. Since job search is a social activity involving others, this is important.

The third and the final factor discussed here that helps in transitional success is the ability to operate without fear. How? When there is uncertainty, especially work related, there is angst, which can create fear. This emotion deeply affects those who let it run their lives. Fear creates its own adrenaline! This again creates others to see you as someone they want to avoid. Fear is something not kept inside ourselves as most think, it is something that is apparent to anyone who sees us; we wear it even without our knowing it. It is much like a strong perfume we wear that we can no longer smell! Fear impedes one's thinking and power to reason.

“My Truth!” is a private and personal statement. Sometimes you do not want to divulge all that surrounds your current situation. Sometimes you are not sure what you want, other than just a job. It is a good idea to be clear about the truth, so that you are honest with yourself. The better you are aligned with what you communicate and what your own truth is, the more authentic your campaign and more honest the outcome. Most have the innate ability to spot the misalignment between your words, and how you present them.

This statement is confidential and need not be discussed with *anyone*, if you choose not to.

Chapter-5: Your New Job

Starting a new job is always an exciting period in one's life. It spells the end of a transition—a difficult one if they are starting back from being out of work—and also spells a start of a new one. How long it takes to settle and develop a feeling of comfort, where one is more relaxed about their job, depends on the level at which they are entering a company. Regardless of the level of entry, there are a few common considerations one must be aware of to be able to not get into trouble settling down at a new place of employment.

Four years is a long time during the impressionable years to imprint a mind with beliefs that are counter to those that run the business world. This is why it is important to start changing your imprinting early, as you get closer to leaving your academic environment. On the campus the focus is typically on getting the degree quickly and making the grades. The academic focus is also on solitary achievements. In the outside world of the jobs, business, and economy all of this matters not as much as most think. Very few employers care to check how fast you graduated. Many do not pay as much attention to the grades (GPA) as those on the campus believe. So, what is important to the “real world?”

The following checklist may provide some insights on how to manage your student affairs more carefully so that you are better positioned to enter the business world:

Why is going from being a student to getting a full-time job is such a big deal? There are many reasons: the foremost is that being a student in your school, college, or university, you

enjoyed a “rank” that few shared. You were the top dog in the highly ordered academic world during your graduation year. Many fraternities bestow unlimited powers on the graduating class, allowing them to “order around” any one else of “lower” rank, even those graduating barely a year behind them. You enjoyed certain freedoms of expressions that others respected and even promoted.

Once you are inside an organization, assigned to a job, you move through four distinct stages over your career arc that defines your career history, looking back. These stages are not restricted to your confinement to one employer; they cross employer boundaries, following wherever you go in your career; they are not employer specific, but are thematic in nature. The concept of stages came about nearly 20 years back when the then traditional hierarchies started disappearing and the deep command and control structure inside organizations started becoming flatter. Starting with the late ‘80s, many corporations came to realize that having highly siloed structures and deep hierarchies were getting in the way of doing business efficiently, primarily because they impeded the flow of vital information by creating a layered bureaucracy. This was also a juncture when information started becoming easily available throughout the organization.

Chapter-6: Charting Your Career

This chapter deals with your ongoing efforts to attain your vision at your new place of work and beyond. It does not matter if you started your job right out of college—or that it is just your first “career job”—or that this is a job after you have been displaced from your previous one, or that you just wanted a change to refresh your career. Getting settled at a new place, and then having a vision to move forward in a planned way, are important to create a career path that is not just a random happenstance. Many believe that a career “happens” to them and not the other way around. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Few know how to manager their career. Most let their career “happen” to them. One reason why this is so, is, perhaps, because many do not know of a systematic approach to career management. In the absence of such an approach, they resort to a trial and error approach. This can be both frustrating and expensive. It can lead to an unfulfilled life and missed opportunities.

A systemic career management framework evolved out of working with thousands of clients who came looking for career advice. This framework is the topic of an entire book

Chapter-7: When Things Go Wrong

Life is a cycle of two things: enjoyment and challenges. Here, we could have chosen the “good-bad” pair to be rather obvious about how life is—work life or otherwise! But, good and bad are relative terms, and how you perceive one in contrast with the other is a matter of context. For example, your getting laid-off, at once, is not a good thing, but often, it can be a blessing. The reason it can be a blessing is because it forces you to explore other opportunities and perhaps reinvent yourself, which can lead to richer possibilities. In today’s society, we often judge what is happening to us in the context of its immediacy and how those around us perceive it. The life’s vicissitudes are a constant of the human condition in all its manifestations.

Chapter-8: Taking Care of the Customer

Taking care of the customer is one of the most basic needs in a business. Yet, the skill required to do this correctly is not appreciated in a way that results in organizations having the right approach to improve a customer experience, as a disciplined process. Often, organizational factors override customer needs and, as a result, customer experience is relegated to whatever processes allow employees to be expedient. For example, if an issue or customer complaint is parceled out to a functional department, its own mission will always take precedence; customer will come second. . The result is a dissatisfied customer at best, a customer defection and a slowly dwindling business at worst. Most fail to realize that a complaining customer does not see the “silos” that those within an organization are so married to. The rub lies in the differing perspectives of those inside an organization and those who deal with it as customers. Those inside an organization see it as “siloesd,” whereas those on the outside, including the customers, see it as monolithic.

The goal of any business is to capture customers and drive them to becoming loyal followers of the company’s products and services. As is obvious, loyalty comes from not just delivering what each segment of customers requires, but going well beyond that on an ongoing basis, in order to constantly wow them. The challenge to keep customers interested in the company’s products is ongoing, because no matter what innovations you introduce to get customers’ attention, competition is going to catch up to, and even preempt, your next move. To appeal to the customers’ buying tastes, the producer must provide full panoply of features that fall into three categories: Required, Expected, and Exceptional.

To understand where a customer stands in their perception of the three categories of “satisfiers” described in the Kano diagram, a thorough knowledge of customer mindset is essential. One such tool for getting this insight is the relationship engine. The relationship engine is a model that drives exemplary and highly loyal relationships with those customers that deserve your most attention and who can significantly contribute to the success of your business and organization. As we presented before, not all customers are the same, and they must be treated accordingly with regards to what makes the best use of your resources and, in turn, provide the best return on your investment. In fact, treating customers this way can be one of the most lucrative strategies available to any business.

The Relationship Assessment Process is an operational implementation of the Relationship Engine just presented. Acronym apart, as a verb, *rap* also means to talk frankly and freely. What better way to create a great discovery than to have an open discussion with your key customers? Rapping with selected customers can change a relationship! The RAP is presented in the flowchart below:

Chapter-9: Working Globally

Yesterday’s business world, that we thought was round like the earth, is now flattened by today’s technology. The Internet, global travel, instant telecommunications, and the democratization of information, all have contributed to making the world a seamless trading place. But, have they really?

Despite the technology's relentless march to flatten the world, in its attempts to create a level playing field, the basic issues of human interactions stemming from cultural differences create challenges that continue to elude today's business leaders. This chapter is presented as a reminder to not just the business executives, but to all who are citizens in today's global village. It is presented as an overview of the issues that can all be lumped under the rubric of culture and geographic peculiarities.

Chapter-10: Just One More Thing

Minding your own business (MYOB) is central to how one shows their commitment to their cause. Knowing when to keep your nose in your own affairs and when not to, in the corporate world, is important.

In business and career, minding your own business is a sign of engagement, commitment, and single-mindedness of purpose. Excellence is achieved by focus, energy, and learning from every action and task. It is when this focus is lost that one gets tempted to find faults with others and to focus on what is not happening with someone else. So, in order to achieve excellence in all that you are engaged in, it is best to keep the focus on what is on your plate and understand that obligation with singular dedication. Losing sight of this often leads to setbacks, grief, and discomposing angst.

Epilogue

To the uninitiated, working in today's corporate environment and becoming successful can be a daunting challenge. One reason is, that, to many, a business or an organization can be a mystery, a hostile place where things happen over which they have no control. This sense of their mystery and lack of control are wrapped in how people interact, behave, how the business drivers shape the organization's future, how managers manage—or mismanage—how leaders lead, and how followers follow to get anything worthwhile done. So, to approach the challenge of working in today's business culture, not just in the U.S., but also anywhere in the world, is overwhelming to many corporate citizens. Since organizations are people, brought together for a common cause, those wanting to understand the rules of the corporate jungle need to understand, at least to some extent, how people behave.

Appendices: There are 12 Appendices on a variety of topics critical to the success in the corporate world. Although they are individually excerpted, they are listed below for convenience:

Appendix-I: Managing Upward: *Managing Your Boss*

Appendix-II: Managing Meetings

Appendix-III: The Immigrant Professional

Appendix-IV: The Human Moment at Work

Appendix-V: Emotional Intelligence

Appendix-VI: The Annual Review and Raise

Appendix-VII: When Is it Time to Move On?

Appendix-VIII: Résumés and Cover Letters

Appendix-IX: Leveraging Your Genius

Appendix-X: Psychometric Tests: A Survivor's Guide

Appendix-XI: Mentors: Developing Relationship with Powerful People

Appendix-XII: Work-Life Balance

Appendix-XIII: Work Etiquette

The book is designed to provide easy access to any topic through the use of a detailed Table of Contents (Micro contents) and a comprehensive Index.