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Did you stay too long in your previous position? Ask anybody in the recruiting business and you'll probably hear that people who have a long tenure with a company are unattractive employment candidates as are the job hoppers. All of this is very subjective, of course. What is too long? Certainly someone who has had the same job in the same company with little change, for the past twenty years would fit the profile. On the other hand, over the past few years when I have done CIO and other senior level searches, I have seen many candidate resumes showing fewer than six months at the present job but with enough bulleted accomplishments to cover several years. I sometimes have difficulty taking those candidates very seriously.

In either case, we can't always control the circumstances that influence and cause job changes, but are frequently called upon to play the hand that is dealt us. Many times our career decisions are driven by our personal needs, although such issues have to be discussed carefully in an interview.

I can think of countless cases where people have stayed at unfulfilling jobs for many years to avoid breaking continuity in health benefits needed to protect a family member. Many separated and divorced parents work positions only because they are more geographically available to their children. This can be very complicated with the many "blended" families we see today. Indeed, this social condition has become so rampant, that my own teenage daughter feels like the odd person in her circle of friends because her parents are married; live together and actually like each other.

Where I am heading with this is to a theme you will hear me touch on in many newsletters to come. To wit: the career search/interview process is a very unique business situation, arguably unlike any other. It is the one situation where you the candidate, are expected to "blow your horn" and sell yourself, albeit carefully, while scrutinizing the company. On a job interview, you are no longer a CIO, VP, Director, etc, but you are a sales professional, who must effectively market your services, while simultaneously performing due diligence on the company. It helps immensely to have a solid grasp of who you are and where you prefer to realize your career.

Getting into my initial comments about tenure, how do you deal with this? Very few of us have that perfect resume: at least three years or more with every company, but not more than five, multiple promotions, no breaks in employment disguised as consulting ventures, salary history always heading "north", etc.

Before you send out another resume, much less take another interview; it may be helpful to conduct a mental inventory of your entire job history. You can't change what has happened, but this is an ideal time to improve your future.

Begin by spending time looking back over all the jobs you've had. How happy and fulfilled were you in each one. What were the ones where you couldn't wait to get to work? What were the jobs where every night, the expression on your face had the same

stare like that on any college basketball player whose team that has just been eliminated in the NCAA playoffs? In both cases, what kind of work were you doing? What was your boss like? How well was the company doing financially? What was the general political climate? When did you contemplate a job change, but then stuck it out to see if it would improve?

Many people have found this kind of self-analysis to be beneficial. I have witnessed numerous instances as a recruiter, where people have stayed with one company for many years, leaving via a layoff, company closing, business relocation or some other dramatic change. Their career then follows a succession of short stays of anywhere from a few months to a year, making them a job hopper by default. I maintain that this is due mostly to the fact that they have worked in only one political culture and assumed that a similar environment would exist in any other company. So too, most job hoppers keep moving because they can't find that cultural fit.

Corporate culture is as unique as the individual personalities that create it. It starts at the top, with the CEO, and then is filtered, enhanced and interpreted by each management level. As an interviewee, you need to determine whether you fit. How? Start with a company Web site? Look at everything from mission statement, biographies, press releases to ethics policy. When you go to the interview, learn to read a company. How are you greeted? While you sit in the lobby and while walking through the building to your meeting, observe employees. Do they look tense or happy? Are they pleasant to each other, or do they simply pass each other, while avoiding glances? There are numbers of subtle but powerful signs that can provide insight into the climate of a company.

To illustrate, some twenty years ago, I met with a client IT Director to discuss recruiting senior level Project Managers and Business Analysts. Charles Dickens could have created his department. Management offices were on the perimeter of the building. In the center was a big open area filled with people who all looked like Bob Cratchit, hunched over their desks and avoiding contact with each other. There were no cubicles or partitions. Rather, desks were spaced about three feet apart. When I left my meeting, it was shortly after twelve noon. Hardly anyone had moved in the previous hour. I was so depressed by this environment, that I was never able to take this company seriously and sell it to potential candidates as a great place to further their careers.

The issues to consider are many: risk, upside potential, chemistry with the management team, company size, industry, geography, travel requirements and the like. Knowing answers to such intangible questions can mean the difference between career stability and fulfillment or hopping around looking for a home.

For those of you who wish to put some real effort into this process, I highly recommend that you get a copy of this book: The Pathfinder: How to Choose or Change Your Career for a Lifetime of Satisfaction and Success, by Nicholas Lore. Fireside/Simon & Schuster, New York, 1998. It retails for \$14.00. Lore will lead you through as step-by-step, self-evaluation process that is granular. It takes time, but if you're out of work, it may help you to understand what makes you tick and where you should best apply yourself. It is

intended both for people who wish to change their career altogether and those who wish to reposition themselves in their present career.

As you continue your job search and consider opportunities, you will find many emotional factors that can influence your decision. They could be the lure of a former boss, geographical proximity, security, prestige, or high pay. Self-analysis will help you to place them in their proper perspective and gain the career traction you want.

Good luck.

A reminder: keep the new member referrals and the job leads coming.

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