

**PREPARING
FOR
TODAY'S
GLOBAL
JOB
MARKET**

FROM THE LENS OF COLOR
CHRISTOPHER ROBINSON-EASLEY



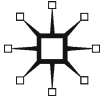
Preparing for Today's Global Job Market

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By
Christopher Anne Robinson-Easley

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Preface

This book is written for anyone across the globe that has either experienced job loss, is looking to change careers, is a student just beginning their career, or is pondering entrepreneurial opportunities. While the audience I address is broad, the fundamental core competencies needed to evoke change are the same for anyone choosing to read this book.

Intentionally, I have chosen to address issues extensively beyond the fundamentals of writing a resume, cover letter, and engaging in the mechanics of a job search. Consequently, this book is designed to help you prepare, from an interpersonal and intrapersonal framework, for the change that is needed to successfully emerge in a career path that gives you joy. The information in the chapters are designed to help people who are facing the trauma of losing a job by specifically addressing strategies to move you past a job loss situation and trauma.

Most important, this book is designed to help you understand the *nuances* of a career/job change process that employers and many others are not telling you. In other words, we will demystify the rules of the *new game* that is being played in today's global economy.

Equally important, the foundational praxes and strategies that are discussed are written to address the global expansiveness of today's economy. As I will continue to say throughout the chapters, perhaps to the point of intentionally sounding redundant, your competition are not just people within your own country; no matter what level of job you hold. Your competition for positions within your chosen career path and/or job incorporates individuals across the globe for a variety of reasons, which are discussed throughout many chapters.

This book is the first in my series titled "From the Lens of Color." The contents of this book and subsequent books that will follow in this series are designed to privilege the lens through which I view the topics I address, while suggesting that the reader does the same. We each have many "hues" and range of differences in our global backgrounds.

Yet, far too often we are stretched to imitate that which we deem to be mainstream beliefs and resulting actions. However, when we examine a global workforce the concept of “mainstream” loses its meaning.

Understanding who we are in today’s complex, yet dynamic environment is very important simply because there is tremendous change occurring in our world. This change is not just relegated to our work environments—it is impacting every aspect of our lives. Consequently, if we are to be successful with embracing this *world* phenomena of change, we need a clear understanding of how we view; socially, psychologically, spiritually, and economically *our* place in it. As you read this book, I suggest that you make a conscious effort to privilege your lens and insert yourself into the conversation, which is why unashamedly I write this book in both first and third persons.

The Structure of the Book

As I have grown in my writing, I have intentionally moved away from what I consider to be objective, yet dispassionate conventionalisms of traditional academics and as a result have inserted myself into the conversations of my work for the past few years—a research strategy I learned years ago in Europe. Consequently, I intentionally move between first person and third person.

As a trained change strategist, I am also an actor in today’s global job market. My lens and interpretive schemas are also informed by my prior roles in human resource management across many sectors and I teach and research management and human resource management issues. Having an inside “track” to the how and why of decisions can be informing, which is why I believe it is important to incorporate my understanding of the more salient points, which underscore today’s workplace issues from a first person perspective. Therefore, the strategies, personal reflections, and reflexive actions I suggest in this book incorporate my own corporate human resource and change management experiences as well as academic and professional training, consultancies, and experiences I have incurred over the course of my career.

From time to time you will encounter recommendations that have been stressed in more than one chapter within the book. There are a number of recommended strategies and praxes that either span across multiple topics or are so important that they warrant repeating within the context that is being addressed within the specific chapter and/or topic. So, I respectfully request your endurance, but most important that you pay attention to these points.

I am also very clear as to why the phenomenological privileging of your lens is critical to both your sense-making and survival in this global work environment. You should work toward understanding how your personal dynamics impact the choices you make relative to job loss, reemerging into a new job market, emerging into a new job market (particularly if you are a recent graduate), and equally important reconstructing your life when it seems like so much is falling apart around you. This understanding is also germane to your considerations toward entrepreneurial endeavors.

As difficult of a thought as it may be to entertain . . . this time in your life could be your moment of rebirth.

I do not purport to have all the answers to a critical dilemma, which is why, as a trained scholar, academic, and practitioner, I also draw upon the research and propositions of other scholars to provide additional context and analyses. However, your active participation through reflection and reflexive actions as you read this book from the beginning to the end are important, particularly when you are called upon to productively begin evoking a strategy to address challenges and/or new opportunities.

There is a model in this book that is designed to delineate a game plan for changing your employment status or jump starting your new employment opportunities. The model, which concretizes the more critical points of the book, *does not* just provide a roadmap for writing resumes, cover letters, and networking. Through suggestions which significantly suggest examining the “self” from a holistic paradigm, you are challenged to emerge stronger, focused and able to take on the world . . . literally. While the foundational praxes throughout this book are grounded in a global context, most important, the suggested change strategies are grounded in a spiritual context that addresses your greatness as a human being with unlimited potential.

Understand, I will not address your theological or religious grounding. Your religious and theological contexts are personal. Across the world we are blessed to have many different ways of worshiping and praising our Creator—irrespective of how you define your Creator.

However, I do believe that a critical factor that is causing so many organizations to lose ground is their failure to privilege the *humanity* of their workforce. Consequently, I believe that it is very important for you, as the reader to privilege, value, and love who you are and how you are aligned with the overarching greatness of our universe. We each are special, and it is within that realm of being special (which we should recognize and act upon) that we have the potential to walk a path of

purpose within our chosen careers and/or jobs that will give us tremendous joy!

Once you commit to the intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics of change articulated in part I, part II will walk you through the dynamics of the job search process.

Today's environment is not for the light-hearted, but I do believe it is one that offers people phenomenal opportunity—if we are willing to embrace that which is new—even in the midst of letting go of the old.

The praxes and strategies in this book are designed to help the reader understand the landscape of challenge and change that is facing our global organizations from a very different context. You see, the change and challenge that is impacting organizations are also impacting the workforce. . . . it is a trickle-down effect. Consequently, there is a critical need for employers to also read this book which is why there are chapters dedicated to helping them reframe the role they should now consider with their workforce.

The foundational praxes in this book provides opportunities for employers to understand from a very different context the challenge, change and heartbreak people endure when they are hit by economic downturns and really do not understand beyond a surface level what these changes and challenges mean and why it had to impact them. Yet, as an individual who has worked in and consulted to many organizations for over 30 years, I have learned that positive change can and will emerge when people simply commit to a dialogue that explores multiple perspectives. Consequently, what I hope to also emerge from people reading this book is a different discourse between employees and employers with respect to today's economic environment and its respective challenges.

There is no doubt that the current challenges facing workers and employers are phenomenal. And, in many cases, if a different conversation could exist, I believe the deltas of misunderstanding would certainly close—resulting in a closure that positively impacts productivity, creativity, and profitability. Employees only want to be valued, and if the landscape of change suggest that the requisite skills and competencies are different or differently emphasized, then there needs to be a global conversation that brings everyone to the same page with strategies designed and owned by multiple stakeholders to insure that our global workforce embraces and “wears” those new competencies.

Our world is dramatically changing. The old ways we have cherished for years in many cases no longer work for us. But in reality that is nothing new. Each decade that I have been blessed to be alive and witness has

brought about immense change. The challenge: our resilience and ability to embrace the change. If our workplaces are to rise to the creativity, productivity, and competitive challenges they are currently facing and excel in their endeavors, they need people who are equally up to the task via current competencies and skills and an ability to produce at levels far exceeding that which they have been challenged to in the past.

Albeit a cliché, we truly are all in this game of change together. Strategically, organizations must realign their human capital needs and provide the critical infrastructures for those realignments. Summarily dismissing people as unable to rise to the challenge without the dialogical processes that help them understand the “new-ness” of today’s environment will not foster an enduring organizational brand. So, I am again respectfully positing that while this book is primarily aimed at those who have lost jobs, are looking for career changes, or as a graduating student, beginning a new career, it is also intended to provide a different paradigmatic perspective for those who are doing the employing!

Even in the midst of a “new game” existing, until we learn how to strategically address and communicate that new game, the recycling of employees will continue—even in better economic markets. Yes, losing a job is hard, but it is also an opportunity to vision and implement a life we may have been unwilling to engage in because of our commitment to an old life style which no longer fits who we really are or our current environment. And yes, the layoff process is a painful process. But as an agent of change, I see endless possibilities to not only turn around the economic barriers we now face but also engage in a productive dialogue as we talk through these issues. The outcome—a state of peace and understanding of everyone’s needs in today’s global work environment that not only better prepares the workforce but also strengthens the core of our organizations by shoring up their most valuable asset—their people!

So, walk with me as we engage in this conversation. Believe in yourself as you reflect upon where you stand in today’s market, and most important... don’t give up!

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Acknowledgments

Once again, I give thanks to my God for guiding me as I wrote this book, and I continue to give thanks for friendship. A special thank you goes to my business colleague, but most important my friend, Mrs. Dortha Brown, who continued to provide me with a voice of conscience as she read what I wrote, despite the many revisions, prodded me to make sure I was staying focused, and has worked with me down through the years as we consulted on the many topics in this book. No matter how early in the morning we would have to leave out to address audiences on the critical topics discussed in this book, Doty was always there by my side, supporting, working both on the scene as well as behind the scenes to make sure we were giving it our best.

I am also grateful for the confidence and collegiality shown by my publisher, Palgrave Macmillan and my editor, Charlotte Maiorana and her editorial assistant, Leila Campoli. They saw and believed in the vision of this book.

I dedicate this book to my family. My two children, Jodie and Caitlin are always an inspiration. I can still remember many years ago how my son Jodie when he was a little “man” would go with me to job training seminars and turn the pages of the overheads, long before Power Point and similar technological presentation options were available. And, I can always count on Caitlin to critique my work right before a presentation. Equally important, I will never forget the love and patience shown by my late husband Jodie during the many occasions I would leave home to embark upon the many ventures, domestic as well as international that sowed so many seeds for this book and my other writing initiatives.

I am also very grateful for the many people who called upon me to help them with their job search process down through the years and those individuals who invited me into their communities to speak on the various topics addressed in this book. It has been over 30 years since

I first began counseling on job search strategies. However, those interactions provided me with many opportunities to grow in my understanding that success is not just about developing an excellent resume, but your career and/or job success is about your personal growth and development.

I also want to give thanks to the thousands of people who read our blog. The Enlightened Blog on our consulting web site (www.enlighteningmanagementconsultants.com) is where the thoughts for writing this book began. The Blog was developed to provide people with help, which in so many ways was otherwise elusive as a free public service. Thousands of people have read the Blog, commented and encouraged us to continue providing this service. People from over 45 countries including our own have been sources of encouragement as well as providers of critical feedback.

In closing, I am so blessed by God and eternally grateful to you—my readers.

May Grace always be with you as you find your “new” way.

Introduction

Our lens represents our interpretative schemas. In other words, how we view ourselves, our origins, and our lives impacts how we interpret and explain our environment, our personal world, and, equally important, our perceived entitlements in this world. Yet, change should be incorporated into our world view in order to effectively evaluate our “new” entitlements.

You see, the change we are now experiencing is both gradual as well as radical. For example, 17 years ago, it was suggested that organizational environments of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries were marked by turbulence and rapidly evolving information technologies (Lair, Sullivan, and Cheney, 2005).

“The major economic shifts in the industrial world since the mid 1980s have been well documented (V. Smith, 1997, 2001). Significant trends include the widespread privatization of public services, corporate mergers and consolidation of industries, technological replacement of many jobs, elimination of middle management in many firms, reduced labor costs through industrial relocation, disaggregation (or molecularization) of the organizational value change (Taspcott, 1997), outsourcing of non-core functions, and team-based restructuring with a new emphasis on individual entrepreneurship.” (Lair, Sullivan and Cheney, 2005, p. 315)

Sixteen years later, Drenzo and Greenhaus suggested that advances in globalization, technology, and increased market pressures continue to force organizations to change the nature of how they manage human capital, often resulting in large-scale job reallocations, which are the norm in today’s environment as organizations respond to pressures to increase profits, organizational flexibility and emerge as or remain lean (Drenzo and Greenhaus, 2011). In 2010, Heinrichs and Lim reported that today’s knowledge-based economy is now requiring every organizational member to possess the ability to generate, critically analyze,

and disseminate knowledge and ideas to support effective knowledge sharing (Heinrichs and Lim, 2010). It has been suggested that five core skills enable this critical competency; basic computer skills, advanced computer skills, internet capability, research, and presentation skills (Pask and Sanders, 2004 as reported in Heinrichs and Lim, 2010). Unfortunately, far too many workers are not equipped with these new competencies and skills, in concert with others which will be later referenced. As a result, organizations are intentionally not developing long-term employment relationships or new psychological contracts—the unspoken agreements—that favor a more long lasting relationship between the worker and the organization.

New global economic structures reward and mandate new configurations of economic relations, work skills human and social capitals well as the resources of flexible capacities, agility and creativity versus the physical and material resources once emphasized in our industrial eras (Jorgensen and Taylor, 2008). As a result, tasks that can be provided despite geographical distance across multiple industry sectors are moving toward much more off-shoring (2008). The paradigm shift regarding labor competition has dramatically shifted. National economies now operate as competitors for labor in an international (global) labor market, which is complicating and precipitating the broadening international search for employees with the requisite competencies and skills (2008).

Multiple business sectors are being impacted. Information technology enabled services are dramatically moving toward this borderless configuration. Back office related services and data analysis functions in addition to call centers and medical transcription functions are just a few of the technology-enabled services that are now global jobs (2008).

More savvy employees are taking a proactive stance. In an effort to move past organizations' hesitancy to develop long-term relationships with employees whose skills sets could become challenged and/or outdated, the change in employee/employer relationships have positioned employees toward a focus on their personal development versus a reliance on employee and/or management professional development strategies (Direnzo and Greenhaus, 2011). Workers need transferable skills in concert with an acute awareness of opportunities (2011). Personal branding, irrespective of your level in an organization has become a common strategy when looking to impact your organization, and is a topic that is addressed in this book.

It has been suggested that an individual's personal brand should be authentic and emerge from your search for your identify and meaning

in life (Rampersad, 2010). Yet, it is hard to search for your identity and meaning in life in order to develop their personal brand if you have yet to understand how you currently view you, your position in life, and the life experiences that have formed your viewpoints.

Until you are ready to ground yourself, engage in self-discovery, and move beyond the mindset of being acted upon—passivity which can destroy one's opportunities in today's dramatically changing global environment—you may struggle with successful branding. In the midst of a dynamically changing environment, we cannot afford passivity to be our guiding praxis. There clearly is a downside to being passive. For starters, the psychological contracts that previously governed the workforce no longer exist in today's environment. Consequently, simply coming to work, working hard, and even long hours no longer guarantees you a place in the organization. The new organizational rules require participants who are willing to assume responsibilities that in most cases clearly go beyond their job descriptions.

Yet, I still remember when growing up how loyalty to the employee in exchange for hard work on the job were unspoken agreements. This relationship ended years ago, evidenced by the massive layoffs that began occurring in the late 1980s where people who were close to retirement were dismissed, many without a bridge to their retirement benefits. Even then, the rules of the game changed! More is now expected of the employee and as a result, this economic turbulence places a premium on employees' ongoing efforts to assess and enhance their employability (Direnzo and Greenhaus, 2011).

We need to possess a clear and unobstructed lens in order to understand how to play *and* stay in an environment where the rules have changed! Today's workforce has to examine and understand our ontologies, epistemologies, and hermeneutics in order to construct our new place, which may mean restructuring old personal belief systems. In other words, change calls for our understanding how we personally view, internalize, and interact with our world in concert with how we filter life through our lens. The dynamics of this turbulent environment also requires that we spiritually ground ourselves in our personal power and relationship with our Creator. Far too many people have personally internalized the outcomes of this changing work environment and assumed that reductions in workforce, job, and/or salary freezes and all the other types of challenging outcomes associated with a volatile economy is a personal affront to the self. These activities are not personal, but you have to understand how to grab hold of your own reins and reposition yourself to successfully move through the turbulence.

If there ever was a time for self-love, spiritual grounding, a heightened level of efficacy and an unwavering belief in one's self—that time is now!

When we effectively work to better understand ourselves, we may learn that we have to leave old patterns of behaviors, psychologies, and historical paradigmatic perspectives behind to move forward. Our world is a profound world of change and it is not standing still for anyone! Understanding our personal history, privileging it, and, equally important, questioning it can facilitate the emergence of a new understanding of the present and our basis for why and how we internalize and react to events in our lives . . . constituting a new awakening that yields a richer understanding of self, and results in a better understanding and reframing of a richer future (Barrett and Srivastva, 1991).

Privileging your lens is important to the personal transformation needed to forge ahead through this turbulence. Pettigrew suggested that an individual's willingness to open space for our personal qualities and experiences to emerge also opens space for another level of a consciousness of meaning to enter that can be subtle; yet of significant impact when deconstructing how we create and manage sense and meaning (Pettigrew, 1979). Today's economies, social, and political environments clearly call for a higher level of consciousness and ability to manage sense and meaning. We have to look beyond the obvious to understand what is occurring in our environment and not inappropriately internalize the outcomes.

I intentionally wrote this book in a format that moves beyond the parameters of simply helping people learn how to write resumes and cover letters, network, and execute the job search process. I challenge you to compare and contrast yourself to today's environment, vision your new place, and begin your personal reinvention processes as you critically examine the information that now resides on your resume and cover letter, I challenge you to compare and contrast your educational background to the need for knowledge workers who possess multiple competencies and skills, augmented by a global world view and a propensity to engage in the acquisition of new knowledge on a routine basis while concomitantly daily challenging one's paradigms and perspectives! Sounds like a lot? Yes, it is, but you better believe its today's reality.

The propositions in this book can and should be extended to a global audience. We face economic meltdowns and/or severe fluctuations throughout our world, which also means that the global workforce is facing issues of unemployment, underemployment, and/or a lack of

contemporized competencies and skills. Yet, the beauty of our matriculation through this new century is our ability to reinvent self and our place in this emerging change. Fluctuations are frightening if embraced with psychological restrictions. Yet, when we open ourselves to newness of this world, our “possibilities” are endless.

Within the scope of multinational, transnational, international, and/or localized businesses, the challenges are immense, and a new set of expectations for today’s workforce no longer has the luxury of being a “nice-to have” but has quickly become a “must.” Many in the global workforce understand these changes, but just as many do not have a clue as to what has dramatically shifted in their environment. Therefore, the goal of this book is to help the reader understand what differentiates today’s job market from the past’s. This book is designed to help you understand how to introspectively evaluate your readiness to compete in today’s market in concert with a model that defines strategies you can develop for positively evoking the change you *need* and *desire* (figure I.1).

The Enlightened Blog

The idea for this book began with a blog that was developed on my consulting website in 2009, which was (and continues to be) called the “The Enlightened Blog.” The blog serves as a free public service to update people on the “new rules” of the game relative to job search strategies, required competencies and skills, and other critical interpersonal and intrapersonal issues germane to the job search process. What drove me to write the blog was my receiving far more email and telephone requests to review resumes than I could handle. My colleague and I thought the blog would be an appropriate answer to providing people with the technical assistance they would need in today’s market. Yet, the blog’s biggest audience is not and does not continue to be people from this country.

While I have not contributed to the blog since I began writing this book, the blog is still actively read. People from *over* 45 countries on multiple continents have and continue to read the blog. People who live in small countries I have never heard are perusing pages. Yet, I have to remind my American colleagues that the blog is there to help them. Therefore, to augment the blog, I decided to write this book, which extensively goes beyond the information in the blog. This book is written with the intent to evoke a different conversation when one juxtaposes where they are to today’s new requirements. We have to change

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our paradigmatic perspectives and coping strategies in order to grow our personal as well economic competitive edges.

So, once again I respectfully ask you to walk with me as we engage in this conversation. Believe in yourself as you reflect upon where you stand in today's market, and most important . . . don't give up!

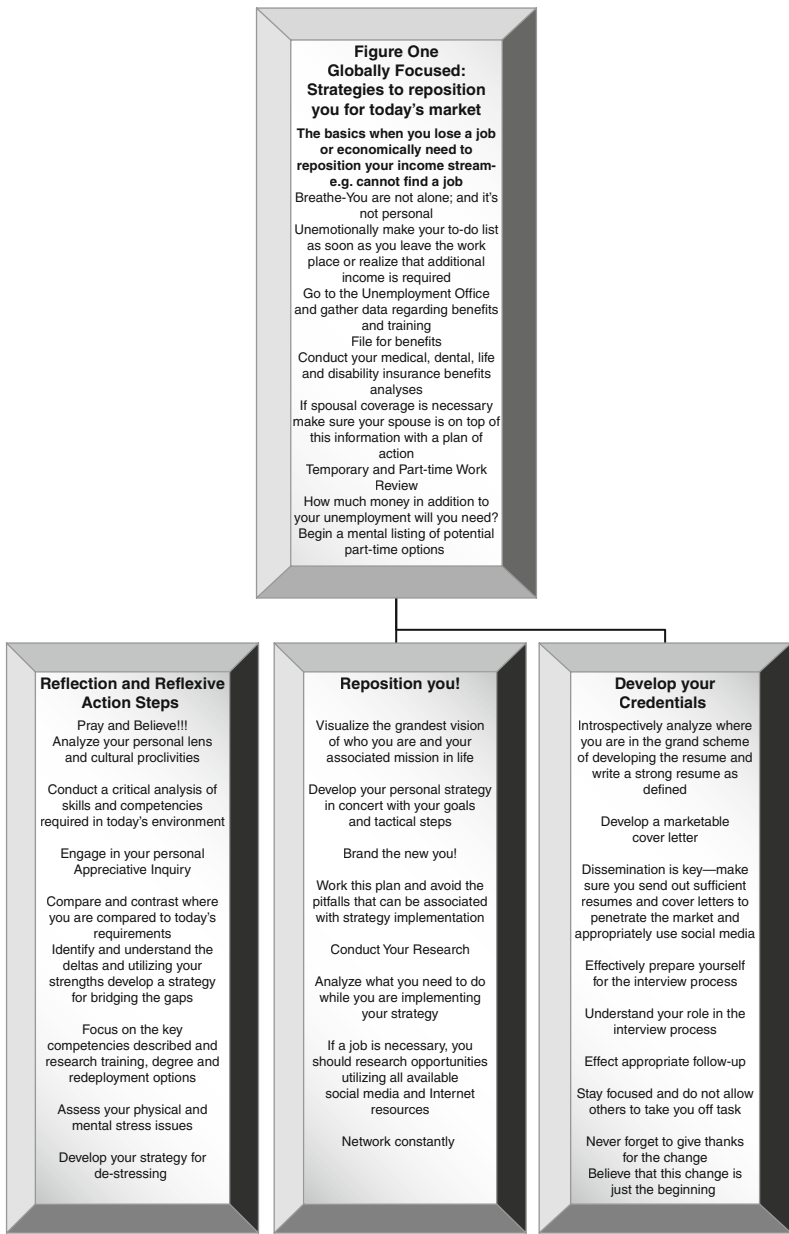


Figure I.1 Model.

PART I

*The Interpersonal and Intrapersonal
Dynamics Organizations Now Require*

CHAPTER 1

The Realities of a New Organizational Psychological Contract: Your Career, Your Responsibility, Your Personal Development Strategy

Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.
In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.
Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

—William Henley, 1888¹

There are fundamental realities in today's global job market that merit disclosure and your acknowledgment. First, in order to understand what is occurring in today's global job market, erase your prior assumptions, paradigms, and expectations.

Second, understand that it is YOU who is responsible for navigating through this continually emerging and dynamic job market—not your employer.

Third, understand that when you are released from a job or have difficulty finding a job, it is not the end of your world. It could very well be a new beginning if you embrace what is silently being conveyed to you and choose to understand and evoke the change that you need.

Fourth, the requirements of today's workforce will continue to expand. Growth is what we are about in this world. Change, under normal circumstances is sometimes hard, but the need to change the “self” in order to move beyond current employment barriers can sometimes be overwhelming. However, changing one's self in order to effectively navigate the current work environment is not overwhelming or impossible to achieve. You have to know where to start and learn the “new rules of the game,” while simultaneously understanding that there are workable and achievable strategies for evoking the required change. Equally important, we have to understand how our personal lens and cultural propensities will moderate our response patterns and readiness to accept change and forward movement.

Understanding who you are, your biases that are informed by many aspects of your cultural background, personality, belief systems, and attitude about life will make a difference as to how successful you are in embracing the change that this world continues to undertake.

Language as an Influencer on How We View Our World

For example, a significant aspect of how we process and cope with change in our life is manifested in our language—the language we speak and the language patterns we allow others to use to address us. Yet, when we deconstruct and analyze our lens and linguistic patterns, the knowledge we gain about the “self” can and will allow us to emerge in better control of even the direst situations. I often hear people say the word “try” versus “will.” While many do not understand the differences—they are more than subtle. The word “try” often can be interpreted as one believing that they are not in control of the outcome. Yet the use of the word “will” conveys an unbridled determination to do what is needed and simultaneously expect the right outcome.

Understanding the pattern of language in the business environment is also crucial. It allows you to compare and contrast your articulation of the world to that of your organizational environment. It is common for organizations to increase the number of messages that call for

innovation strategies in their branding and rebranding efforts (Lair, Sullivan, and Cheney, 2005). The real question is do you recognize and understand those messages? Equally important, do you understand what those messages mean relative to the change that the organization intends to undertake and are you prepared to be a part of that shift—or are you embracing outdated paradigms relative to what constitutes success in your organization?

I have served in higher education for 19 years. I am an Associate Professor of Management and management consultant to public and private sector organizations. In addition to teaching, I have worked in higher education administration in the capacities of director, dean, and assistant provost. And, before coming into academia, I spent over 20 years in the corporate business sector in management and executive positions primarily in the areas of human resource management and organization development, which significantly inform my perspectives articulated in this book. Yet, I am keenly aware that despite my three degrees and work experiences, today's global environment has forced me to constantly engage in an ongoing learning process.

I cannot afford to rest on my laurels because I possess a PhD. In a matter of moments that doctorate can and will become “stale” with respect to today's new and emerging knowledge. As a result, I am always engaging in ways to learn—I have no choice. It is not my option but a requirement in order to stay current in today's environment, and it is not an option for you as well. Employers expect their workers to be current in not only their relevant skills but also the core competencies that are critical in today's global market—a concept that I continue to emphasize throughout this book.

Over time, many social scientists have concluded our knowledge; relationship to self, others, activity, and to our world is constituted and mediated by our engagements in our world; our resulting discourse as well as our social practices (Ricoeur, 1992; Cobb, 1994; Piaget, 1970/1972; Steffe and Gale, 1995; Tobin, 1993; von Glasersfeld, 1993; Packer and Goicoechea, 2000). Simply put, how you respond to today's job market, your position in it, and strategies for evoking change will be informed by how you “see,” internalize, and verbally articulate your world. The dynamics of this global world, where barriers that previously existed are daily being redefined and/or removed, suggest that we personally challenge our knowledge, relationship to self, and perception of our world—particularly our perception of this global world and resulting global labor markets.

Therefore, the point in which this book begins relative to providing strategies for moving through today's challenging job market is at a

very personal level where you are challenged to introspectively look at yourself. The poem *Invictus* by William Henley is very appropriate for setting this tone. You see, you truly are the captain of your soul!

You will never be able to effectively work through a global organizational foci if you personally feel and internalize limitations. I recently overheard a conversation in a restaurant where a young woman was vehemently stating that she would never ever in life travel to certain countries—yet, obviously she did not understand that these same countries are drawing major US businesses. Consequently, if her employer overheard her discourse as did I, automatically she could be perceived as a person unfit for international travel and/or work; thereby potentially missing what could emerge as important career opportunities.

Today's global environment suggests that challenge is what we know and challenge is what we will continue to "do." Consequently, we have to be willing to embrace a different approach as to how we process our reality. Historically, we have had to constantly adjust our paradigmatic perspectives to accommodate environments that may be designed to lock out certain people. Women, for example, have routinely faced visible as well as invisible walls, despite the contention by many that we are moving through the glass ceilings. Employees across the world face similar issues, which are only moderated by their particular "difference." But if we are to globally survive, we have to learn to strategize—and remove barriers. However, before we work to remove those barriers, we have to remove the *personal* barriers we allow to reside in the recesses of our soul—feelings of limitation, not being good enough, or blind acceptance of what we perceive to be the status quo.

We also have to have a realistic perspective regarding the cause of the massive global unemployment numbers. While many organizations are downsizing due to economic constraints, just as many are downsizing because they are retooling their workforce. Unfortunately, many people do not understand that there are new competencies and requisite skills that are needed by organizations that are retooling as well as repositioning themselves in today's global market. Equally unfortunate is the reality that many people do not understand the fundamentals of how to competitively enter and/or reenter this job market.

We have to be honest and question if we even know what organizations (private, public, as well as governmental) are looking for in today's globally competitive environment. Equally important, do we know how to acquire those competencies and skills? Your educational qualifications will not be the only prerequisite that gets you in the door. And, you have to *believe* that you are entitled to new opportunities that can and will

emerge if you put forth the effort to alter your foundational competencies and skills. So, let's take a moment to reexamine the issue of lens.

I have learned over the course of the past several years that when I work in culturally diverse communities and/or organizations that have historically incurred an imbalance in power, developing an understanding of that which gives rise to both the larger structures of power as well as those who are on the opposite end of that power continuum is critical. From a global context, many communities fall in this category, yet there is debate relative to the appropriateness of viewing the individual as helplessly manipulated by larger structures of power (Foucault, 1977; Barrett, Thomas, and Hocevar, 1995), whether you are in a different country or in the United States. Over time the very power structures we challenge often become objects of transformation even as members engage in resistance, which only points to our need to understand the recursive dynamics of organizational and global change (Barrett, Thomas, and Hocevar, 1995).

Despite the pain and hurt we experience when victimized by job loss, underemployment, and other fall outs from a very volatile economy, the lessons we are challenged to learn are the new rules of the workforce, our ability to identify and internalize the critical core competencies and skills required in today's tumultuous markets, and to go deep inside ourselves and evoke a spiritual, mental, emotional, and intellectual transformation.

I believe the shake up that is occurring in today's job market, while in real time is negatively impacting people, will also serve as our motivation for massive personal transformation. As a workforce, we are being forced to grow in order to expand our options and ability to effectively perform in a very different global work environment. Equally important, understand that the definition of a global market has nothing to do with whether or not you personally are working in a different country. The dynamics of change that now impacts organizations whose products and services reside on an international, multinational, or transnational basis suggest the organization rising (if not already) to a different level. Economic pressure precipitated what Jack Welch once called the boundary-less organization (Direnzo and Greenhaus, 2011), which multiple sectors are now embracing. A boundary-less organization seeks to blur or minimize barriers that inhibit communications and productivity across vertical, horizontal, external, and geographical organizational boundaries (2011), which results in boundary-less careers that are independent from traditional organizational career arrangements.

The Need to Challenge Our Guiding Praxis as We Work to Better Understand Who We Are

Recently, I had a conversation with a colleague who was musing about how inappropriate her organization was treating her and others when it came to issues of salary and its respective inequities. As she was talking and venting, I reflected upon and shared a conversation I had with one of my seminary professors. During a class discussion, I adamantly said that African Americans should stand up and challenge the “system” as it pertained to the issue under discussion. My professor, however calmly conveyed how the “system,” in whatever form we choose to describe it, is always morphing—which means that the most important focus and strategy for change lies within ourselves and how we view the concept of self and our own personal power. I shared this point with my colleague and stated that if in fact you are so disenchanting, have you reflected upon your personal aspirations and laid a strategy for achieving them . . . irrespective of what the organization is or is not doing for you?

Your career, salary, and progress should never be contingent upon another party choosing to do the right thing. Your achievements and progress need to lie within your own personal control and domain. But, if you are psychologically fighting baggage that you are not openly aware of—the likelihood of your moving to that level of self-awareness that empowers you to gain your respective goals will be slim to none. My most enlightening understanding of “self” has emerged from books I have read that have fallen under the domain of Black psychology, beginning with the work of Price Cobb and William Grier—*Black Rage* (Grier and Cobbs, 1968). I read that book 40 years ago and never forgot its critical lessons. We have to make conscious choices regarding personal and professional ideologies, as they pertain to assimilation versus accommodation in our workplaces (and other areas of our lives).

In many ways, we are being challenged to question our feelings regarding the personal transformation employer's expect us to make. If you feel like you are losing a critical part of “you” when engaging in a transforming process, understand why. Arming myself with answers to questions regarding my personal definition of “self” enabled me for years to better understand and work through the battles I endured as a woman climbing the ladder in corporate America. And, it has equally armed me with understanding my challenges as I have moved through my academic career.

You see, in academia the issues are similar to those in the corporate business sector. In 2011, I contributed a chapter to the book, *The Black Professoriate, Negotiating a Habitable Space in the Academy*, and in that chapter I wrote

“Higher education was a place where I initially thought that if you had a mission to educate students, worked to be recognized in your respective discipline, served your institution, community and surrounding stakeholders, while working hard to accomplish the criteria for performance, tenure and promotion, you would be successful in achieving your goals. I never imagined as I made the decision to switch careers that higher education has just as many barriers as the business sector I left. However, over the course of the sixteen years I have spent in higher education, despite an solid record of serving my respective institutions and students, a vita that reflects many accomplishments and the willingness to step in when asked and address extremely tough administrative situations, producing solutions and results that have significantly surpassed those produced by my predecessors, I have felt racism, sexism and a level of marginalization that rivals the business environment I left. Yet, through each endeavor, I have never bowed my head in submission or failure. The last sixteen years has reinforced my understanding of how unconquerable is my soul. In many ways, I thank the Academy for inculcating discomfort, for it is in this discomfort that I have experienced the additional dimensions of strength, personal growth and what it means to truly be the captain of one’s ship.” (Easley, pp. 45)

My lessons were not learned overnight, and I am still learning how to privilege, but most important is understand my lens when engaging in change. I applaud my colleagues—African American female scholars who unwaveringly take the position that feminism in general has been developed by Caucasian women with *their* histories, which limits the relevance of feminism for other women of color in the United States who have different experiences of domination. In other words, they have learned to privilege their personal lens of color, regardless of how one defines the varying hues.

I strongly believe that the hermeneutical approach that forms womanist interpretations is very contextual and truly does begin with the social location of the Black woman, which must be privileged. Black women still face marginalization in the workforce. Black women across the world face varying forms of marginalization. However, it is important that we understand it is not about us. We are not “less” than. In addition to the traditionally discussed glass ceilings, women of color

face many more barriers that have the ability to deplete our spirits. Yet, we often inappropriately internalize the attacks we daily face—thinking something is wrong with us (Mitchem, 2002; Brown, 2004; hooks, 1995; Easley, 2011)!

Consequently, those that write from a womanist perspective versus a feminist view address a world that entails multiple forms of oppression that simultaneously work to marginalize Black women, which ultimately impacts our families, relationships, and view of self (Mitchem, 2002; Brown, 2004). However, to successfully navigate through these realities, we need to be in tune with our true nature by understanding and appreciating the beauty we carry inside ourselves.

Many cultures write about the issue of self-discovery and how necessary it is for survival in today's work and personal environments. However, we often do not take the time to cross reference literatures. When I was attending seminary, I had the opportunity to study in my global ministry class the work of the late Gloria Anzaldua who closely examined issues of the Mestiza culture, with a particular emphasis on Mestiza women. She set forth the proposition that Mestizas walk a borderland of consciousness, which she saw as being marked by a plurality of personality that possesses psychic restlessness (Robinson-Easley, 2012). I believe the concepts and constructs Anzaldua suggested in her work are relative to many cultures that immigrate to other lands, yet continually grapple with working to “fit in,” issues that can and do spill over into the workplace.

Juxtaposed against this psychic restlessness was a conflict she observed between perceiving oneself as visible and concomitantly invisible because one has been forced to walk outside the boundaries of that which was originally your culture . . . a culture that was taken over, rendering you as the “other” (Anzaldua, 2007; Anzaldua and Keating, 2002).

In liberation theology, we often find the concept of “othering” addressed. The term “othering” is often used to connote difference, and when speaking of people who have different characteristics from those considered to be “mainstream,” will often include concepts of the demonization and dehumanization of groups, which further justifies attempts to civilize and exploit these “inferior” others (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Other>; Robinson-Easley, 2012).

However, Anzaldua posited that because the Mestiza endures and is able to cross over these invisible (and physical) barriers, the Mestiza evolves from this “othering” experience and emerges a stronger and a more malleable species, forced to embrace hybridity and flexibility; attributes that strengthens the character and will to survive—necessary

core competencies in today's global workforce. Within the context of her discussions of this *Mestiza*, she also addressed added layers; for her, the layer equally profound was that of a lesbian woman who had to work through the internal trauma of going against the grain of her culture relative to the role and responsibilities of a traditional Mexican woman (Anzaldúa, 2007; Robinson-Easley, 2012).

People across the globe have many individual layers and those layers can impact our self-esteem and view of our external world whether we openly acknowledge them or not. Yet, when we make the conscious choice to openly acknowledge the self, understand the context of our current environments, deconstruct the holistic environment for its positive as well as negative attributes, we can significantly impact our strength, self-esteem, and focus on where we want to stand in this current "space."

As we understand and deconstruct those layers, we cannot allow them to become impediments to the need for us to develop the change that is necessary to effectively compete within a global market. Understanding the "self" should be the first level of knowledge for productively moving forward with our lives; which is why I believe Anzaldúa also saw the counter stance that the *Mestiza* assumes as a step toward liberation. (Anzaldúa, 2007; Anzaldúa and Keating, 2002, Robinson-Easley, 2012).

At this point, you may ask the question, what does all of this have to do with the fact that I have either lost my job or I am at risk of losing my job; or I have never had an opportunity to engage in really gainful employment? What does this have to do with the fact that I am so angry about my employment situation that the anger continues to rise in my throat and I feel like I am choking. What does this have to do with the fact that I strongly believe I was negatively impacted by a supervisor or manager who had it in for me! What does any of this have to do with the reality of my situation?

Losing Control Versus Taking Control

While you may feel locked out from today's economic job market, in order to change that situation you have to critically understand how you have internalized and equally important are responding to the "lock-out." There are many ways in which people are locked out of employment and career advances and have their roots in "isms," which legally have been outlawed, but still exist. You can neither "control" "them" or the situations! Yet, you can control "you"!

Your cultural perspectives impact how you view and respond to your situations. If you understand those perspectives and lens through which you view your world, you will be much better equipped to infuse positive-oriented behaviors into your new strategy that allow you to move past other people's (and the organization's) baggage.

Let's go back to my previous example. If as an African American woman, I blindly by in to the praxes of feminism without privileging the specific context in which I personally reside, I could be left thinking something is wrong with me. However, if I look to the reality of my situation and understand how I have to "shore" up for *me*: by loving me, understanding the nuances of my environment, and recognizing the skills and qualifications that I should possess to get into the "game," I am not focusing on that which I "can't do," nor am I buying into being a victim, I am focusing on attaining the grandest vision of who I have the ability to be!

You should also be honest and question if you are really in tune with the changes that continue to occur in this global workforce? It pains me to have to counsel so many college graduates (graduate and undergraduates) who are not successfully obtaining employment. Employers are looking for a combination of competencies, skills, education, and demonstrated accomplishments that often people possess—but do not know how to effectively articulate on the resume in order to "sell" themselves. Culturally, some of us are conditioned not to "sell" ourselves. Equally important, it is hard to sell yourself if you are not feeling good about you.

Culturally, many people have been conditioned to believe that they do not have the same worth as their peers in today's job market. However, we have to identify, understand, and, in many cases, change those cultural proclivities that can work to impose personal limitations—hence the need to understand when and how to privilege our lens! It is our choice to take a holistic view of self, environment, personal beliefs, values, and response patterns, and it is clearly our choice to change them when they no longer become useful in the current environment.

The Landscape of Change

The structure and increased competitiveness of today's global economy have set the stage for organizational leaders across the globe to now require workers who are more self-directed, willing to assume greater responsibilities for planning, executing, and improving their work and

are focused and engaged in becoming a knowledge worker where they take responsibility for and manage their own learning and development over the course of their working lives (Williams, 2005).

Yet this is not a new requirement. In the 1980s and 1990s, the United States in concert with similarly advanced economies such as Great Britain and Australia embarked upon a series of industrial and educational reforms designed to improve their competitiveness in a globalizing world economy (Williams, 2005). I clearly remember the challenges that my colleagues and I had in the late 1980s as we worked to develop the critical success factors and associated curricula for driving the corporate strategy for a major US steel manufacturer. Our reality at that time was how much training we would have to do to get people to the entry level of required skills and competencies. These challenges were similarly felt across the globe.

For example,

“The reorganization of the Australian vocational education and training (VET) system was part of an interrelated set of federal government policy initiatives whose purpose was to secure a more highly skilled and productive workforce in the face of rapid industrial and technological change. Reforms to VET in Australia involved the introduction of a unified national credentialing system and competency-based training (CBT), the development and endorsement of national competency standards, national accreditation and assessment frameworks and, later, the development of industry training packages. Importantly, the reformed VET system in Australia would be “industry led,” that is, more closely aligned with industry and employer needs.” (Williams, 2005, p. 35)

Today, in academic meetings, universities across the world still are questioning how to infuse into their respective courses, competencies that are required of today’s labor force. Academicians are still working through strategies relative to designing and developing a pedagogical context that will evoke this worker profile (van Vucht Tijssen and De Weert, 2005), which is particularly challenging for those secondary school systems that are still graduating students below average in critical skills. Yet, our international competitors are aggressively moving forward with these initiatives. The expansion of global capitalism to China, India, and the former Soviet Block countries that have expansive technological workforce competencies, has allowed them to double their supply of labor available to the global capitalist system (Jorgensen and Taylor, 2008). Workforce growth is expected to be the strongest among developing nations (2008). Therefore, when we look to understand the

global competition for talent, we must compare and contrast the varying quality of national education systems (2008).

I first heard about the Bologna declaration in 2004 when I was at an international management conference in Sweden. Architects of the Bologna declaration and Lisbon objectives were (and still are) focused on obtaining an international equivalence between academic degrees in order to standardize the educating processes aimed to increase competencies of higher education graduates. In the context of the Joint Quality Initiative, competencies were defined at the bachelor and master's levels, resulting in minimum qualifications that every graduate would be required to possess, irrespective of disciplinary areas (van Vucht Tijssen and De Weert, 2005).

Another movement, which continues to be advanced in the international arena, is the movement away from context-specific competencies to transferable competencies and skills across occupations (2005). For example, in the United Kingdom, it has been assumed that equipping graduates for the world of work can be achieved through the possession of core competencies and skills that are transferable across multiple contexts (van Vucht Tijssen and De Weert, 2005).

These global activities are not just relegated to the private sector and are globally impacting public sector entities. For example, in Malaysia, the Government realized that performance, efficiency, and effectiveness in public service could be enhanced through implementing appropriate knowledge management practices in line with their private sector colleagues (Kasim, 2008). Equally important, the position that the Malaysian Government took was that these goals should be implemented and improved in parallel with the goals of national development (2008). In 2010, while visiting Turkey as a part of US-based delegation of business professors whose role during that trip was to study the business, educational, and political sectors of Turkey, I saw a similar stance and was very impressed with the manner in which they aligned the competencies and skills taught at university levels to the strategy of the country.

Malaysia's resolution to their dilemma was to implement the Malaysia Remunerative System, which emphasized knowledge management principles in concert with requiring all civil servants to attend mandatory courses every year to enhance their competency and efficiencies (Kasim, 2008). I have seen similar programs in France. When I have taught management classes in the French Caribbean, I am teaching students whose businesses are assuming the training and advanced degree costs, a requirement of the French government versus our nonobligatory tuition

reimbursement benefits. Similarly, Malaysia is not only implementing knowledge management practices but also inculcating a lifelong learning culture among government employees (2008).

Yet, while some countries are more aggressive in engaging in public policy to address labor market issues, for many at risk workers, such as late career workers, the aging workforce, public policy approaches that incorporate language of individual responsibility does little to positively impact the needs of this workforce (Jorgensen and Taylor, 2008). Consequently, workers need to be aggressive with their own change strategies!

Comprehensively understanding our world is said to emanate from our activities and experiences, which produces a social context that can impact how we emerge (Davies, 1991). Yet in many societies, particularly in the United States, we tend to be very insular.

People get angry when they lose their jobs or feel that they have been mistreated by their organization. And, that rage is quite understandable. It has been suggested that irrespective of how you term the loss of a job—layoff, downsizing, rightsizing or reengineering—the loss of a job ranks third as one of life's greatest traumas, just behind death and divorce (Lewison, 2002). There are a number of blockages that impacted people who have lost jobs or are careering late in life will have to work through. Dislocated knowledge workers whose competencies and skills are more firm specific are being forced out of jobs previously thought to be secure. Older workers still are facing age discrimination in concert with many possessing outdated competencies and skills. And, if they chose to not retool, their reentry into a job market will be very hard, despite public policy attempts to ease their transition (Jorgensen and Taylor, 2008).

It has also been suggested that only a thinly veiled line exists between a cry for justice and expressions of hate. Rage has a way of being uncontrollable and unstoppable, and unless its energy is redirected, the rage will consume the self (Butler, 2006). Rage will develop when people believe their humanity is denied and one's existence is controlled by those who attempt to objectify their existence (2006). However, there is also a duality in rage...the creative transformation that conquers circumstances and restores the soul to living a life with joy (2006).

What will it take for you to be at peace in your life? What will it take for you to be in charge of your career and job search processes and/or decisions as to whether or not you even want to play the new rules of the game? What will it take for you to move your anger and/or rage to a place of creative transformation? Age or the time in which you are

entering or reentering a job market does not have to be a major blockage if you are focused, understand the terrain and are determined to effectively navigate through this wave of change.

What will it take for you to understand that the rules of today's game actually began changing years ago? In other words, . . . what is it going to take embrace transforming "you" so that you truly emerge as the captain of your soul? Change needs to first occur internally before one can change their external circumstances.

Yes—you may have lost your job; or you may feel locked into a situation that you just don't like—underemployment. But until you personally embrace the opportunities that await you, go down the path of discomfort as you reposition yourself, you will continue to stay locked in a sea of cognitive dissonance, feeling disempowerment. Your personal change is not about what an employer can or cannot do for you. In the United States, we live in a very individualist culture. People as a rule are primarily focused on self. Yet, even those countries where the collective good is a primary focus are being challenged by issues regarding today's global employment and resulting paradigms and psychological contracts.

Today and a fast-forwarding tomorrow bring forth so much opportunity. It is our choice to move out of our personal comfort zones and assume the navigation of our lives.

CHAPTER 2

The Revised Relationship between Employer and Employee: Why New Rules of Engagement and Revised Psychological Contracts Are Globally Required

A Glimpse at Foundational Concepts: Viewing a Different Paradigm of Human Capital Management

This chapter is primarily written for employers. Yes, organizations' need for a different employee profile has indeed changed. And yes, there is no doubt that many people, across the globe either do not understand the specifics of or existence of this change or have chosen not to respond to it. But most important, what research and reports tell us is that employers and employees are not having effective conversations as to what has changed, what is now needed relative to human capital competencies and skills, and how both (the employees and their respective organizations) can better support one another in attaining the organization's goals.

Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to make the business case for revising the relationship between employees and employers, which hopefully will delimit the need to incur significant organizational turnover.

Years ago, the old psychological contract was interpreted to infer that if you worked hard, was loyal to your employer, you would retire from that organization—drawing your pension and obtaining your “gold watch” or some similar artifact that represented loyalty and longevity. However, that psychological contract and associated values began to wane the latter part of the twentieth century.

Many people were taken by surprise when the changes occurred. I remember in the early 1990s teaching graduate courses in human resource management and hearing about employees who had been with their organizations for many years, only to be hit with the harsh reality that their jobs were eliminated. I was even asked to counsel some of those individuals. But what can you say when a person faces the trauma of their organization suddenly deciding to engage in a workforce reduction, restructuring, or reengineering. It does not matter what words are used to identify the action, it still is a shockingly painful process for the employee receiving the news.

While the global economy is challenging organizations to levels that they have not previously experienced, I strongly believe organizational leaders need to rethink their perspectives on their human capital management strategies. As a professor who has taught management; researched in the fields of management, human resource management, and organization development; and consulted to organizations for the past 19 years, in concert with over 20 years of experience in several corporate business contexts—I am still baffled as to why so many organizational leaders truly do not understand and incorporate into their financials the real value of human capital management.

Progressive organizational leaders understand that the concept of human capital on a global context is changing and should be considered when identifying goals and resulting strategies. For example, Bill Gates has been known to assert that the most important assets of his company are his people, recognizing that the collective knowledge, skills and abilities of his employees represent a distinctive competency that has set Microsoft apart from its competitors (Luthans, Luthans, and Luthans, 2004). Social capital, or one's resources of trust, relationships, and contact networks are also very important, impacting career success, an organization's turnover, job search help, entrepreneurship, and other areas such as intercompany learning (2004).

Knowledge work and knowledge workers have been posited to have a direct relationship to economic prosperity (Namasivayam and Denizci, 2006). Equally important, intellectual capital is thought to be the total stock of capital or knowledge-based equity that the company possesses (2006). Now, if this is true, one can respectfully suggest that when an organization engages in routinized turnover, they may be significantly depleting their organizational equity, which can dramatically impact their bottom line. This relationship is particularly important to service industries, which comprise an ever-growing component of our businesses in the twenty-first century.

Some researchers suggest that the fundamental thrust of all intellectual capital valuation models is to identify value adding intellectual and knowledge management processes and investments in order to ensure appropriate financial valuation (Namasivayam and Denizci, 2006). Therefore, human capital issues and resulting strategies and conversations may need to primarily focus on understanding individual level competencies and how to transform them into knowledge-based competitive advantages (2006). However, there are still far too many organizational leaders that do not understand and/or value this relationship and its impact on their productivity and profitability!

People want security in their lives. They want to know that what they give to the organization is valued. In fact when looking at compensation strategies, intrinsic rewards—the nonmonetary contributions to employees are typically as valued as are cash rewards. Why? Intrinsic rewards convey to organizational members that the leadership recognizes their efforts and also values them. Yet, many organizations continue to lose ground with respect to their employee relation strategies and outcomes. We push people to work in inordinate hours, and we have now come up with the clever idea of paid time off (PTO), which lumps together vacation, sick, and miscellaneous days off, thereby reducing the amount of time employees have to spend with their families for vacation. We have demoralized psychological contracts to now suggest that your time with the organization can be severely limited, especially for organizations that reside within employment at will states and then we wonder why innovation, productivity, and equally important profits are declining. The results of this decline—people eventually get laid off and then the vicious cycle repeats itself.

I cannot help but believe if we enhance the human capital relationship, made people consistently feel valued, that even in an economic downturn, organizational profit margins would not be so negatively impacted. Companies such as Microsoft, Southwest Airlines, and others have found this relationship to work for them. In fact in the midst of the trauma of September 11, 2001, Southwest Airlines was the only company that made a profit that year. Why—a very simple concept that had been valued and not compromised within that organization for years.

The primary recipe for Southwest's ongoing success was simply due to the way in which they treated their employees. There is no doubt that organizations across the world are being challenged to rise to a different level of productivity. No matter how much automation an organization has, people are still the primary focal points and the most critical expense. Therefore, it has never made sense to me why organizations

do not see that the manner in which they manage human capital may indeed be the crux of their problems when they face challenge and decline.

For as long as I have taught compensation management, which has been over 20 years, there has been one figure that appalls me yet people never seemed to pay a lot of attention to it. For the past 19 years, the percentage of people in the United States that were classified as working poor and poverty level consistently hovered around the 30 percent range. With the most recent economic challenges within our country, this number has increased. Now what does this mean? Very basically, one third of the population in the United States does not make a sustainable wage! The industries that pay substandard wages are vast, yet they are the industries that have high turnover and ongoing economic challenges.

When I teach strategic human resource management, I always suggest to my students that they focus on making the business case for doing that which we each know is morally and ethically the right thing to do. Why? Far too many organizations have reduced effective human capital management to a bottom-line approach. Yet, even when we make the business case, change can be slow to come.

Allow me to point out an example. If I am the CEO of an organization that is paying less than a sustainable wage to a majority of my employees, there is no doubt that my organization will incur high turnover, high absenteeism, low productivity, and the failure of employees to voluntarily engage in upgrading their competencies and skills. You see, they will be too busy working more than one job to really flourish on one job. My organization will lose money because of these issues. Yet, turnover is very costly and recruiting processes are also very expensive. When I lose employees, I am losing productivity. More often than not, new employees hired to replace more seasoned workers initially have lower productivity levels.

High levels of absenteeism cost because I am either running overtime and/or losing output by virtue of the absence. My employees will probably incur high medical bills due to the stress they are internalizing because they cannot effectively support their families, thereby driving up the cost of the organization's medical insurance. And, I may risk more accidents in the organization due to employee burnout and fatigue; thereby increasing my workers compensation costs. There are many more negative financial impacts upon the organization—I am just naming a few. There are also the intangible impacts such as a poor external reputation, which ultimately impacts the organization's brand and resulting competitive advantage.

If I, as the CEO and my executive team have also made the decision to lay off workers because it will be too expensive to train them, I have to factor into this decision how employees who are retained will feel. Will the higher producing employees actually stay, or will they believe that their turn could be coming next and as a result voluntarily leave the organization? The leadership team needs to calculate the costs associated with paying substandard wages and/or making decisions to reduce the workforce and hire new workers versus giving people who have been with the organization an opportunity to build their competencies and skills and pay.

The same principles hold true for organizations that fail to invest in training and development for their employees. Yes, I am very cognizant that for many organizations the prior psychological contracts associated with professional development have either diminished or no longer exist. And, as I will continue to posit throughout this book, individuals have to take control of their own professional development because those commitments on the part of the organization no longer exist. However, human resource professionals must be astute in making the business case for actions, which a leader would not normally consider—you see it is those actions that could result in improved financials for the organization.

Making the Business Case

Human resource policies influence employee decisions about staying with the organization as well as joining the organization. Employees, even in economic downturns will look to join organizations that appear to match their needs (Bellou, 2007). Consequently, human resource policies are critical elements in the formation of psychological contracts (2007).

There is indeed a dualistic relationship; human resource policies affect the formation of psychological contracts. Consequently, if the organization has policies that send members positive signals relative to the relationship then the organization can experience high levels of job satisfaction, commitment, loyalty and positive (2007). Yet, if employees believe that the organization has breached its respective psychological contract (s), employees may engage in counterproductive behaviors (2007), which definitely will impact the organization's bottom line.

In a recent study in the United Kingdom, which incorporated quantitative and qualitative research methods, human resource professionals were interviewed regarding their human capital value creation strategies and resulting disclosures. The organizations reported how

employee skills, education commitment, positive attitudes, and behaviors in concert with motivation are considered to be contributors to value creation (Beattie and Smith, 2010). In addition, the study found employers capturing information on turnover, training and development, workplace safety employee satisfaction, motivation, and commitment (2010).

Yet, some suggest that the number of organizations that engage in measuring human capital issues may be small for a variety of reasons that include the inability of human resource executives to point to data that synchs with the business programs and the value of human resource programmatic initiatives (Cantrell et al., 2006).

Executives need to make appropriate employee relations decisions. Their failure to do so can negatively impact not only the financial position of the organization but also the customer and vendor relations. When an organization decides to engage in mass staff reductions, there can be a significant impact on these relations simply because longstanding business relationships, which in some cases may have also morphed into personal friendships are lost to the organization (DiFrances, 2002). This leaves customers wondering what is occurring in your organization and is the organization still a viable supplier (2002). Often organizational leaders assume the customer understands the rationale behind layoffs. Vendors may also question how long you are going to remain in business (2002), questions that can impact many areas of supply chain management.

Understanding new psychological contracts in concert with evaluating the impact of employment decisions is critical, especially in seasons of economic downturns. Lastly, over and above the aforementioned reasons, innovation and marketplace responsiveness can also be significantly impacted when an organization decides to engage in workforce reductions. Employees are the only asset resource necessary for innovation within an organization (Di Frances, 2002). Marketplace responsiveness can also be impacted simply because continuity of staff is an asset (2002).

The option... organizational leaders should routinely revisit their psychological contracts, the impact of those current contracts upon employee morale and the resulting financial impact. Employers should also carefully consider decisions to engage in workforce reductions. It does not matter if the reductions are assumed to be needed in order to bring in employees who already possess the desired competencies and skills. Comprehensive training and development programs where employees understand the reason behind their engaging in intensive

training may be a financially sound strategy compared to layoffs and hiring new employees.

“It is far too easy to react in a kneejerk manner and opt for the anticipated near-term savings when confronted with falling revenues. Doing so, however, frequently results in decisions made upon the basis of illusory savings that, over the following months slowly vanish. The “soft” costs of mass staff reductions during economic slowdowns are often not fully felt until the economy improves. It is vital for management to carefully consider all that may be lost to the organization, and to compare the potential loss to any anticipated savings that might accrues from any planned job cuts.” (Di Frances, 2002, p. 7)

Employers should consider revising their vision of the employment relationship. In today’s global, albeit volatile economic environment, new paradigms are definitely called for when managing human capital, as well as are new conversations that should ensue between employees and employers—an issue that is addressed in chapter 16.

CHAPTER 3

The Realities of Joblessness in Today's Global Market: The Impact upon the Employee and Employer

In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.

—Albert Camus¹

You Are Not Alone

When economic issues are not up close and personal, it often becomes easier to distance yourself from the reality of the environment. Yet, all around us there are people we know whose dreams are being crushed. People cannot retire when they planned to, kid's dreams for college are being challenged, and families are being torn apart due to the psychological stresses being imposed as a result of the economy.

What can each of us do to provide support and help to colleagues, friends, and families? Information on resources and availability of jobs are critical. My consulting colleague and I routinely pass on the web address for the blog. We both believe that while we cannot change the number of jobs that are disappearing from this economy, perhaps we can help people become better prepared to represent their credentials to the employers who are hiring. The question for each of us is what can we individually do to provide support, networking, guidance, and sharing of informational resources to others? What is your role?

People need to know that others care. We have a responsibility to reach out and stay connected in order to help where we can. If ever there was a need for communities to pull together; it is now. Your role may be small—it could simply be connecting people to necessary support systems. What we have to understand, however, is that no role and

effort is too small. This is not the time to be self-centered. One of our challenges is to love people when they may not deserve to be loved as a friend or colleague. I am convinced that if you maintain your values and standards and never back down from the responsibility to help others, when your turn comes the help will emerge from areas of our lives we least expect.

Effectively working through today's challenging job market calls for change processes where we are not afraid to examine areas of our lives that require significant turnaround. Sometimes reaching out to ask a person can I help will make a world of difference when fear, desolation, and all the other negative emotions emerge within the person who loses a job or is having difficulty finding a job. Perhaps you can offer that friend and/or colleague guest passes to your health club, so that they can physically and mentally stay fit during this difficult time. Or, perhaps you can offer to serve as an exercise partner, daily and/or weekly walking with them to make sure they are getting out and getting the exercise they need to stay focused. Your role does not have to be big and magnanimous. Focus on doing what you can—but reach out.

The global economy is shifting and causing businesses to have to innovate and produce at far more sophisticated levels than they have in the past. Yet, past realities in our world still haunt us. Across the globe, joblessness is an issue that ranges from unemployed to underemployed, compromised by issues that begin with literacy deficits to a lack of understanding what competencies must be daily displayed by today's global workforce.

For example, Haji (2007) reported that in most African countries, unemployment, underemployment, and poverty levels have continued to increase and remain at very high levels, despite sustainable development efforts. Hidden unemployment due to part-time and casual employment continues to be an issue in Australia (ACOSS, 2003), in concert with a current jump in unemployment that is being attributed to the position of the Australian dollar and an overall tough global economy (BBC, 2011). Similar to many other international countries, in November 2011 it was reported that Australia's unemployment rate is expected to have risen third quarter 2011 owing to the global economic uncertainties that kept local employers from hiring new staff. However, the most unfortunate part of this report was that analysts expect the jobless rate to continue rising in the coming months (Asia Pulse, 2011).

Turkey, a country that has experienced significant economic rebound and growth over the past decade continues to experience a lack in

vocational education and the resulting skill sets across 19 regions (Hurriyet Daily News, 2011).

In the United States, the US Census Bureau released on September 13, 2011, that the national's poverty rate rose to 15.1 % in 2010, up from 14.3% in 2009, making it the highest level since 1993 (Wikipedia). On September 13, 2011, the New York Times reported the number of Americans living below the poverty line; 46.2 million people was the highest number in the 52 years the Census Bureau has been publishing figures on poverty (Tavernise, 2011). Unfortunately those numbers do not even begin to address issues of working poor, who are strapped in industries and jobs that pay less than a sustainable wage. Baden in December 2011 reported for the US News and World Report that despite the unemployment rate hovering near its lowest in more than two years, millions of Americans still remain jobless or stuck putting together part-time work in hopes of landing full-time employment, and as a result, a number of Americans are choosing to leave the country and find work in other international venues (Baden, 2011).

Needless to say, the global complexity of these issues span realms that require significant intervention and change. There are many NGO programs as well as governmental programs across a number of countries that have the mission to bridge the many education gaps that exist still in many countries. Yet, my intent is not to address the economics of these issues, nor articulate and/or critique the results of initiatives designed to evoke change—perhaps another time. I simply provide the context and strategies as to why there is a need to evoke personal change in order to rebound in a challenging job market.

“The most exciting breakthrough of the 21st century will occur not because of technology, but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human”

—John Naisbitt²

Prejudicial Realities—But Nevertheless Many Employer's Perceived Realities

In June 2009, Dana Mattioli published an article in the Wall Street Journal titled “Only the Employed Need Apply.” The article addressed how employers who have job openings prefer candidates who are already employed. There now appears to be another stigma attached to being unemployed. The article addressed how many employers have the perception that if you were part of a cutback and others survived, you may

not have the skills and competencies that the hiring authorities now need (Mattioli, 2009). Although I do not agree with the tenets of this article, I do know that this is a real perception that has to be addressed by those looking for work. Shortly after this article was published, I attended a training session along with a number of corporate recruiters and we engaged in an intense debate on this topic. You see, they too held the same perception that Mattioli reported.

However, before we can critique those executing the recruiting processes, we should factor in the reality that there are many people who are not at the top of their "A" game. Some have become very comfortable in life and never felt the need to rattle their own cages in order to understand the new rules. For others, they have never had the benefit of being mentored in order to understand what constitutes the requisite skills for mobility and retention in a job and/or career path. Equally important is the fact that many people have many competencies and skills but do not know how to effectively package their qualifications.

I continue to address this issue in my classrooms. Over the course of my 19 years teaching at the university level, I have seen far too many students come back to school, work extremely hard to obtain a degree and/or second degree, with the end results that they still were not progressing in their careers.

They did not understand that the degree is only one component of what qualifies you in today's global workforce. Many possess the core competencies and skills required, but lack the knowledge for branding themselves and promoting their true talents.

For others, there is a fear of engaging in the knowledge management process, when in reality employers' desire for knowledge workers has been a preference for many years. Similar to the Malaysian example, a knowledge worker defined in this country is simply an individual who has committed to engaging in continuous learning, which can be acquired through a variety of ways. You do not have to be in a degree program to learn. However, on the flip side of today's reality, if you do not possess the foundational educational qualifications that your field now requires, don't kid yourself. The failure to have the requisite educational qualifications will impact your keeping a job or qualifying for a new one.

Throughout this book, I use the word paradigm or the concept of paradigm shift. The concept of paradigms and paradigm shift are not new concepts. Joel Barker introduced the concept to businesses well over 20 years ago through film and books. He built upon Thomas Kuhn's theories and concepts and posited that paradigms can be both

beneficial as well as dangerous to our global society. The examples Barker used in his film were both basic, yet startling as to how resistant people are to change—resistant to the point that over the years businesses and key discoveries have failed because people did not want to view change through a different lens (<http://www.thenewbusinessofparadigms.com/>). A failure to invoke new paradigms will definitely lead to stagnation.

Effectively confronting our decay (Quinn, 1996) requires us to critically examine our personal qualities and experiences in order to open space for another level of a consciousness of meaning to enter (Pettigrew, 1979), which is foundational for moving beyond existing job market barriers. We have to intentionally open space. I am amazed at how many people I talk to are afraid to go deeply inside themselves and quietly assess their strengths and areas for opportunity.

An important paradigm to challenge is the insularity that Americans hold dear to their hearts . . . an insularity that can be self-destructive. Having a world view and experiencing different cultures significantly opens our eyes as to our global realities and equally important—possibilities. Traveling to other countries helps us frame and understand what it means to work and live in a global context. I am astounded by how many of my international colleagues will comment on Facebook on television programs broadcasted in the United States, but I rarely see my US colleagues reaching out to their television stations in order to hear or see their social context—perspectives that are critical to our moving seamlessly in this global employment market. When you choose to see how other cultures live, work and play, your paradigms dramatically expand, which leads to diminishing your fear of change. Yet, if you choose to remain insular, you significantly limit yourself.

Regardless of the job you perform: executive, management, technical, administrative, a craft position, an operative, or a laborer position, organizations now require workers who can function at much more sophisticated levels than previously challenged. In the absence of working at more sophisticated levels, organizations will continue to outsource to other countries. Yet, as previously suggested, I do believe positive change can and does emerge out of adversity.

Organizations are outsourcing for more reasons than cheap labor. Throughout most of my international travels, I have seen how educationally and technically behind we are compared to our international colleagues . . . even those that face their own challenges. Concomitantly, US businesses are being challenged to more aggressively compete with their international counterparts in both services *and* products.

Technological innovations are moving faster than we have previously experienced. Yet, many people who are in my age bracket and still working—the baby boomer population—are still resisting using technology as a part of their daily life. PDAs are replacing the traditional desk top computer; cell phones, which some baby boomers see as intrusions in our lives are the way of life for today's global environment.

Ian Davis and Elizabeth Stephenson explained in a recent issue of *The McKinsey Quarterly*, “More transformational than technology it is the shift in behavior that it enables. We work not just globally but also instantaneously. We are forming communities and relationships in new ways. More than 1 billion people now use cell phones. We send 9 trillion emails a year. We do a billion Google searches a day, more than half in languages other than English. For perhaps the first time in history, geography is not the primary constraint on the limits of social and economic organization.” (Cohen, 2008, p. 1)

Despite the bleakness of the economy, there are jobs. However, we have to carefully consider to whom and why jobs are leaving our country; compared and contrasted to our own competencies and skills. Equally important, we should leverage our strengths.

There are critical questions you should ask yourself in order to effectively leverage your strengths and sell your competencies and skills. How resilient are you in the face of adversity? Have you learned to take control of your life versus assume the status of victim? Are you an active leader in your community who inspires people? Are you a risk taker who has learned to embrace change? Are you living your life on purpose and following your dreams? Are you happy when you wake up each morning and do you look forward to facing your day? If not, no matter how many resumes you write and no matter how many interviews you obtain, your dissatisfaction with you will inadvertently come across in the job search process.

What have you accomplished—not in just your work life, but in the spirit of transferable skills, in all aspects of your life? Do you lead a Boy Scout troop or are you heading a ministry in your church? Are you active in your community and have you learned to balance multiple priorities? Do you have accomplishments in your life, or have you just functioned in limbo? If you are living on purpose, goals and accomplishments will not be difficult for you to articulate in a resume and/or vita. If you are happy with yourself and what you are doing in your life, you will seek opportunities to excel and not wait for them to come to you. Equally important, you can articulate these competencies very easily in a resume, which can position you ahead of many others.

What do you love to do? The things that you love to do can easily become your career in life. When we are not aligned with our passions, we tend to slowly move forward. Life is too short to not live on purpose. Simply put—inertia is spiritually and mentally debilitating.

Dr. Robert Quinn, in his book, *Deep Change*, states that many people are afraid to confront deep personal change and as a result, they opt for slow death (Quinn, 1996). Yet, today's global challenges and highly competitive economy can no longer tolerate individuals who are opting for slow death. You know if you have opted for slow death! The question is if you are willing to admit it to yourself?

How do you personally feel knowing you are not growing? How do you personally feel when you realize that you are essentially trapped in a job and/or market because you have not expanded your skill and competency sets? How do you feel knowing that employers need people who are invigorated with life and are not afraid to confront challenge... particularly the challenge of self-improvement? We have the power to choose our experiences.

Corporations, public service organizations, as well as government entities are being challenged to shift their perspectives and operating paradigms. Career paths that were never thought to be vulnerable are now being significantly impacted... and not because the services are not needed. New definitions regarding productivity, profitability, and consummate customer service are continually morphing to even higher levels and if the current workforce cannot operate to these new levels—they will be replaced. In other words, as the rules of the workforce change, workers across multiple sectors, irrespective of their job title or level are being challenged to produce to standards that possess significantly higher performance bars.

So where does one start? First, . . . breathe and begin to de-stress. You may be out of a job now, or you may be working at a job where you are significantly under-employed, or you may be in fear of losing your job, but there is light at the end of the tunnel. Before you can move toward that light, you have to be physically, mentally, and spiritually able to engage in the challenge of change.

Invoking change in your life in concert with looking for work is more than a full-time job. It can be one of the most time consuming endeavors you encounter. But, you can do it. In executing, however, you have to have a very clear head, which means that you need to remove as much stress as possible from your life. Consequently, the next chapter addresses that issue—removing stress!

CHAPTER 4

Stress Management Controls: Strategies for Evoking a Less-Stressful Job Entry and/or Reentry Process

While the job market may have many people stressed, human beings have the capacity to change their world (Cooperrider, 1986). Managing this stress, however, first calls for our understanding how we are constructing and coping with our reality.

In 1986, David Cooperrider posited that no matter what the durability to date, any pattern of social action can be revised. Revision, however, is inherent in the establishment of new visions of symbolizing and conceptualizing the world (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). What this simply means is that each of us has an ability to turn around our circumstances. However, first understand how we view the situation, our personal power to evoke change, and how we position ourselves to engage in a holistic strategy.

It is important to understand that a critical ingredient of a revisioning process is a need for us to understand the etiology of how we currently interpret our environment and essence of self. Do we visualize real and imaginary limitations that prohibit us from visioning ourselves beyond our current boundaries? Are we comfortable with making excuses for not becoming all that we are destined to become? Has life smacked us around to the point that we give up? There are multiple factors required when we look to successfully cope with either a job loss or improve our performance for obtaining a new job and/or career change. In 2001, it was suggested that executives had to be the equivalent of corporate athletes—sustaining high achievement demands physical and emotional strength as well as sharp intellect (Loehr and Schwartz, 2001).

Loehr and Schwartz studied executives and the behaviors that were importing stress and performance issues upon their lives (Loehr and Schwartz, 2001). The results of their studies found people failing to implement simple, yet critical strategies that would put their life in balance. For example, when executives carved out space for proper rest, exercised, reflected upon, and reconnected to things that were important in their lives, as well as eliminated habits that were challenging their health they were able to work at peak performance (2001).

Their study led to their developing a model that identified the *components* of peak performance, which included: physical capacity where through exercise a person builds endurance and promotes mental and emotional recovery; emotional capacity that carves out space to create the internal climate that drives the ideal performance state; mental capacity, which helps through rituals focus physical and emotional energy on the task at hand by doing simple things such a meditation, taking short breaks to replenish the body with healthy foods, or simply allowing yourself the opportunity to develop a schedule that won't break your back; in concert with developing a spiritual capacity where you carve out sacred time and space to connect to those things that are important to you. These intentional steps were found to dramatically improve not only the executive's performance but enabled them to work harder in short periods of time because of increased efficiencies (2001).

These same and/or similar competencies that allow executives to operate at peak performance levels are vital to your effectively managing through a climate of challenge and change. And, once you get that new job, these same and/or similar competencies and skills will be required to consistently produce optimal performance. We have to consider that many of the core competencies that were once expected of executives are now being required of all members in the organization. A healthy mind, body, and spirit are vital components of change. When either or all are out of balance, we can and will become bogged down in negative thoughts about our situation, and plausible outcomes. The combined negativity of being out of balance in concert with negative thoughts regarding our ability to control a situation will significantly impact outcomes.

Postmodern change theorists and practitioners have suggested, and proven in research studies across a span of many years that what we think becomes our reality. Once we work to get into a state of being balanced, we should also deconstruct our thinking, actions, and the artifacts we keep that normally evoke stress and perceptions of limitations.

If you "think" it is going to be hard to get a job then it will be. If you think there is nothing else you know how to do but that mundane

position you have or had then you won't. If you think you do not have the ability to strike out on your own, you won't. If you think you don't have options—you won't. If you think you are living in poverty—you develop a poverty mindset and associated behaviors. If you think your life is constantly barraged with stress and you have no control of your stressors—you will not have control. Yet, when you adjust your thinking, you begin managing stress.

Taking Care of the Basics in Order to Move Forward—First Things First

No one should take the loss of a job as a personal affront; even if your employer does not release you in the most humane manner. Immediately, and I mean immediately after you get the news, do not under any circumstances wallow in despair. You must begin moving.

It is important in life that we develop personal strategies. We need strategies and tactical steps for many aspects of our lives. We need a strategy for reaching our goals, which begins with a vision . . . points that will be addressed later in the book. But for now, begin to reposition yourself once you have been notified that you are facing unemployment. These same strategies apply if you experience a dramatic cut in your hours. Either way, your income has significantly been impacted. Consequently, at that critical moment you become aware of the change to your status, and you should engage the tactical steps that allow you to take care of basic needs.

Your movement diminishes the depression that can and will set in if you do not begin taking charge of your life. Conscious movement ensconced with a strategy is motivating. Therefore, before you go home, stop by the local department of employment security office and obtain information regarding filing for unemployment. If you can immediately file that day—do so. Every day you wait will impact how long it takes to get benefits. Understand—some employers automatically challenge claims, even if they have no legal right to do so. Again, it's not personal; from their mindset, it is business. Unemployment compensation is insurance that employers pay. Similar to car accidents, the more claims you have the higher your premiums. Therefore, if they can get away with challenging your claim, they will do so. Again, it is not personal, it's business, which means you have to focus on taking care of your own business and filing that claim. Often if you are receiving severance you may have to wait until the severance pay and/or paid vacation benefits run out before the unemployment payments begin. But that is no excuse

for not filing immediately. If the employer contests your claim, at least you will know and have an opportunity to effectively counter the claim while you still have income coming in. But if you wait to take care of this business after your benefits have run out, you compromise your position.

Once at the local employment security office, you also want to ask about other benefits, such as available training. Laws put into effect years ago provide impacted employees with competency and skills training that enable them to reemerge into the workforce in a stronger position. The exacerbation of today's economy has caused state and federal agencies to provide even more support. There are many agencies and institutions of higher education assigned the task of helping unemployed and/or underemployed people develop new competencies and skills. You also want a clear understanding of the job search processes these offices either refer you to or offer, the available training, your eligibility for benefits, and equally important your responsibility under the law to engage in a job search (and your reporting/documenting requirements) in order to keep your benefits.

Even if your employer has not completely cut your job, but significantly cut your hours, you may still be eligible for unemployment. Your local office can give you that information along with the maximum dollars you can make if unemployed by working a part-time position while looking for a full-time work.

Once you come home, sit down with your family and go through the monthly budget. Identify areas where you can trim your monthly expenditures and do that immediately. For your larger bills, you should immediately send letters to your creditors advising them of your job loss and explaining that you will continue to make payments, but would like to know the absolute minimum amount of money they will accept and not report you to the credit bureau. I would recommend sending as many of those letters via certified mail. Preserving your credit rating will be critical and you want to make sure you have documentation of an initial contact. Follow-up with a telephone call and ask them to confirm the conversation in writing. Preserving your credit rating is also important in as much as many employers now use your credit scores as a screening device.

Immediately ask how long your medical benefits and life insurance will last and what are the provisions of your layoff/ job elimination, in concert with how much compensatory, vacation and or payable sick time you have available. If your employer quickly scuttled you out of the door, as they do when they are looking to "avoid sabotage," (which in and of

itself is a very poor excuse for inhumanely treating people), you may not be clear on your benefits and what the requirements are for the continuation of those benefits. Call human resources the same day and request everything be sent to you immediately in writing. Employers are responsible for providing COBRA continuation benefits, but it is quite expensive. And, there is a set time frame in which they have to provide you with that information. So, if continuing your employment benefits is not viable because of the costs, look to state and federal options for covering you and your family with the basic medical benefits necessary to keep you going until you obtain employment with benefits. This is not about pride—it is about survival. And remember—you are not alone!

If you have a working spouse, your job status will constitute a qualifying event, which enables them to immediately put you on their plan and/or sign up for the plan if they were on your benefit program. It may be cheaper to be put on a spouse's plan than to purchase COBRA benefits. A job loss is a qualifying event that allows you to enroll into a benefit program outside the normal enrollment period. However, be aware that there is a time limit for taking action. Your spouse should immediately call their human resource professionals to determine the process for adding you (and your children if you carried them on your plan), the costs, and what documentation may be required in order to execute the add-on to the benefit plan. If you do not take action within that time limit, you will have to wait for the next enrollment period.

You should also investigate governmental assistance in several areas. The local employment security office can point you in the direction of resources and may even have print materials, which provide you with contact information. This is not the time to be shy about asking for help. You have paid your dues by paying your taxes. Now it is your turn to collect. You may not immediately need help, but it is always good to know where to go and how much time it takes to activate those benefits.

Okay, this day is still not over . . .

Now, sit down and say a prayer and if you are not a praying person, meditate. Breathe . . . deep breaths. Rest your mind for at least an hour or two because you still have work to do before the day is over. Meditative silence can restore you. You have not lost everything. In fact, this day could be the day of a wonderful new beginning—a concept we will explore a little later. You have your Source or Creator who will always have your back—no matter how you define your personal relationship with a Higher Source, now is *not* the time to turn away. If ever there was a time to turn inward and believe, it is now.

Reflection is now critical as will be the stress management strategies we discuss. Think about that job and/or career change you may have wanted. After you have rested, it is now time to address the steps remaining in this chapter as well as the next chapter. You see, these steps are critical to helping you develop your job strategy. It is an exercise in futility to develop a resume without reflecting on the areas we address.

Your day is now over; rest tonight. I guarantee you will be able to rest better because you began the process of getting your life back on track versus spending useless energy becoming angry at the situation.

In addition to continuing the steps we further identify in this chapter and the following chapters, your second day should focus on examining interim money making opportunities. This does not mean that you are looking for the next career opportunity. You can begin to identify part-time as well as full-time opportunities that may only serve as your interim job until you reposition yourself for that next career move. So, let us first focus on networking.

Make a list of everyone you know that has a viable position within a stable organization. Call them, and develop a matrix of contacts (in other words, ask them for names of people to contact). However, under no circumstance should you ask them for a job or to vouch for you as a reference, but ask them if they know whether or not their organization is hiring. If the organization is hiring, ask for the name of the appropriate contact person, and if it is the human resource department, you also want to know the details of their application process.

From each initial contact person in your matrix, ask them to refer you to five other people they know that are working in viable positions. So, if you made five initial calls, and worked those contacts, and they refer you to five more, you now have a total of twenty-five contacts of people who can tell you whether or not their organization is hiring and who is the appropriate contact for that organization.

Job Search Strategies during the Holidays

During the years I worked in human resources, I found that many employers had little to no sensitivity with respect to releasing people during the Christmas holiday season. In fact, because of the timing of the budget processes, many employers believed it to be an ideal time to invoke layoffs and permanent workforce reductions. Yet, to me it always seemed to be one of the most cruel acts that an organization could do.

Unfortunately, if you are let go during this time, and you chose to do nothing because of the holidays, your search process will be impacted. During the holiday season, most organizations are either functioning with skeletal crews or are in total limbo. In other words, nothing gets done until after January 1.

Patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish. A little knowledge that acts is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that is idle.

—John Quincy Adams¹

Let us first remember what holiday seasons are all about. Perhaps now becomes the time that we remember the real meaning of our celebrations and not who has the biggest package under the tree. While the unemployment rates are devastating to many families, the downtime in December, it is not when you give up on finding employment. Equally important, it is not a time to lose site of your vision of that perfect job. It is a time to reflect upon your current job search strategies, redesign where necessary, and prepare to hit the month of January with a well-developed strategy that begins January 2. The holiday season is not a time to lapse into depression about what we don't have. We truly do have the gift of life... a phenomenal gift. We also have the gift of love, and for those of you who have your families and friends, you have the gift of togetherness. But equally important, you are still here, weathering this storm of uncertainty and alive to talk about it. Truly blessings.

Organizations typically will not engage in the employment processes during the month of December. They are focusing on vacation time and closing their books for the end of the year. Generally, positions will not be discussed, funded, or acted upon until people return after the New Year's holiday. But when they return, you want to be one of the first to have your paperwork reviewed. This is the time where you can reflect upon your goals and aspirations—determined to move past mediocrity and/or the habit of settling because it is easier not to evoke change. This is also the time to compare and contrast what you should be doing to engage in a productive job search versus what you have done in the past. This is the time to make a list of changes you need to immediately make. For example, this is prime time to increase your participation in the stress management and interpersonal development strategies that are recommended. Take time to be still and reflect. Open your heart and mind to how you are feeling about yourself and your job and vow to make change.

Inclusively, after reading this book and begin working through the recommended strategies, I highly recommend you

- Rewrite that resume. Since people are going to be home on vacation, ask your family members or friends to review it for you (points we will cover in later chapters).
- Look at your cover letter(s) with the same level of scrutiny.
- If you are on social networking sites, look at how you are projecting and branding yourself. Are you maximizing the websites you can look at for jobs? There are so many more than just Monster.com or Career Builders.com A few that were recommended at a seminar I attended a couple of years ago include www.rileyguide.com, www.jobhunt.org, www.employmentspector.com, www.diversityjobs.com, www.diversitylink.com, www.simplyhired.com www.asian-jobs.com, www.latpro.com, and of course LinkedIn, which is a powerful networking site where you can build as well as tap into networks that may be able to connect you to leads.
- Examine how many resumes you plan to submit on a daily and weekly basis. In a tight job market, you have to be strategic and play the target as well as numbers game. So, target the markets you want to penetrate, but maximize how many job applications you are submitting.
- This is also a good time to ask a friend to “mock” interview you, and have another friend video record how you respond to questions. Sometimes we are unaware of our mannerisms that can hurt us in the interview process. In my Business Communications class, we always engage in mock interviews. Over the years, I have consistently found my students to be amazed at how poorly they handled the interview process because of mannerisms and communication processes of which they were not aware. But, once “put on notice,” they found these mannerisms and communication processes easy to change. You can pull typical interview questions off the Internet and have someone act as the interviewer. But the most important part is video recording your session. And, don't be the only person that evaluates your “performance.” Ask friends to provide input for you . . . open and honest input.
- Equally important, it is now time to network and inquire as to possible openings or changes organizations may be making in the first quarter of the upcoming year.

So, what does all this activity accomplish? First and foremost, you are doing something productive to change your circumstances versus

allowing depression to set in. Action that is strategic will always yield positive results. Second, you are making use of other people's downtime in order to positively position yourself. Most important, you are being good to you. You owe it to yourself to be positively productive.

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit.”

—Aristotle²

Losing a job is stressful. In fact, stressful living is something we have taken for granted—it is a part of our culture. But if you examine other cultures, even those that do not have the material wealth that we possess, their cosmology regarding life keeps them in a balanced state. Taking action that is focused and strategic, while also focusing on delimiting stress requires you taking charge of your life. And, a critical component of taking charge is being focused in your actions, removing stressors, and living in a balanced state, which means in addition to taking time to reflect and then reflex with action, engage in proper eating, exercise, drinking water, and getting enough sleep.

This is also the time to read literature that brings you closer to understanding the blockages you have allowed to control your life and ways to remove those blockages. Life truly is about balance, which leads to growth. As long as we are alive, we each will face change and challenge. However, the true test of how well we navigate these changes and challenges is in understanding how to ground ourselves in a context where we recognize our strength and roots.

So, where do we start on the stress management part of “getting repositioned”? First, let's examine the definition of stress:

Stress is how individuals adjust to their environments; achieve high levels of performance and health; and become distressed in various physiological, medical, behavioral, or psychological ways. (Quick, et al., 1997, p. 2)

Individual distress is typically viewed as the degree of psychological, psychological, and behavioral deviation from an individual's health functioning (Quick, et al., 1997). Many people suffer from both personal as well as organizational stress, which is why we have to be honest with ourselves when we have loss a job. That job could have been making you sick because of its toxic environment and toxic people. If you felt undervalued, you probably were and now owe it to yourself to get paid your worth—after you have been honest with yourself as to what is your worth. An environment ensconced with negative energy is not only

debilitating to the organization, it daily wears us down. Yet, we have to be honest with ourselves and understand that there will be many organizations we cannot change. However, we do have the power to change ourselves and our resulting choices as to what and how much negativity we allow into our lives.

There are definitive relationships between toxic organizations, stress, and the ultimate stressor—burnout. Daily we live with issues of less intrinsic worth, global competition, technology strains, redistribution of power, failing corporate citizenship—all which result in new paradigms regarding work relationships—all which lead to overloaded work. We face lack of control over what we do, inappropriate rewards, breakdown in community, and feeling that we are not being treated fairly, which evokes conflicting values and an intense dislike for our situation (Maslach and Leiter, 1997). Ill-managed organizations can and have been proven to make people ill. Yet, when we fail to move away from those toxic environments, the stress that we harbor has the ability to manifest itself into some very debilitating diseases. Adding to an already bad situation, many people will invoke modifiers to their stress response such as anger and hostility, an inappropriate cognitive appraisal of themselves, and view unrelated areas of their lives (e.g., personality, age, ethnicity, and social support systems) in a manner that can further debilitate an already stressed body, mind, and spirit (Quick, et al., 1997).

The Power of Choice

We have choices as to how we handle stress. We can choose to view challenge as a normative mode of life and stimulus to personal development, which leads us to experience our challenges with openness (Quick et al., 1997). How we evoke an attitude of optimism versus pessimism is learned behavior with respect to how we explain the good and bad events in our lives to ourselves. Basically, they are our habits of thinking learned over time (1997).

We have the ability to move beyond a victim mindset when it comes to managing stress by deconstructing how we allow it to manifest in multiple areas of our lives as we critically examine our coping strategies. We can improve our coping strategies by understanding how different parts of our personal system interrelate and correlate to one another and collectively work to import stress into our lives (1997). How we manage or allow others, such as our family, jobs, home, friends, to manage us will determine the level of stress in our lives (1997). To shift current

thinking and begin to drive true change, we need to see interrelationships in our lives versus linear cause–effect chains. We must also see processes of change rather than snapshots (Senge, 1990).

There is a story I like to tell. I cannot claim it, nor can I tell you where it originated. In fact, there are many versions as to where it originated. But the story is often told as a parable for understanding resistance to change. So, I beg forgiveness for not properly citing the source, but I believe the lessons embedded in this story are too valuable to not retell it.

Some scientists have said that this metaphor of how a frog will act under the circumstances of boiling water is not true. People, however, continue to tell the story because it carries within it a critical message. Mal-adaptation to gradually building threats to survival is pervasive—which in reality is the major point of the story—let’s take a leap of faith on this story.

The story goes that if you place a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will immediately try to scramble out. But if you place it in room temperature water, and don’t scare him, he will stay put. If you turn up the temperature gradually, he shows signs of enjoying himself. As the temperature continues to gradually rise, he will become groggier until he is unable to climb out of the pot. Though there is nothing restraining him, the frog will sit there and boil. His internal apparatus for sensing threats to his environment is geared to sudden changes in his environment, not to slow gradual changes.

Our thinking can negatively contain growth opportunities. To counteract doing so, we should look beyond individual mistakes or bad luck to understand important problems, examine the underlying structures that shape individual actions and create the conditions where types of events become likely, and learn to see system structures, understand our patterns of behaviors and how those patterns of behaviors trigger events (Senge, 1990). These actions constitute a major paradigm shift with respect to reentry into today’s global workforce and understanding how we invite stress into our lives and allow it to “live.”

Critically examining how we manage stress also means deconstructing how we allow our language or discourse to shape our reality, which reflects back to my initial paragraph regarding how our thinking becomes our reality. What are the negative and binding words that you are comfortable with; words such as can’t, will get to it, maybe, try, and other terms that suggest tentativeness and you not being in control and/or at the top of your game? When we traditionally view our discourse, we tend to think of it as simply a form of spoken dialogue versus a more

contemporary perspective, which views and deconstructs discourse from several vantage points (Oswick, Keenoy, and Grant, 2000). A view of discourse that I believe more appropriate to understanding how we can better cope with stress is viewing it as beyond the scope of a linguistic device, and seeing it as central to how people construct their reality (Oswick, Kennoy and Grant, 2000).

The Power of Language

Thirty years ago, it was suggested that the various ways in which language mediates between the world and perceptions of the world are primary loci of analysis, thereby suggesting that styles of discourse be examined as they play roles in the gathering and analysis of field data (Manning, 1979). So, in layman's terms, what does this really mean? Bottom line, you, others, and equally important employers can tell a lot about how a person, their potential, and how they position themselves in life by how they construct their language. Language truly does mediate our environment and if we are not careful can place barriers in and around our lives without our being aware. People who listen at deep discursive levels to your linguistic representations can use this information, and you may never know they did and/or the results. Whether you are a policy maker, a CEO or head of a nonprofit, or governmental agency, in today's environment you cannot afford to keep people on the payroll who have limited abilities and resulting vocabularies to vision change.

Our self-image and belief in our own personal power is critical in bringing forth personal and strategic change in our lives. If we are constantly having negative conversations—with ourselves as well as with others—we will reinforce our perception of being powerless in changing our circumstances and most important we will continue to evoke stress in our lives. Postmodern theorists also caution against the modernist assumption that rational processing lies “behind “ or guides one's outward behavior by strongly suggesting that language cannot be perceived as cultural-free (Gergen, 1994). We should pay close attention to the language we have culturally and environmentally inherited. Yet, if your language bespeaks of a strong personal belief system backed by understanding holistically the situation you are addressing—your ability to influence up will dramatically increase.

The underlying praxis of what I just addressed is that discourse or our language has “determining capacities” and when tied to social relations, identities, power, culture, and social struggle, produces a particular

version of social reality (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Chia, 2000). Therefore, if historically an individual has throughout his or her life conveyed feeling disempowered, there is a need to understand the language of disempowerment and remove it from one's vocabulary.

I have worked in organizations where disempowering language was the norm. As a result, people created their own self-fulfilling prophecies, which negatively impacted the organization's culture. Discourses from the past can shape present and future behavior in the form of established societal beliefs, theories, and stories (Marshak and Grant, 2008). Established discourse of disempowerment can be a major stressor in our lives and can also block our ability to evoke required change that manifests into new career opportunities.

We buy into the belief that we cannot change—either because it is not our “destiny” or the “system” (whomever the system is defined at a particular time) won't allow change. Yet, the beauty of understanding how our language influences both our positive and negative behaviors is manifested in the proposition that discourse is also the *core* of the change process. The deconstruction of our language is instrumental in our better understanding the fundamental nature of our social world at the level of subjective experience. In other words, when we take the time to critically examine our language, we rapidly understand how and why if we delve deep enough, we have allowed our personal blockages to manifest.

What does this mean when we are engaging in a job search process? At one level, we should critically examine the manner in which we perceive our place in this current environment. Are we passive actors allowing change to manifest itself “on” us, or are we dancing with the change and rhythmically moving with iterations of “newness”? If we choose to move with iterations of morphed change, we concurrently develop the personal development strategies that allow us to fluidly move with its rapidity. Yet, if we are passive actors in an environment that is quickly moving beyond our own skills and capabilities, we lose ground. You see, the global job market is going to move forward regardless of how firmly we dig in our heels and psychologically detach ourselves from progress.

When we begin to critically examine our language and resulting behaviors and open ourselves to internal challenge, we better understand the dynamics of our lives, interpretive schemas, various associations (e.g., internalized metaphors) as well as the under girth of our belief systems that manifest themselves in how we process our social world as “actors” in an environment. Therefore, it becomes easier to

move through the many layers of “stuff” that have been blocking us for years (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Giddens, 1984; Parker, 2000).

When we deconstruct how we speak, we can understand the relational bonds that exist between ourselves, our environment and our interactions with people, and how we have allowed certain structures to be created, transformed, and maintained (Barrett, Thomas, Hocevar, 1995). But most important, through the study and analysis of how we simply talk, we can evoke our own personal change as we open space for challenging our current beliefs (1995). When we deconstruct our language in concert with reading literature that helps us better conceptualize how we historically locate ourselves within our society, we are free to develop new language patterns that affirm us, evoke hope, and create a sense of awareness of our potential to grow even further. Life is a miracle and we have to learn to consistently embrace it.

Appreciative Inquiry—Valuing Self in the Midst of Change

As we move toward evoking the necessary change needed to reduce our stress, which then sets a productive stage for moving forward with our lives, we also have to have a foundation upon which we build. So often we forget the skills and competencies we possess that have positively framed and strengthen the self. Yet, when we work from the lens that the glass is half full versus half empty, it becomes much easier for us to de-stress and evoke change as we draw strength from the past.

Allow me to share an example. In the early 2000s, colleagues and I taught a leadership development institute that was a collaboration between my university and one of the largest state agencies in Illinois. This particular day was my teaching day, and I was sharing the theory and practice of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (which will be expanded upon further in this chapter) with my students. At the same time I was teaching AI, one of the students was going through a family crisis—her brother was dying. The stress of seeing her brother die before her eyes, working a full-time job, being a parent and attending school was overwhelming to say the least. Yet, I never believe in happenstance. The breakdown she was feeling occurred just when we began engaging in a dialogue on AI. She talked about how her brother was responding to his loss of mobility, which required his family to do everything for him. She described how he felt himself to now be a burden to his wife, children, parents, sisters, and brothers. Yet, she also talked about his life before his illness and how he had helped so many people.

I suggested that when she returned home she take the lessons she learned in class and work toward helping her family and her brother

restory his life. In other words, I suggested they daily spend time exploring all that he had been to them and others and the joys he had brought into their lives. After her brother transitioned, she called to tell me just how much those positive dialogues changed him during his last days and impacted his family's ability to cope with his illness and impending death. They parted one another helping him refocus on the joy he had brought into their lives and how much he had given to so many people, which dramatically diminished his perception of being a burden during the challenges of his illness.

To effectively move forward in today's challenging economy, and not become depressed and further stressed, requires our learning how to restory our lives. Yet, I want to be very clear, while I fully support the utilization of AI when engaging in understanding the strength from which we draw, I concomitantly understand that there is a precursor step that helps us understand our "uniqueness" in today's environment, which is why engaging in an analysis of our discourse is a very important first step. You see, once we better understand the feelings and emotions we tend to deeply bury and how these feelings and emotions manifest in our behavioral lives, it becomes much easier to authentically move into an AI process and evoke deep change (Easley & Alvarez-Pompilius, 2004).

When we deconstruct our language, we will also "see" through a new lens our cultural proclivities. For example, while conveying to potential employers what differentiates you from the crowd, you may "live" within a cultural orientation where it is socially unacceptable to tout one's accomplishments. There are fine lines of distinction between cultures as to what constitutes bragging versus identifying strengths. Therefore, it becomes very critical that we understand the roots of our words and how we give them power over our lives. If concepts and language are sufficiently reinforced, they do become internalized beliefs (Robinson-Easley, 2012).

The way that a people think and consequently how they act is a product of what they "know." (Akbar, 1996, p. 67)

The way in which we think and consequently "know" as posited by Dr. Nai'm Akbar impacts our coping strategies for effectively managing our stress and our ability to restory our lives. An appreciative inquiry process serves as both a catalyst for evoking a new language that heals and provides a reconciliation process, which allows us to move forward with a real internalized change where we accept our accomplishments and associated competencies and strengths as our new foundations

for our change (Easley & Alvarez-Pompilius, 2004; Robinson-Easley, 2012).

Exploring Appreciative Inquiry

Let us examine what AI really is and its foundational theories and praxes in concert to its importance when looking to evoke our distressing processes and personal change. Dr. David L. Cooperrider wrote his doctoral dissertation on a case study where he developed and used an intervention methodology he called AI (Cooperrider, 1986). Since then, Appreciative Inquiry or AI has been used across the globe. Although AI is primarily used in organizational settings, I have used it as a both an organizational and individual change strategy. Any references to AI outside specific citations must be credited to Dr. Cooperrider.

The foundational constructs of AI are germane to both organizational and personal settings. I also believe understanding the foundational constructs of AI are critical when looking to change our individual behaviors and most importantly manage stress. When I have taught stress management in doctoral courses, I have always incorporated into the curriculum a component that addresses AI.

A critical foundation of AI is social construction theory, which if correctly understood helps us to better understand how we psychologically choose to analyze and internalize our environment. Social construction theory incorporates the critical concept of choice. In other words, we have a choice as to how we construct our social order, once we take the time to better understand it.

Our social order, viewed as the product of broad social agreement (tacit and explicit), influences us in many conscious and unconscious ways. Consequently, understanding how we internalize the paradigms, praxes, and perceptions of our social order is critical to understanding one's self. The people we allow into our environment, the unconscious manner in which we internalize their perceptions and views in concert with our own while assimilating into our own language their respective discourses can have a positive as well as very negative impact upon how we view our selves, our realm of choices as well as opportunities.

The systems that invoke stress into your life are clearly components of your social order, For example, friends, family, and work are each individualized systems, which make up our larger system and social order. Therefore, if you are ensconced in an environment where people routinely engage in self-defeating dialogues, you risk internalizing those same perceptions of limitations and hopelessness. It has been suggested

that knowledge is a communal creation—an interactive collectivity that is created, maintained, and put to use by the human group (Gergen, 1994). For example, think about how quickly and systematized the dialogue of “this place is bad” can become an internalized dialogue for many workers; ultimately impacting not only one’s perception of the workplace but also their perceived personal value to the organization as well as advancement opportunities. As the dialogue spreads, the culture of the organization is negatively impacted. As the dialogue spreads, so do feelings of hopelessness within self and colleagues.

Unfortunately, it typically takes only a small critical mass of people to begin this type of social construction that has the potential to grow to immense proportions—negatively impacting those who work in the organization as well as its productivity and profitability. Our organizational life begins to then morph into a vicious circle. When people perceive and articulate the environment as being bad—it develops into a bad environment, which ultimately has a negative impact upon the financial bottom line thus positioning the organization for the worse to occur. In other words, pervasive negative dialogues turn into self-fulfilling prophecies.

Unfortunately, many employers do not see the systemic nature of disempowerment in an organizational environment. Others may believe themselves to be immune to the inevitable outcomes. But in time, poor productivity, employee dissatisfaction, and the resulting impact on profitability can destroy even the largest and most powerful organization.

When you focus on the negatives you become depleted. When your dialogue becomes consumed with how bad a situation is, it becomes very difficult to imagine anything different. Yet, when you focus on the positives of an impending future that will allow you to be all that you are meant to be, your cognitive dissonance can immediately vanish and your self-esteem and thoughts about your future undergo tremendous transformation. As a result, you become ready to vision your change, design your personal strategy, but most important—implement that strategy, one critical step at time. Equally important, you diminish the stress, which if left unattended can severely impact your health.

We have to also become cognizant of how this negative dialogue morphs to other areas of our lives. If we are daily ensconced in a negative linguistic environment in which we spend an inordinate number of hours; we can’t help but bring that negative discourse home. Yet when dialogue is free from a perception of constraint or distortion it can also accurately determine the “nature of things”—from a productive lens (Gergen, 1978).

At all times we need to be aware of our social environment. People, places, and perspectives can and do add to our stress. They can also influence how we view our ability to rise above perceived limitations. If the people with whom we interact and our resulting discourse are constantly grounded in negativity, we “wear” that negativity, which makes it stressful and difficult to evoke personal change. We should feel free to remove the negativity from our lives—we have the power to do it. But we first must deconstruct it and analyze it for what it is.

Groups can and will form around common ideas that are expressed in and through some kind of shared language, which makes communicative interaction possible (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). At the same time, to the extent that action is predicated on the stories, ideas, beliefs, meaning, and theories embedded in language, people truly are free to transform their lives by changing their patterns of narration; which also implies people are free to transform their systems (Gergen, 1994)—their personal systems and organizational systems. People cannot begin to reconstruct a new reality unless they are *taught* to do so via developing an awareness and new set of assessment patterns as to what our conversations and resulting internalized propositions have previously meant (Gergen, 1994; Easley, 1999). And, understanding how our historical context has impacted opportunities is important to learning methods for constructing our new reality.

My ability to deconstruct and better understand the African American context did not emerge until I engaged in critically reading Black psychology, theology, and womanist theology during the time I attended seminary, which was many years after I obtained my doctoral degree.

As global citizens, we have to help ourselves and others understand the negative paradigms that we allow to contribute to our reality. Only then will these negative paradigms cease to be truth bearing, which opens space for us to view an alternative reality (Gergen, 1994). The simple act of reading my “own” literature helped me better position myself in multiple aspects of my life. In other words, I psychologically, spiritually, and even physically became a stronger person.

Once those steps are complete, the engagement in an internalized AI on a daily basis will challenge you to change the story lines of your lives, your view of your potential, prior accomplishments, and future goals. Simply put, a positive dialogical environment enriched in provocative inquiry can foster people to truly begin a revisioning process. When engaged in a revisioning process, you can emerge more creative, generative, fluid, and most importantly eager to respond to change (Cooperrider, 1986; Easley, 1999).

Embedded in AI are critical assumptions, which include the following concepts:

- In every society, organization, or group, something works.
- What we focus on becomes our reality.
- Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
- The act of asking questions of an organization, group of people (or your internalized dialogue) will influence the group and/or individual in some way.
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
- It is important to value differences.
- The language we use creates our reality.
- We move from the modality of solving problem to appreciating and valuing the best of “what is” by envisioning “What Might Be,” and work toward the change we desire (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987).

So, why is AI important to our stress management strategies? AI constructs suggest that individuals can become more than they are at any given moment. AI infers that when we “see” the light, similar to heliotropic evolution, we become heliotrophic in character, which helps us develop and evolve in the direction of positive imagery versus negative imagery.

The group processes for engaging in AI include

- Define the topic choice
- Inquire into the life-giving properties, that includes data collection and discovery
- Articulation of possibility propositions, for example, visioning the ideal
- Consensual validation/agreement through dialogue
- Coconstruction of the future, where participants leave with action steps

If we were to take these processes and move them to an individualized stress-management change invoking modality on an individualized basis, I respectfully posit that those processes would emerge as:

- Define your intent, for example, evoking change in my life as I realize myself for this very different global job market.

- Examine all that you have achieved over the course of your life in multiple venues and identify what those core traits really are and how you can begin to acknowledge and use them in your new endeavors. Have this conversation with people close to you who support you in order to really expand the acknowledgment of who you are and all that you do.
- Vision the grandest vision of who you are and where you want to be in your life.
- Talk about it with others as you gather research and information regarding the respective implementation steps. Do not entertain the concept of constraints as you dream.
- Develop the strategy, tactical steps, and project management time lines and goals that will move you strategically and systemically toward your goals.
- Daily work your plan and do not allow others to arbitrarily get you off course.

“Your thoughts are the architects of your destiny.”³

—David O. McKay

I also encourage you as you begin to engage in your job search strategies to critically examine how you spend your day and how you allocate time. The failure to know where your time is spent can and will invoke stress. What time do you get up in the morning? Do you have your day mapped out in terms of productive things you need to do to move forward your strategy; or are you aimlessly moving through your day allowing circumstances to govern your calendar?

When we lack structure and good planning is when we become victim to random activities and people that can be on an unrelated agenda. Now, I am not addressing downtime in this commentary. Downtime is good, and necessary as is living life in balance. It should be routinely planned into your day. Unfortunately, many people spend endless hours indulging themselves in idle activities, which have no positive outcome. We need to factor in some “me” time. Take time to go to the gym, enjoy a walk, meditate, or simply sleep.

The lack of “me” time can and will impact how we feel about ourselves. For example, if we always allow other things to get in the way of exercise, it will impact our weight, which then impacts our health and our coping skills. Do you carry excess weight? Do you exercise? Physically looking like we do not take care of ourselves sends many negative signals to potential employers, augmented by the fact that they

see you as a health risk and ultimate stressor on their health, life, and disability insurance rates.

Over the years that I taught stress management courses and seminars, my students were professionals who had returned to school to obtain their doctoral degrees and were in very high-stressed jobs. I routinely taught them that if they understood how their failure to manage themselves could lead to very debilitating diseases, trust me, they would immediately clean up their act. One of the text books we used was written by two brothers—one was a physician and the other an organizational behavioral expert. The structure of this book was critical because they were able to make direct and thought provoking correlations to job stress and a myriad of critical illnesses and disabilities. I was not surprised when many of my students voluntarily changed their jobs. They quickly understood and processed how sick their work and organization was making them. Typically, stress impacts men through cardiac disorders and women through cancer as well as cardiac disorders. Diabetes and hypertension in some ethnic communities are unfortunately common. But when you exacerbate these diseases by uncontrolled stress—they can be life-threatening. Yet, the simple tasks of taking a walk every day, exercising, taking time to “be” with you, praying, and meditating works wonders for our mental stability, which increases our creative consciousness as we work to take ourselves to a new level.

The effective management of stress also requires you having a personal change strategy. I am not underplaying the stress associated with not having a regular paycheck. Yet, it is vital that you understand the point I make. You cannot effectively and quickly turn around that situation if you are stressed—meaning pay attention to your behaviors, language, and how you invoke “me” time in order to bring forth the change you desire. Equally important, engage in your own AI dialogue, which will help you focus on ways to bring forth a status change.

Managing stress in the wake of a very stressful situation sounds complicated and dualistic, and many might even laugh at these propositions. But I challenge you to try to work through the maze of unemployment without first getting yourself together—you will see just how far you get.

More Strategies for Moderating Stress: Understanding the Overarching Cultural Context of the Work Environment

The relationship between employer and employee continues to change across the globe. The work of researchers such as Gert Hofstede and

Frans Trompenaars conducted research that helped people better understand how culture can and will moderate the employment relationship. Understanding these differences is critical from two perspectives. If you come from a collectivist culture and now work in a highly structured individualistic environment, you may not understand why your employer conducts themselves in the manner in which they do because it is counter cultural to your operating paradigms. Therefore, if a job loss occurs, you may opt for an internal dialogue that is self-deprecating; despite the fact that the change may have had personally nothing to do with you. It simply is business and the way in which business is conducted in this particular cultural context. Consequently, the stress that you internalize in concert with the resulting internal discourse may be very inappropriate.

On the flip side of the coin, if you are working in a foreign work environment whose cultural values are counter to your expectations, you may not know how to effectively work among your colleagues and as a result can significantly isolate yourself and invalidate your production—because you simply did not know how to “fit in” or be an effective team player by the terms of your host country. Stress can and will emerge from this situation as well, which is why I initially posited that we understand and learn to be comfortable in privileging our personal lens.

Lifelong learning is how we grow as a society. I received my doctorate degree in 1999, but in 2005 began my walk through seminary. Many people asked me why, with all that I do in my life, did I choose to return to school? I am not looking to pastor a church, but I saw the learning that I would acquire in seminary important to my community work, research, and writing. Even though I did not try to take inordinate class loads, the classes that I have thus far taken have rejuvenated and inspired me, and equally important-expanded my thinking. Seminary became my personal sanctuary where I met many new friends and colleagues that shared similar values. As I previously stated, even with a doctorate degree and my routinely researching and publishing, I cannot rest on my laurels. Similar to every other worker, I have to stay on the cutting edge of my field, possess multiple ways of learning, and commit to continual growth.

There are many educational programs out there today, particularly those that are government sponsored and focused on retooling today's workforce. But you have to research and go after them...they won't come to you! Yet, to be successful in this endeavor, you have to have a clear mind devoid of stress. You have to be willing to seriously assess

where you are juxtaposed to today's environment in order to better understand what you need to do. A knowledge worker must be an analytical and conceptually focused thinker who can evoke a strong vibration of self-confidence, flexibility in his or her thinking and actions, and constantly seeks new information to grow talent and skills. It is hard to demonstrate these competencies if you are battling severe stress or burnout.

The Art of Change: Invoking New Strategies and Behaviors

Before moving to some basic steps for managing stress, I also want to reiterate a point I initially addressed earlier in this section but not in detail. Stress can also emanate from organizational stressors we daily face. When I earlier said your employer may have done you a favor if you are working through a job loss, I was very serious. There are many organizations that are not healthy, albeit their professing to be. Often, when employees are under stress, the methodologies many organizations put into place to address the stress is similar to putting a band aid on a profusely bleeding wound. Unfortunately, many organizations are reluctant to address the real issues that cause stress to their employees, such as ineffective leadership and management, inordinate workloads due to continual cut backs complicated by a failure to fill those work voids, and/or a failure to offer mobility in the workplace, leaving employees feeling stuck, devalued, and underpaid. A free or discounted membership to a health club is not going to address these issues, nor will your accessing the Employee Assistance programs that are offered make a systemic change in your life. The only way to ameliorate this distress in your life is to leave the place causing the distress. If the organization has failed to recognize its issues at this juncture, you can count on the probability that it won't in the immediate future.

Toxic organizations typically have high turnover and absenteeism, low work performance, high worker's compensation payments, and high court awards due to the number of people who are litigating against the organization. The morale is poor, the decision making questionable, and aggressive behaviors are quite common. Psychological violence is also a typical trait of toxic organizations, where supervisors and managers feel empowered to berate employees, or mentally abuse them (Maslach and Leiter, 1997). Many people, due to a lack of personal confidence, will stay in this type of organization. We are afraid to leave because we lack confidence in our ability to find a healthy

work environment and/or career change, or perhaps we feel locked in due to pay or some other form of benefit. So, now that you have lost your job think about this . . . if your organization had any semblance of these characteristics, consider the possibility that they did you a favor, although you won't feel obliged to admit it right now.

We typically fail to understand the physical manifestation of stress in our lives. Being tired and disgruntled all the time, in addition to an inability to sleep comfortably, dreading Monday mornings, or staying on the job inordinate hours should not be a part of our day. Life is far too short to live it in pain . . . mental, physical, or emotional pain.

Moving forward with our lives should be seen as an opportunity to rebirth ourselves. I highly recommend your reading *Deep Change*, by Dr. Robert Quinn (1996), who challenges us to look at how reluctant we are to engage in deep personal change versus living a slow death. Deep change assumes that you can become an internally driven leader (and leadership spans beyond just leading an organization—you have to focusing on leading your life) by drawing upon your own ultimate source of power, which means you do have the ability to manage stress (1996).

Deep change infers a spiritual connection; yet deep change is not incremental. It requires new ways of thinking where you embrace paradigm shifts and constantly scan the environment to see “beyond” the present. It connotes a radical change (1996). Deep change also requires you becoming comfortable with taking risk, understanding that excellence never lies within the boxes we have drawn for us in the past. To be excellent, we have to step outside the safety net of tradition, despite the risk (1996).

Because the price of change can be high, many will seldom assume the challenge of change. People opt to allow fear to impose blinders to the possibilities of excellence. As a result, the price we pay is slow death—a meaningless and frustrating experience enmeshed with fear, anger, and helplessness while moving surely toward that which is most feared—your ultimate resignation at a life you also considered to be mediocre (Quinn, 1996). Augmenting this travesty is our tendency to seek solutions to new problems in the same places where we found the old ones. Equally distressing is that when we face stress and pressure, our attention span diminishes and there is a tendency to become rigid. Instead of responding creatively, when innovative action is most needed, we will increase our commitment to old patterns and implement our most ingrained natural responses (1996).

“The ultimate measure of a man (woman) is not where he (she) stands in moments of comfort, but where he (she) stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.⁴

Remember, in order for organizations to succeed in today’s global environment, they cannot tolerate a rigid workforce, which means if you do not openly accept and embrace change your employer will question your value to the organization. So, how do we begin to engage in deep change, removing the stress in our lives and embarking upon that which we vision as the grandest vision of ourselves, our dreams, our aspirations, and the quality of life we desire?

Citing a few of Dr. Quinn’s recommendations in concert with my own perspectives and commentaries, I suggest the following as your beginning strategies:

- Break the logic of task pursuit (Quinn, 1996)—in other words, learn the difference between executing a strategy versus working a list. Your strategy should define your vision of you, stratified, positioned, and living your dream. Your tactical steps are the building blocks for getting there. A “to do list” can have a relationship with your strategy, but often it does not. It simply represents nonrelated activities.
- Be still and listen to the sounds all around you . . . particularly your heart (1996). What does your heart tell you with regards to what you want in your life? Far too often we think our dreams are out of our reach. But if we go inside ourselves, we will soon “hear” the strategies for executing the path to get us to our dreams. Are you listening???
- Feel the love around you and that which you have received in the past (1996). Learn to live in gratitude—moment by moment. I often have difficulty with this one, but I constantly work on not worrying about tomorrow, for we each know it is not guaranteed, but looking with the eyes of gratitude at that which my Creator has given me—the ability to wake up today, my children, my friends, feeding my animals, and watching the birds eat on my patio. We should reflect upon each of the activities that quietly tells us how blessed we really are and be grateful for them. I do believe when we learn to live in a mindset of gratitude for that which we have, we open ourselves to receiving that which is to come.

- Reexamine your motives in life—how do you live your life and how do people perceive you? Are you a tit-for-tat person that always expects something in return? For example, does your mindset tell you that at work you aren't doing anything for which you are not paid? Do you have the same attitude toward friends as well as strangers? If you do, you are seriously cutting yourself off from so much in this life that is given to those that expect nothing in return.
- But most important, walk naked into the land of uncertainty—and allow your faith to be your guide (1996). Can you step out on faith and walk a path that you can't see the end of the road, but you take each step day-by-day knowing that your Creator is guiding you? I will never diminish how hard it is to learn to do this. It takes focus, belief, and prayer in the constant midst of our uncertainties. But, if we believe in us, the fact that we are love—beyond a doubt we will, albeit slowly, put one foot in front of another as we embark upon that path.
- Move beyond pointing out the short comings of others and understand your own. But most important, confront them! Develop a change strategy (1996). I will never suggest you play yourself short, but at the same time, I will also suggest you learn to critically assess what opportunities you need to take for personal and professional growth. Be real and be open to deep change.
- Change your perspective (1996) . . . challenge your guiding praxis and open to new paradigms.
- Reexamine what is important to you in life as you redefine your purpose and align your actions with your values (1996).

I am sure that there are many other points you can add to the list. Life is full of mysteries, challenges, but most important . . . opportunities. How we embrace opportunities, ultimately becomes a personal choice. The path may not always be clear at first, but you have to take the first step, and I clearly believe that that first step is removing the stress that you are carrying in order to be able to clearly think, plan and act!

Reiterating previous, but critical points

- Examine your life—where do you spend your time, energy, and place emphasis? Are there adjustments you can make immediately? If so, make them.
- Get the clutter and drama out of your life . . . clutter can manifest itself in things as well as people. Do you hoard things around you

that can and will deter from your being able to clearly vision and dream? Do you keep the drama kings and queens around you who can and will move you off point? If you do, you need to consider politely exiting all the clutter and excess baggage (including the people) out of your life.

- Do you surround yourself with people who have a positive outlook on life, are focused and are grounded in a strong belief system?
- Examine your mindset—how do you vision you? What holds you back? What are your dreams? Why aren't you living those dreams? While repeated in several other places thus far, have you examined the words that are common in your vocabulary that suggests a deficit-oriented mindset?
- Vision the type of life that gives you joy inside and outside your organization. Do you gravitate to those environments, or are you locked into patterns of working for people and organizations that deplete your spirit? Examine the choices you make with respect to your associates and environment.
- How do you look? When you look in the mirror, do you like what you see? If not, change it. Do simple and inexpensive things that can and will invoke behavioral changes and results such as not eating past a certain hour in the evening, taking a walk with friends, or taking a walk with you, while you pray and meditate. Commune with nature. It doesn't cost you anything to move. Change your diet, drink water, think about why you eat. Do you eat out of stress, or are you really hungry?
- Vision what you want to do in this particular stage of your life. As we get older, our visions and dreams change, which is okay. Put the plan into place for where you want to be in your life now. Equally important, understand that the criteria for manifesting that plan may have changed due to the challenges and changes associated with today's global environment, which is okay, Simply put, be conscious of the new rules—then work them into your strategy.
- Develop and work a strategy. Move past the “could have, would have, should have” syndrome. Make it happen. Use a planner to list your daily tasks, which can enhance your focus.
- Stay on the path; work the plan. But most important, make a plan. And, if you are not sure of all the variables that should be in the plan, ask questions. Talk to people, network, study, and use the Internet for something other than sending trivial emails. Understand that when people see you do that, one of the first

things that may come to their minds is that you have far too much time on your hands.

- Do not be afraid to engage in silence. In the stillness, we can better hear our internal voice that is more than ready to articulate dreams and new visions. In the stillness, we can also hear our Creator, who will willingly speak to you about your purpose in life.
- Put play into your life . . . balance is very important. Get back in touch with your friends, enjoy their company. But, equally important, spend time with people who inspire you and cause you to think. Know when to let go of people who no longer bring you joy. Take the lessons they have provided you, use them and be grateful to Creator for those lessons, and then move forward. Hanging on to friendships and relationships that are unproductive or toxic will stifle you.
- Identify and understand that which is toxic in your life and remove it . . . immediately.
- And for those of you who believe—pray, pray, pray. Pray for the patience of unanswered prayer. Pray for vision, pray for a peace of mind, pray for the ability to sustain hope, pray for a hopeful mindset, pray for forgiveness for not living your life as you have been called to do, and acknowledge that you are now moving forward as you pray for guidance, strength, and the perseverance to keep it moving!

Once you begin to manage the stress in your life—the real work begins. Sit still and meditate on what brings joy in your life. Dream about the grandest vision you have of you. Through meditation, invite guidance with regards to your next steps. Listen . . . an alignment with the spiritual side of you will help you “hear” what the universe is calling you to do.

Once that grandest vision is revealed, compare it to the outcomes of your resume. What new skills and competencies do you need to develop? What training is now required? What networks should you develop? What are the operational strategies you need to develop? Take the time to talk to people currently in your desired field. Get their input, network with them as you begin to develop your personal strategy—but most important be determined to work your plan. Once you begin to strategize, you will be amazed at how your stress begins to diminish—you are moving, and most importantly you are moving in a personally desired direction. You may stumble—but that is okay. Remodulate your strategy and steps and incorporate the learned lessons and keep moving.

A strategy is never a failure if it is a work in progress. We only fail when we do not implement our plans. Do not be afraid to refine your strategies. Well-known strategist, Henry Mintzberg from McGill University, posits that successful strategies need to be flexible (Mintzberg, 1994). An equally well-known strategist, Michael Porter from Harvard University, suggest the need for strategic alignment (Porter, 1980).

In other words, everything we do should be aligned toward our obtaining the end results of our strategy (1980). All of our initiatives and endeavors should “fit” in order to align with one another. So, when engaging in an activity, think about how you are spending your time. Is what you are doing helping you move toward your goals?

I will never suggest we should not take time to have fun. Living on purpose and reducing stress in our lives requires, as previously stated, balance. We know what those activities are that tend to not be productive, and we also know that there are people in our lives whose jobs are to keep us off task. However, we always have to remember that we are in control. You may also have to engage in a job that you may not want right now as you are working your plan. But if you are on the path to living your dreams and desires, even the most mundane job will be okay, because you know it’s not your future. You know it is only for the short run while you are creating the grandest vision of you!

Living on purpose and pursuing your dream is going to take a lot of hard work. It may require that you work long hours. You may have to work that regular job, take more classes, as well as engage in other activities that could require your putting in very long days. But if you know there is a purpose and end in sight, you will become and stay invigorated.

Our intuition is powerful and I believe it draws its power from our Creator speaking to us and guiding us to listen to our inner voice. There is a saying, and unfortunately I don’t know the proper citation for it, so please understand that it is not my own . . . but when you have been pushed to the edge, trust God (or your personal Creator) because only two things will happen. Either God (or your Creator) will catch you when you fall or He will teach you how to fly. Either way, we are being asked to believe!

Learn to appreciate you, which is why having that appreciative dialogue with self is important. I have often said to my students that they do not always realize or appreciate just how productive and special they are. Most are working full-time jobs, caring for their families, in concert with working through inordinate academic loads to expedite their graduation. Most importantly, they do well at each endeavor because

these are critical components of their personal strategies. When evaluating their competencies, they routinely multitask, engage in leadership roles, daily prioritize, invoke hourly decision-making and problem-solving strategies at the speed of light, and equally important live on purpose, pursuing their dreams and being a role model to their families. But, so often they never take the time to think about all that they do, appreciate themselves, and very importantly . . . love themselves.

Life is such a wonderful gift. It is tragic when we choose not to live on purpose and appreciate all the wonderful gifts we have been given. I believe that today's challenges are going to make people much stronger, more focused, and more spiritually aligned. The question is, are you up to the tasks?

CHAPTER 5

The Nuances of Effective Human Capital Performance Strategies: Deconstructing the Dynamics of Inter- and Intrapersonal Change

When you couple economic challenges with the additional challenges of natural disasters, staying strong in the face of adversity becomes taxing. Perhaps holding on is no longer the answer. Now is the time for taking stock of where we are in our individual lives and working toward reinventing ourselves as well as creating our own opportunities. Reinventing self may mean that we take more responsibility for what is occurring in our economy. Reinventing self may also mean we fortify our belief in ourselves and our abilities. Reinventing self may also mean we move past being content to a constant state of discontent in order to take advantage of all that this continually emerging, yet challenging global market is offering us. Now is the time that we invoke gratitude that we are still standing and able to move forward.

Yet, the time for sugar coating today's status is long past due. We are in an extremely competitive global environment, which as I have already posited means we have to understand our context from multiple perspectives. More importantly, in concert with an extremely competitive global job market, we are still forced to move through many systems of domination—racism, class elitism, sexism, and imperialism. Each “ism” has the ability to wound the spirit (hooks, 1995). Unfortunately, damaged spirits rarely choose liberation . . . which may be why so many people are shrinking from engaging in the change that is necessary for

them to emerge in this job market strong enough to successfully face that is being called for (hooks, 1995).

We should understand the relationship between stagnation, issues of our own self-esteem and our inability to articulate a clear vision (Ashby, 2003). To better understand the dimensions and dynamics of our respective situations and the associated psychologies of those who now have power and privilege, our approach to our personal change should push the limitations of traditional conversations, propositions, and change strategies in order to effectively develop new ways for reentering today's job market. In this open space, we must feel the freedom to deconstruct our implicit feelings embedded in our settings, context, and social interactions that can and will hold us back (Foucault, 1986; Hansen, 2006).

Our daily lives are embedded with so many issues of "isms." For example, as a woman of color, I know and understand that my theoretical sensitivities emerge from a place where issues of duality and objectification in the background continue to be themes in my life. It does not matter that I possess three degrees, which includes a doctorate degree. It does not matter that I am trained to teach others. At the end of the day, the fact that I am an African American woman emerges as a combination that is impacted by intersecting patterns of racism and sexism (Parker and Lynn, 2002). If I am an out-of-work African American woman, despite my education and work experience, my life emerges with a whole new set of issues and complications in concert with my manifesting false historical narratives I have "chosen" to internalize.

It has been suggested that most organization members sincerely want to love their work and crave the restoration of hopeful work environments to provide balance to their lives (White-Zappa, 2001). Yet, in order to fortify oneself to effectively evoke a change in our organizational environment, one should first seek to understand the "self" and be ready to internally change. Signs of hopelessness in our society are all around us, particularly in our work environments, which are evidenced by the radical changes created by public and private sector acquisitions, reengineering, and breakdowns in the relations and psychological contracts between employer and employee (White-Zappa, 2001). Yet, we cannot become personally challenged and scared by these issues. Each individual has to learn to believe their abilities and invincibility.

We can choose to be a subjectively coherent participant in our story lines, or we can choose to be an objective participant (Davies, 1991); choices that impact our understanding of how we fit (or do not fit) in today's global environment. Equally important where change occurs to which we have no input and/or control, one may have to take an

objective stance. Under no circumstances, however, should you back away from actively engaging in a critical and dispassionate analysis of “you,” where you are in life, choices you have made and how the strides you are taking to live life to its fullest impact your responses and equally important response patterns. There is no room for excuses or choosing to not move toward change.

As difficult as it is to say—for some people losing a job or being challenged with the job search processes may be necessary wakeup calls needed to instigate action.

Invoking the Concept of Leadership into Our Lives

Over the past 12 years, I have had the opportunity to teach leadership...a competency that is mandatory in today’s environment. Leadership competencies are no longer relegated just to people who lead organizations or endeavors. Leadership is about assuming responsibility, having vision, being able to inspire others even in the face of adversity, and equally important being grounded in an unmovable faith that fosters a belief in who you are, and Whose you are!!!! Leadership as a competency is critical for self-development. Simply put, as active leaders of our lives, we must not fall victim to believing someone else is in control of what we do.

From a global workforce perspective, leaders are necessary at multiple levels in an organization. A few years ago, I attended a presentation where senior executives from multiple markets clearly articulated how their respective organizations needed leadership competencies in their workforce—from the bottom of the organization to the top.

The reality of this decade is that there are going to be fewer jobs and more competencies and skills required of those who work. Critical lessons learned by organizations over the course of the prior century is that economic progress does not always translate into human development, which means the new paradigm is requiring organizations to understand the interrelatedness of these two variables (Hagen and Lodha, 2004). Consequently, organizations that understand this relationship are focusing more on locating the role of human development as a measure in defining and evaluating the organization’s performance (Zahra, 1999 as cited in Hagen and Lodha, 2004). Yet, the concept of human development is complex.

Organizations that have been successful in achieving competitive advantage have long understood that there is a need to move beyond short-term strategies and leverage the management of tangible and intangible internal skills and assets (Petrick et al., 1999).

Recommended practices have included

“Provide leadership style and substance education and training at all levels so that behavioral complexity and stewardship sustainable development skills become commonplace throughout the organization. The more capable top executives, managers and other stakeholders are at exercising balanced judgment in strategic decision-making and factoring in environmental concerns, the more likely that reputational capital will be increased, and that the core capabilities of a firm will lead to sustainable competitive advantage.” (Petrick et al., 1999: 64)

However, today's prevailing reality and operating psychological contract are that the individual is responsible for his or her own professional development. Leadership competencies are just one of the many you will have to “wear” and demonstrate in order to help your organization maximize competitive advantage. Your reality is that you cannot wait for the organization to “train” you.

Other critical competencies, which can be paramount to the organization's ability to effectively compete include

- Achievement oriented
- Quality focused
- Self-initiates
- Excellent oral and written communication skills
- Excellent interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics/communications skills
- Customer-service oriented
- Can influence and impact
- Has an organizational awareness
- Can network
- Works well in a team environment
- Possess drive—the ability to exert a high level of effort on the job, the energy to work hard. and the desire and ability to take initiative
- Is honest and demonstrates integrity
- Possessed technical knowledge in one's respective field
- An understanding of organizational power and influence issues
- Has an ability to look at problems from a multidimensional perspective
- Has made a “difference”
- Is “balanced” (Boyatzis, 1982)

While the list appears long, understand that within today's global environment, it is continually expanding! When you examine these core

competencies, look at them with multiple sets of lens. First, it is important to understand from an overarching context the core competencies and skills organizations seek in their workforce. Second, it is important to understand (via seeking the information) how the respective competencies and skills are expected to be executed in your current organization or one in which you hold an interest. Third, compare and contrast how you culturally manifest these core competencies from your personal cultural lens.

For example, the manifestation of organizational power is clearly different across cultural contexts. And, how people exert influence up or down the organization will also be moderated by their cultural lens. Even if you have resided in a geographic location for many years or most of your life, you may still display cultural proclivities that are representative of your origins because of family influence.

A significant task of management is to understand and consider the social-cultural situations and developments, such as customs, habits, and codes of conduct and their influence on human behavior (Neuert, Opel, and Schapp, 2002). Organizations seeking to evoke change should seek to understand how their workforce is grounded in both epistemology and ontological reasoning. To better understand this concept, let us revisit Pettigrew's proposition. Simply stated, Pettigrew (1979) suggested that when we openly acknowledge our personal qualities and experiences, we also open space for another level of a consciousness of meaning to enter that can be subtle yet of significant impact when deconstructing how we create and manage sense and meaning. When organizations as well as individuals understand choices regarding how the world is viewed from one's epistemological and ontological grounding, a better understanding of behavior will emerge.

Being a leader of your life, environment, choices, and in your chosen profession and/or work is critical to how you survive today's economy. When you assume a leadership position in your life you work toward insuring that you acquire and/or refine those competencies identified. So, let's first examine what it means to be a leader in today's environment in concert with what it means to be a leader of one's life and purpose.

Leadership: A Required Competency for Surviving Today's Economic Environment

Core competences have always been a given requirement in the workplace, but not as extensively tied to performance as they are now

throughout multiple job levels. Years ago, a skill-based workforce was far more prevalent, particularly in nonprofessional ranks. Now, people in all levels of an organization are expected to perform with skill and an extensive repertoire of competencies, which should be demonstrated in the job search process.

In 2001, Welch and Byrne suggested that the only sustainable competitive advantage is to innovate and change faster than the toughest competitors and that if the external environment is changing faster than the organization then the organization could die (Welch and Byrne, 2001). This was not an issue just relegated to the private sector in 2001. Today, as it was then in a world that is still wrought with political unrest and constant challenges to underlying principles, both the public and private sectors are continually challenged by multiple issues, which call for an examination of the prevailing paradigms that form and shape policies and resulting political and administrative and corporate systems that support these policies (Easley and Swain, 2003). This change is accelerating and is driven by rapid technological innovations, the globalization of businesses, and increased Internet commerce (Lewin and Regine, 2000).

Equally important, systems, processes, and procedures alone cannot change. The people who work should also just as dramatically change in order to keep up with the dynamics of globalization. For many, this concept is new and the required coping strategies have not been mastered. As a result, when employers are forced to retool their organizations, many are less inclined to engage in extensive training strategies as previously stated and will opt to replace workers—many who may have been with the organization for a very long time.

The dynamics and rapidity of change within today's global market has also forced organizations to re-examine the concept and context of leadership. For those who lead organizations, private and public, their executive teams continue to express the need for a new type of leader who has the ability to deal with the complexities of change, has a strong sense of self and evaluation, is able to invoke group interaction, possesses sound communication skills, and has the moral fortitude to deal with complexity (Bisoux, 2002).

A new vision of management in the twenty-first century mandates organizational members aligning their core values with their actions—meaning that to be successful in the twenty-first century, business leaders at all levels must possess authenticity, integrity, and creativity, competencies that are consistently enacted at work, home, in their community, and in their personal growth strategies (Friedman, 2006). Yet,

those leaders cannot operate in a vacuum. They need people with similar competencies and skills who also understand what global connectivity means and are able to better manage social capital in a world that has become very diverse (Kouzes and Posner, 2002).

The business environment of this century also requires that we view leadership and life from the same continuum, which means an organization should learn to increase business results by enriching lives (Friedman, 2006). Executives in multiple sectors want employees to display an even more intense search for meaning, thus facilitating movement toward a greater openness to the spiritual side of life within the walls of businesses (Kouzes and Posner, 2002). In other words, they are looking for people who are comfortable with who they are, embrace balance, and their role in life. So, while the corporate athlete was once extended to the leadership of an organization, the concepts are now funneled down throughout all levels of an organization.

There are many reasons why balanced leaders in official as well as unofficial leadership roles are important. As said earlier, organizations that are best able to capitalize on their human assets typically gain competitive advantages (Friedman, 2006). Inclusively, many organizations are less hierarchical, and business leadership is no longer limited to top executives—it is required at all levels (Friedman, 2006). Consequently, the broader spans of control require employees to make more decisions (2006).

These requirements, however, are not new. Organization change theory is continuing to examine new knowledge that positions us to better understand the heart and souls of people served by and working in businesses and government, resulting in expansive discussions regarding a need for new hope, reconnection to basic values and appreciation (Easley and Swain, 2002; Easley, McMaster, and Tate, 2003). The literature on leadership and transformational change has continued to expand to include emphasis on interpersonal awareness, where questions of how to drive deep personal transformational change are examined in concert with traditional leadership theories and models (Quinn, 1996; Senge et al., 1999). But the majority of people who read this literature are either academics or professionals. This critical information is not being shared with the masses at large. Therefore, the need for a more aligned employee may indeed be a foreign concept to many who are content to just “living” their life and not focusing on their personal development strategies.

A challenge and change to the concept and context of leadership is occurring on the personal side of life as well. Leadership competencies are

required in almost every environment, starting within your home. Your children will follow your example; your community needs leadership; and as I just said, organizations are demanding it in any and all level jobs. Leadership is not about “wearing” a laundry list of skills and competencies, and leaders are not just “born.” Leadership is a process of learning to develop and internalize strength, vision, an ability to love, and motivate people, while concomitantly not being afraid to take risks.

Leadership is also about not being afraid to change. Leadership competencies are foundational for navigating through this crazy economy and emerging strong. As individuals, we should possess a willingness to reinvent who we are and how we interact with our environment. Leadership as a foundational quality for emerging through the tumultuousness of this job market is about personal, spiritual, and professional growth, and the ability to see the environment for what it is, yet possessing the wisdom to see all plausible scenarios that can emerge while we prepare ourselves for those possibilities. Leadership is also about honesty, authenticity, ethical behavior, and most important faith—believing—that there is something higher than you to call upon. In other words, leadership is about what is inside you, which is why understanding how you interact with and process your social context is so important.

Changing our circumstances—including joblessness, underemployment, or your facing an inordinate amount of time for acquiring a position means starting with an examination of self, which requires significant leadership competencies. A couple of years ago, I watched for the first time the movie *Invictus*. This was a most inspiring movie that charts the early presidential years of South Africa's former president, Nelson Mandela. The most critical lessons I learned from this movie was what kept him strong in the midst of years of unwarranted imprisonment.

Many of us are similarly situated—we are prisoners of our paradigmatic blockages and refusal to even think about change. The poem *Invictus* (Henley, 1888), which was said to be a one of President Mandela's guiding praxis while imprisoned, is powerful . . . When you really listen to and internalize the meaning of the words, that meaning becomes a powerful weapon for not only survival but also effecting forward movement. The context of this poem challenges us to emerge as leaders of our life versus falling victim to life's chances.

“I believe we are now entering a period of breakdown and cultural disintegration where our standard approaches to generating and applying

knowledge to solve personal, organizational, and societal problems—a reliance on tools and techniques, whether it be psychotherapy, psychopharmacology, reengineering, organization development, social and governmental programs are problematic, and are not resulting in fundamental change or a reduction of societal turbulence. Further, our so-called attempts at personal and organizational transformation—whether it means becoming a radical or being an advocate of supposedly radical crusades more often involves sophisticated extensions and amendments to existing theories. Pouring old wine into new bottles can quickly run its course. What we need now are not more ideas, more knowledge, more theories, more tools, more information, more two-by-two organizational models, or more websites, but a fundamentally new perspective, a perspective which is not constructed from within the rules of the existing order.” (Purser, 2011: 46)

When we begin to address deep personal change, we are thrust center stage with facing our values, knowledge, assumptions, rules, and competencies that make us who we are. In doing so, we must be willing to step outside ourselves and embrace disconfirming feedback, see and hear unpleasant things about ourselves and understand growth as a process. If an individual is not continually growing, they may be slowly dying and personal slow death will impact every aspect of your life (Quinn, 1996). Employers do not want to engage people who are afraid of change and growth. And, they clearly do not want to employ the walking dead. Critical to organizations growth and change is the need for stakeholders to be comfortable with the dynamics of change. Even in the midst of total uncertainty, we need to be comfortable with our abilities to work with many unknowns and if necessary, engage in significant risk. This is a major challenge for this millennium because far too many people are risk-adverse.

Unfortunately, despite wanting to evoke change in our lives, we often keep recreating familiar routines and repeating habituated patterns. Consequently, creativity and fresh innovative thinking becomes an exception and rare occurrence (Purser, 2011). Yet, there are many lessons to be learned from Henley’s references to being the master of one’s fate and captain of one’s soul (1888). Today’s environment challenges us to ask what it really means to be the master of one’s fate and the captain of your soul in an environmental context that daily changes. Our mindset and personal vision are critical beginnings to move us beyond feeling stagnated. Yet, our mindset and personal vision have to be as flexible and malleable to change as is our dynamic environment. Our choices are not linear processes; the essence of time and opportunities embodied

in time are more like harmonious, rhythmic chaos. Change via a series of processes, which retrofits that which we know, will invoke limiting choices and confining patterns (Purser, 2011). Perhaps the change we need can be found in our exercising a creative inquiry and strengthening our powers of imagination; removing paradigmatic boundaries that act as blinders (2011).

In most of my leadership classes over the years, I have asked students what their personal vision of themselves and resulting leadership development plan would look like. Every time, students would answer by developing a “to do” list, without first having an internal conversation regarding what it is for them to “be.” We have to have a vision of who we are first before we can engage a “to do” list. Challenge is all around us, but if we look at history, it always has been. No job can define us, and most certainly the loss of a job should never be what takes us down, spiritually, mentally, or physically. As Mahatma Gandhi said

“We must be the change in our lives we seek.”¹

What Does It Mean to Take Charge of Our Lives; To Be the Captains of Our Souls?

I can still remember teaching human resources in the early 1990s to mid to senior level human resource professionals, many who were in the telecommunications industry and discussing how their organizations were outsourcing to countries such as India because of their advanced technological skills. Even then, the rules were changing. Yet, because it was not an abrupt change (remember the boiling frog analogy), people did not recognize the signals that there were new workforce requirements emerging that had absolutely nothing to do with cheap labor. In many respects, people who are being impacted by today's economic downturn and resulting job losses are going to have to play an extensive catch up game. Which means that the first question is, where to start? It is suggested that successfully alternating the human system is a critical part of adaptive change—change where needed expertise and tools do not already exist. Real change will therefore require people to make painful adjustments in their attitudes, work habits, and lives (Quinn, Spreitzer, and Brown, 2000).

So, for people who shy away from technology as one end of a continuum to people who daily utilize multiple mediums of technology in the work day, understand that the movement toward the other end of the continuum does not just entail your “learning” to use the technological

resources. You should learn to embrace the psychological shifts that go along with the change. For example, adapting to technology is not the same as internalizing it as a part of your daily existence. Some may not agree because there is a fear that technology has overcome our lives. Yet the choice to allow it to “overcome” you versus productively incorporating it into your repertoire of work strategies are two different issues.

When we work to evoke change in our lives, an important step is to incorporate appreciation when we examine our past. Yet, we must also be willing to turn inward and examine the potential for self-hypocrisy, which requires personal discipline to cope with the pain involved in examining your integrity gaps in order to change behavior (Quinn, Spreitzer, and Brown, 2000). I continue to put forth the proposition that before an individual can engage in productive appreciation of the past, you should also have the difficult dialogues with “self” in order to remove deeply embedded barriers that can impede personal change (Easley and Alvarez, 2004).

Quinn, Spreitzer, and Brown (2000), discuss Torbert’s proposition that people (particularly professionals) will perform well as long as their assumptions about the situation are not violated. Yet, they also present Torbert’s proposition that it is possible to deviate from the norm through an awakened attention, which allows you to press forward in uncertain and threatening situations; learning as you go—an activity he calls action inquiry (Torbert, 1987 as cited in Quinn, Spreitzer, and Brown, 2000).

When I read this proposition, I had to chuckle, primarily because I clearly understood Torbert’s proposition and painstakingly agree with it. In addition to having Quinn as an instructor in my doctoral program, I had Torbert and Quinn as professors in my doctoral program; each were ahead of their time. I never will forget how Bill required members of our class to engage in an autobiographical writing that required us to deconstruct our behaviors on many different continuums. I protested in more ways than one could imagine—simply because I did not want to confront the “decay” Quinn describes. Yet, Bill was quite adamant and simply stated that if I wanted to pass his class, I would write the assignment.

Not quite a year later, I had the opportunity to see Bill again at a conference in Stroud, England where 65 participants lived under one roof, studied and engaged in lively exchanges for several days. Albeit my writing the assignment from an initial mindset of protest, I had to admit to Bill while we were in England that it was the best thing I had done in recent years. You see, I learned through that assignment that

as Quinn, Spreitzer, and Brown so appropriately suggest, you cannot change others (and I am going to take the liberty to add—or your environment) until you have made the painful adjustments by surrendering and placing yourself in jeopardy as you work to become part of an emergent system (2000).

They also suggest through a perusal of Reason's work (who led the Stroud conference and also was ahead of his time) that leaders of change must be open to reframing how they view a situation, as they consciously seek and choose new frames to ensure that their behavior is aligned with key values; actions that keep the change agent in a process of self-creating and self-transfiguring (2000).

Our global world is an emergent system; it is continually morphing. Being open to engaging in change to adequately meet the requirements of this emergent system also calls for surrendering to your ability to tolerate uncertainty while you engage in strategies that will help you develop your new steps. This change is going to be discontinuous, radical, and, as I experienced with Torbert's exercise, painful (Quinn, Spreitzer, and Brown, 2000). Yet, the outcome can far exceed what we ever expected from ourselves.

To emerge with the core competencies needed in today's environment, be willing to look inside and align your values and vision with the common good as well as with your own highest purpose (2000). The common good, however, is also going to be ambiguous—the change you are adapting to is one that is continuous. Yet, when you are in alignment with your highest values, vision, and purpose, you also invite others around you to come into alignment—which is what change is all about (Quinn, Spreitzer, and Brown, 2000).

People need to identify those things that give you joy and happiness . . . a concept we often forget to think about. When we seek to identify and define those things that give us joy, they are the very endeavors we can embark up to make our living. Concomitantly, we have to be honest with ourselves as to why we do not actively engage in that which gives us joy. What actions, activities, people, and circumstances do we allow to get in the way of us daily living our lives in ongoing moments of joy?

I love to write, and as a professor, we have to publish if we are to stay current for our students. Writing for the academy was always somewhat painful for me because there were so many issues I wanted to address that were outside my discipline. However, after I became tenured in a conversation with one of my seminary professors, I had the epiphany that I could write about topics that I enjoy versus writing to accommodate the "Academy." It was then that I moved from "publishing" to

really writing and addressing topics that I believe to be more meaningful to communities to which I feel a strong bond.

Equally important, the results of my joyful writing moved me from submitting my work for consideration for publication to invitations to write from journal editors and publishing houses. Yet, the most important achievement of facing my academic “demons” regarding writing was my movement toward being authentic to “me.” My movement toward this action was not without risk—which is a major component of change. However, as I engaged in Torbert’s action inquiry, I had to ask at what point did I lose “me?” At what point, did I lose the joy of “being” me and all that I can manifest?

Unfortunately, as a community of scholars, the Black professoriate endures many unwarranted barriers that are counterproductive to our career paths. We are often chastised in many ways when we “step out” and address issues that may fall outside the mainstream of our disciplines—particularly those issues that are tied to our cultural communities (Easley, 2011).

As I have mentored junior faculty, I always suggest self-managing their career and engaging in scenario planning to understand the future of higher education. Equally important, I always caution against becoming comfortable with the concept of tenure and the protection it allegedly offers.

You see, similar to other organizational sectors, even people who have “protection” can and are forced out of jobs if their respective institutions do not deem their current contributions to be of value and their skills and competencies up to par. Merely having a doctorate degree means nothing in today’s rapid global workforce. The ability to add new knowledge, technologically stay current and be globally recognized in your field defines today’s professoriate.

Living and Loving Life: A Critical Under Girth of Leadership

When teaching my leadership classes, I also ask my students the question—“Do you know how to live?” We exist in such a fast paced environment that we forget how to enjoy the simple things in life. Burning my fireplace and candles gives me so much peace and joy, as does feeding the birds that flock to my patio. Yet, for such a long time, I never took the time just to sit and enjoy the fire and get inside me, or take time to buy bird seed and watch with a big smile how they and the squirrels jointly eat from the same feeder. Taking time to sit by that fire the first thing in the morning is where I again thank my Creator for life.

My first thanksgiving begins before I hop out of bed, yet I remember a time where I did not pray first thing in the morning . . . I was too “busy” getting up. Yet, it is when I pray I find that I am grounded for the day with an invincible attitude. I believe that a significant part of learning how to live again is living in gratitude for that which we have. What will always stay with me is a phrase from the last Rocky movie where Stallone said that it was not how many times you got knocked down that mattered. What was important was how many times you were able to get back up!

Many people knocked down by this economy feel broken and strapped. But they wake up each day with life—a gift to nurture. How we choose to nurture that gift is what will make a difference as to whether or not we survive this economy and most important constantly changing global environment. Do you continue to exist as you have in the past, or do you take a leadership role in your life and embrace and more importantly *make* new opportunities?

The next question I typically ask my leadership students is that they think about the grandest vision they have of themselves. Now, I cannot take total credit for these perspectives. I was blessed to teach leadership development for five years with two powerful colleagues and friends, Drs. Cynthia Tate and Michele McMaster, two ladies whom I dearly admire. Over the five years of teaching leadership development, we each grew in our understanding, reflection upon, and reflexive action toward what Dr. McMaster’s termed, conceptualized, and contextualized as the “being-ness of being” and its relationship to leadership. My learning moved my teaching leadership from a very traditional model to one where I now teach how to engage the self in an experiential process that impacts all aspects of a person’s life and prepares them for leadership roles irrespective of the venue.

When I first heard Dr. McMaster talk about the being-ness of being, I chuckled, but over the years since she first taught that concept, I have gone beyond resonating with it to really internalizing what it means. When you are grounded in the being and understanding of your true essence, you are more open to embracing a vision of where you want to go in life. We each have gifts—but for many reasons that often are beyond our personal choice, we do not always manifest those gifts. Yet, a critical part of our leadership qualities is our ability to be comfortable in being all that we have been gifted to be!

Once you embrace that vision, it does not matter what else is occurring in your external environment. It does not matter that folk around you are acting crazy, or that there are impending layoffs, or that the

energy in the air reeks of negativity. You are in your zone, pursuing your vision and focusing upon living your life in gratitude. You will adjust to required changes because they are not driving you . . . you are driving your own soul as you work *your* plan that is designed to execute *your* vision. And, when you get stuck, with clarity you will call upon your Creator for guidance because your mind is focused and clear about what you need to do . . . you just need a little jump start once in a while. Once you identify your vision and critically examine how you are living your life, it is time to put your personal strategy together. Strategy and the execution of strategic steps are very important because they move you toward the realization of your dreams and goals.

I remember many years ago, having a conversation with a student who talked about wanting to develop her career path toward the goals her supervisor and organization had for her. I asked her what she wanted to do with her career. The irony of her answer was that it was totally antithetical to where her organization wanted her to go. I then asked her what would happen if her supervisor left and or the organization could no longer support her financially on the development path they had outlined for her. Would she be happy in having moved along a path in which she had no vested interest other than the fact that someone else wanted it for her? She could not answer either of those questions and interestingly enough came back to me a few years later to continue the dialogue because her job had been eliminated. Unfortunately, far too many people fail to self-manage their careers. I am not discounting that you should not enjoy the results of career development opportunities—I just personally believe you should follow your heart, exercise your personal career development strategies, and constantly keep a list in front of you of those tasks that are necessary to execute your plan.

Our Internal Dialogue—Is It a Language of Self-Empowerment?

While I have addressed the need to deconstruct our internal dialogue, please indulge me as I engage in a little more phenomenological analysis of the impact and results of doing that. If you are set to take a leadership position in your life, you will commit to constantly scanning your internal dialogue in concert with your external or nonverbal cues—all which impact your ability to brand yourself; also a topic we will investigate.

Watkins Ali suggested that often times people's phenomenology is inextricably linked to the intersections of our psychology and spirituality, which help to frame the existential and phenomenological types of

questions that emerge in our dialogues (Watkins Ali, 1999). If historically you have face challenges, and you are not careful and intentional in deconstructing your dialogue, your persona can give the vibration that you really are “doomed to fail,” despite your desire to take control of life. Again, I must drive home the concept of privileging our lens. When we work hard to understand our self and the multiple contexts that impact self, we are armed with knowledge that makes it far easier for us to change.

How we internalize our world is critical to our being able to change our path. As an African American woman, I am very clear on the fact that many in my race have undergone a crisis of identity, which necessitates intentional liberating activities that can bring about a salvation that extends to the very core of my being (Butler, 2006) . . . a salvation that will heal me from the external forces that threaten me as well as help me bridge the chasms that exist within my personal domains (Easley, 2010).

Margaret Wheatley (1999) equates this level of introspection to a concept of newness, positing that great forces of creation are focused on exploring newness, which is a primary value embraced by all life, a primary force that encourages life into new discoveries. If, however, you give others the keys to your self-esteem, you will not look for the new but will instead explore things within self-prescribed safety zones, which do not invoke a willingness to examine new paradigms. *Effective* leaders—especially when leading the “self” seek newness (Easley, McMaster, and Tate, 2003). Leaders drive change, they don't follow the status quo. Therefore, a positive view of self provides inner strength from which a person may cope more effectively with crises, and develop the self-esteem that provides a firm foundation from which to deal with the problems of life (Slater and Cibrowski, 1982), thereby strengthening one's ability to *lead* their life.

As an African American woman, I share with my other Black sisters many coping strategies that stem from living in a society that has a long history of denigrating us—but it does not define us, which is a critical point to remember. We have unique experiences that lead to unique perspectives or standpoints for self-examination. Yet, when looking to evoke change, we also have to challenge our coping strategies. There are characteristic themes that emerge in our dialogues; themes of struggling for independence, self-reliance, and self-definition (Banks-Wallace, 2000). Unfortunately, these themes will come to haunt us when we incorporate the added stress of matriculating through the loss of a job. And, they may even haunt us as we daily work in our organizational environments. We may turn to an internally self-destructive dialogue

versus evaluating the situation for what it really is—thereby destructively attacking the “self.”

The cruelties of today’s job market do not help. When I worked in the corporate sector in human resources, it was unheard of to conduct a job search where you did not give a status regarding the application to the candidate . . . even if they were not being considered for the job. Yet, in today’s job market, one can send out hundreds of resumes never to hear anything in return; not even a polite email. We have lost the “art” of civility and employers are riding on the high of this being an employer’s market. But you cannot allow inappropriate behavior to deplete your spirit and bring you down. If ever there was a time you need to have your self-esteem in tack and on an all-time high, it is when you are looking for a job. When communicating with potential employers, you have to be strong and grounded in a belief that they need you. You cannot convey the positive attitude that is needed or be as focused on the nuances of the job search process if you are drowning in feelings of inadequacy and/or depression.

It is critical that people in today’s challenging environment, irrespective of their ethnic origins develop an ability to aggregate and articulate individual expressions of *everyday consciousness* as *self-defined and positive* standpoints (Banks-Wallace, 2000). In other words, you are not a failure and you are not alone. However, you also do not want to follow the “crowd” with respect to how you work through the challenges.

Whether you are leading the little league team, an organization, a church ministry, or equally important your future—true leadership is inner directed. Individuals can learn to shape themselves when they are willing to stand in their personal power and recognize that the world is shaped by choices. Personal power is nothing more than an individual’s ability to choose (Easley, McMaster, and Tate, 2003); and as posited by Goswami, Reed, and Goswami (1993), “choice is a concomitant of conscious experience . . . *We chose therefore we are*” (p.112).

Recognizing that our choices determine how our world is shaped is an enlightened, yet difficult concept for many to grasp (Easley, McMaster, and Tate, 2003). To shift one’s focus and act in terms of personal choices is to realize that we can direct how we experience our world (Wheatley, 1999; Easley, McMaster, and Tate, 2003).

... It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

—William Ernest Henley²

CHAPTER 6

Today's Required Competencies, Skills, and Employment Expectations

For employers to suggest that people are not desirable because they have lost a job, particularly as a blanket statement and point of view, is questionable behavior. While technology has dramatically changed the methodology for screening applicants, during my years in human resources, it was never assumed that you would summarily dismiss communicating with a candidate regarding his or her status. But in today's economy not receiving feedback from a potential employer seems to be the status quo, despite how many attempts one may make to follow-up.

Unfortunately, many business leaders do not understand that their failure to treat people with dignity and respect will ultimately impact their brand. Yet, that is not a situation you can allow to derail your efforts. Know failure and/or lack to engage in two way communication processes during the job search process (even if it is a simple follow-up email) is a fact of life that should NOT impact how you exponentially brand, market, and move your credentialing processes forward as you look for employment.

I recently heard a radio personality, who also is a business owner, discuss on the air that he never hires people who are not personally referred. That too is a travesty because even in today's job market, people are still reticent with respect to recommending people because they are afraid of putting their own laurels on the line. The failure to "know" someone does not mean that you, as a potential candidate, are an undesirable candidate. It may mean that you are well networked and/or the people you know may be in tenuous positions with their own employers and as a result are less inclined to want to provide a reference.

While networking is critical in today's market, there clearly is a difference between being well-networked and being considered a "lackey" to people. I have seen far too many people who are determined to network with the "right" people, lose their identity as well as their way in life. There is a balance you should strike when developing your networking strategies.

In today's environment, we should learn to personally overcome potential roadblocks by focusing on possessing a spirit that will not give up despite multiple rejections, whether they are communicated rejections or a failure of people to respond to your applications. Failure to respond should push us to the reflective-reflexive action mode of introspectively assessing our next steps, which we may find are diametrically opposed to where we would have started. Our rejections can be powerful lessons for us if we learn to step back and objectively assess the situation.

Employers indeed want and need people who are not willing to give up. Tenacity is a critical competency, coupled with one's ability to view processes as well as challenges from different paradigmatic views. In other words, if I can't get in the door one way, what are my options? Options may simply include your initiating a follow-up to a prospective employer versus waiting for them to respond to your application.

People are being challenged to step up their personal "game." Complicating this concept of needing to step up your game is being comfortable with how fast technology morphs. Many of the jobs for which we are trained may not even exist three to five years into the future. Our ability to quickly learn information has to be a competency that we are able to communicate to potential employers. Your mental agility and willingness to learn are very important. Further complicating the concept of stepping up one's game is our ability *and* willingness to demonstrate our comfort with and ability to evoke change, while navigating through very challenging waters. Yet many people are far too comfortable with being rigid in both their thinking and actions. In many respects, I believe rigidity is used as a safeguard against taking risks; irrespective of how small the risks may be. To survive and excel in today's environment requires your being comfortable with risk-taking. Our ability to be comfortable with risk taking infers that we are not daily functioning in a mindset and physical stance that is riddled with unwarranted stress—which is why managing stress in our personal lives is critical.

There are some specific terms you should understand, relate, and internalize to effectively navigate through this economy: the concepts

of paradigms, paradigm change, and paradigm paralysis and/or blockage; terms I have already used. One of the major sources I have used over the years regarding these terms is the work by Joel Barker, who interestingly began writing about and making short films on these topics close to 30 years ago. Explore the meaning of these terms and ask yourself are you into a mindset of paradigm blockage or paralysis with respect to what this continually changing global economy means today? Be honest with yourself—can you adequately compete, or do people see you as a dinosaur in a vastly expanding technological age? If the latter is the answer, seek the change that is necessary and do not be afraid to rebrand “you.”

Now That I Have Mentioned the Term “Brand”—What Does It Mean and Why Is It Important?

A comprehensive definition of personal branding incorporates

A description of the process whereby people and their careers are marked as brands. It has been noted that while previous self-help management techniques were about *self-improvement*, the personal branding concept suggests instead that success comes from *self-packaging*. Further defined as the creation of an asset that pertains to a particular person or individual; this includes but is not limited to the body, clothing, appearance and knowledge contained within, leading to an indelible impression that is uniquely distinguishable. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_branding, downloaded November 13, 2011)

Personal branding is very important in today’s employment environment. You have to make a decision regarding the image you wish to convey—and then you need to internalize and “wear” this image at all times.

We each have a personal brand, yet are often unaware of it. Our unawareness leads to our failure to strategically manage our brand; yet everything that is publically associated with our name impacts our brand. In today’s instant-message, online, and virtual age, a strong personal brand plays an important part in personal success (Rampersad, 2010). Employers want to know who you are, how you fit in, in concert with what you bring to the table. In other words, what differentiates you from the crowd?

The level of job you seek does not delimit the need for you to brand yourself. If you are a craft worker—how you execute your craft and customer service will make you stand above the crowd. Employers want

to know if you have a history of going above the norm in your work and can you either quantitatively or qualitatively describe those attributes? They want to know if you are neat in appearance and portray an aura of organization.

Everything about you is scrutinized. Potential employers will draw conclusions from seemingly unrelated areas of your life. Depending on the level of position to which you apply, where you live and small details regarding your family may also be scrutinized. This especially holds true when you are going for high-level positions. Therefore, how you and your family members present yourself can impact your job search. Seemingly unrelated personal issues are a part of your brand; which means all areas of your life should be congruent with the image you choose to represent you.

The failure to understand how you are perceived from varying viewpoints is a universal issue, complicated by the many “isms,” which still impact a person’s ability to matriculate through their career or worse, obtain employment. My intent in bringing in these perceived barriers is not to suggest you should change who you are. I simply have always believed that it is important to understand the rules of the game and the unspoken “isms” in order to make a decision as to which ones you choose to address and/or modify “you” in order to accommodate the nuances of individuals who make hiring decisions. So, let’s look at some of the more subtle barriers that can impact your brand. In 2009, Rigby reported ten things that should not kill one’s career prospect, yet often do. So, what were those ten “things?”

The first one he addressed was an individual’s sense of dress, which can be negatively impacted by the failure to look businesslike and contemporary (Rigby, 2009). The second barrier being your appearance, citing that a recent study at the University of Florida found that good-looking people really do earn more and go further (2009). While I do not disagree with the results of this study, I would like to point out that good looking does not always require our looking like a Vogue model. I strongly believe that our internal beauty shines when we feel good about ourselves, which leads me back to the points I made regarding keeping stress under control. Do the basics: exercise, eat healthy foods, remove negative energy of others from your lives, in concert with simple things such as drinking enough water, getting enough rest; all which can make a difference in both how we feel about ourselves and project an image of confidence and internal beauty.

Rigby’s ten issues also included body modifications—tattoos and other body “enhancements” in concert with accents. However, perceptions of

other researchers suggested that the effect of one's accent on your career may be more subtle in today's environment (2009).

Rigby also added to his list, education; more specifically stating that individuals who attend what are perceived to be more prestigious schools may have more advantage in the job market (2009). This point alone is critical to substantiating why you need to focus on developing your personal brand in concert with acknowledgment of the contributions you have made inside and outside the workplace. Bottom line, everyone does not attend a high-profile institution. However, everyone has the choice to be active in their professional and personal communities and make a difference in this world—actions that will magnify the desired critical core competencies desired by employers.

Rigby's last few personal attributes include parentage (e.g., family connections), height, hair (promoting the need to insure that your hairstyle is contemporized), and weight (2009). The weight issue was amplified by his reporting a United Kingdom survey of two-thousand HR professionals who indicated that given the choice between an average-weight versus an obese candidate, 93% would chose the average-weight person. And, in a poll conducted by a Seoul-based obesity clinic, 80% of those respondents said being overweight greatly reduced chances of being hired (2009). Centered in and around the issue of weight was the personal characteristics reported to be associated with obesity—laziness, greediness, and a lack of discipline (2009). Rigby's tenth issue was a person's politics and religion in concert with the recommendation that people should keep their personal and political views to themselves (2009).

What does this all mean? Successful personal branding is more than just marketing and promoting yourself. It entails controlling and influencing how others perceive and think of you (Rampersad, 2010, p. 4.01). Yet, your personal brand should be authentic, which leads to a happier and more successful life (2010). Your personal brand should emerge from your search for your identify and meaning in life, which means you should be clear about what you want, while you focus and giving it all your positive energy (Rampersad, 2010).

So, let's summarize. From the beginning of this book, I have presented concepts that require you to closely and critically examine who you are compared and contrasted to where you want to be. I started by strongly suggesting you privilege as well as deconstruct your lens, and I presented several methods for doing so—critically examining your language in concert with flipping that language and learning to invoke appreciation for all that you are. Each of these steps serves as a catalyst for your moving forward. I also suggested you de-stress—a strategy that

allows you to better align yourself to your goals, while concomitantly invoking balance into your life.

Your brand will not just include your external presentation, albeit it being a very important part of your brand. A complete branding process can and will go to the core of who you are and the *consistency* of your imaging and resulting behaviors. In other words, people can spot a “fake.” You cannot and will not be able to consistently keep a brand going if it is not a direct outcome of who you are. Therefore, the interpersonal and intrapersonal work that was suggested in previous chapters is critical to forming and/or reforming your brand, which in many ways already exist. You have to understand its current state, execute modifications as required, and “manage” your brand at all times.

Your brand will also include your more visible attributes—simply stated are you neat about your person? Do you look like you are in shape? Are your outer artifacts organized and clean? Is your home clean? If coworkers have to unexpectedly drop by, what will they see? I have had to go to colleagues’ homes on several occasions that were not anticipated. I walked into disaster zones. Now, had I been their superiors, what do you think would have been my impression? The same holds true for your office space at work—is it neat and clean? I will never forget years ago my taking a walk in the workplace with my superior and his comments as he looked into the disorganized offices of colleagues. He was very clear in expressing how he saw a disorganized office representative of a disorganized mind.

Could it be your turn to drive to a restaurant for lunch with colleagues that could include your boss? If so, is the car clean and organized on the interior and exterior? You see, if it is not people can draw conclusions from the appearance of your vehicle as well and correlate that appearance to your ability to be organized!

I believe our Creator, irrespective of how we identify that Creator is calling us to be all that we can—to continually morph ourselves to new levels. For many, being all that we can is frightening. We fear our successes sometimes more than we fear our failures. So, what does that mean when people are facing unemployment and employers who do not prefer to even hire the unemployed? If you fear success, it is going to be impossible to brand yourself as a successful and influential person, irrespective of what type of job you seek. If your outer appearances do not represent confidence and a mind focused on success, you will not get beyond first base with a job search process. Consequently, it is important to understand your personal style and how it is perceived when looking to effectively communicate with and influence others to hire you.

It is suggested that an organic, holistic, and authentic personal brand helps people unlock their potential to build a trusted image—one that is in harmony with your dreams, life purpose, values, passion, specialization, and genius (Rampersad, 2010). Being perceived as extremely competent is very important; yet being perceived as extremely competent *and* a joy to be around is an added plus. Think about the people and organizations that you prefer to work with. When I think about the people and/or organizations that I prefer to work with, I can directly tie my working with them to the list of competencies we will continue to discuss throughout this book and my perception of their brand. And, I will pay a premium for their services when using them because they consistently perform! Their reputation means nothing if they do not execute the required performance to keep that brand intact.

When branding yourself, assess your *interpersonal* communication style and how it impacts your ability to influence. Do you clarify and confirm your communications with others? Do you effectively manage differences? Do you work to build upon ideas for the higher good of the organization and/or endeavor with which you are working? Are you an effective listener who understands how to listen to both the spoken word as well as note and understand the unspoken communications of people? Are you viewed as conducting an orchestra or do your colleagues see you as a solo player? Do you command respect and demonstrate authority in your area of expertise? Or do others consider you to be difficult in both your communications and their ability to work with you?

Success is contingent upon you and your mode of presentation. When looking to influence others, you should always demonstrate a comfort with your ability to stand in your personal power, which is built upon a higher level of confidence than that people normally and daily assume. You will be assessed by potential employers relative to your ability to build relationships. Yet when looking to build relationships, people want to be associated with an individual who projects confidence, personal power, and some level of authority, even if they are not in a position of authority. Inclusively, credibility is critical. Others will look at your record of effectiveness and competence.

Your Internet Presence—Can and Will Break or Make Your Brand

Before the Internet became a major source for networking, people made great efforts to make physical contact with potential sources of influence. However, in today's environment, LinkedIn and Facebook have become the networking door openers (Morgan, 2011).

Most people are familiar with the popular online sites for job postings. However, what many may not know is that recruiters are utilizing alternative ways of recruiting via the Internet, a phenomena that is being well documented in today's environment. Approximately three years ago, I attended a seminar with recruiters who openly admitted to first going to a person's Facebook, My Space, or LinkedIn account before determining if they wanted to proceed with the recruitment process, which means how you represent yourself on the Internet will definitely impact your job search results. The language you use, the critical thinking you display, how your interpersonal as well as intrapersonal dynamics come across and your pictures are all subject to scrutiny, even if you attempt to block individuals who are not on your friends lists. Many recruiters know how to get around those security measures.

I continue to be amazed and baffled with students when discussing their social networking presence. Far too many students believe that it is not a recruiter's business as to how they post on their social networks. What they failed to understand was that social networking pages are being used for a variety of reasons, whether you like it or not. Consequently, if you are serious about your career or job search, you will have no option but to factor in these realities, which mean you scrutinize "friends," manage what you post as well as what others migrate to your pages and set the tone for the language that you will accept by your social network friends.

Do your pictures often show you hanging out and drinking? Draw your own conclusions as to what recruiters will then surmise! Are you often spouting off about personal issues that really have no business on a public website? Do you excessively post and/or tweet? Doing so could suggest a narcissistic personality or far too much time on your hands. Equally important, who are your "friends" on these sites? People who "taint" their pages with excessive language and other questionable behaviors will be a very negative reflection on you as well—despite not being able to control what they say and how they say it. The old perception that birds of a feather flock together can and does prevail. My recommendation has always been to not be afraid to jettison these people off your page, even if you personally are not offended by their FB or MySpace lack of etiquette.

I am not advocating that it is appropriate how people judge you on social networking sites. I am simply saying be aware of the fact that they *are* judging you and take the appropriate action. Your social networking sites are an important part of your brand. Social networking sites are now populated by corporations, government, profit, and nonprofit

entities as well as politicians—another indicator of a situation where the “rules of the game” have now changed. Equally important, there may be a concern that how you conduct yourself in a social context will spill over into your business contexts. Consistency in your behaviors is important to potential employers, particularly when they are assessing your ability to handle difficult situations. How you interpret and react to events in a social context can imply how you will handle difficult situations in a business context. Even if you do not approve of the intrusion into your personal life—choose to evaluate what your behaviors in multiple contexts may say about you.

At the same time, I will never suggest that you shy away from using your social network sites. They are fun, supportive, and keep us connected to people. I love Facebook because it has allowed me to connect with people with whom I would not normally communicate—not that they are not important, but we all know how busy we become. It only takes a few minutes to update your status and read what friends and colleagues are up to. And, it is a joy to read what people are doing, get inspirational quotes from friends and colleagues, or just keep one another lifted when life seems to get to us. Yet, we also have to be aware that many employers block the use of these sites on their business computers, which points to the need to balance the impression of how much time you are actually spending on social networking. Therefore, if you frequently tweet or post on Facebook, your employers or potential employers may surmise you having too much time on your hands no matter how much you pontificate your ability to multitask!

You can also manage your brand by developing your personal Internet profile on a personal web page, which can also house your resume and other critical information that can be used when networking. Google and Yahoo are two examples of sites that allow you to develop your personal pages. Consequently, if recruiters are searching your name, or looking for individuals with a specific area of expertise, your web page will emerge.

How you choose to use electronic communications is critical to managing your brand. As a society, we use electronic communications as a daily part of our communication processes, and we won't even discuss the phenomena that text messaging has become. Yet, just because these are quick communication devices does not mean you can become lax when using them. How often you send people chain emails will contribute to people's perception of your available time and sensitivity toward their time. No one wants to constantly delete junk mail because someone else is indiscriminate in its use. Everyone will not appreciate your

jokes. Your incessant use of this mode of communication can suggest your being lax in both your time and outputs.

Your use of the English language on email as well as text messages should always be professional. When professionally communicating via text, you should never use shorthand. We cannot assume that everyone understands what the shorthand symbols mean. Many people forget that once you hit that send button, you have lost control of that communication, which can be disseminated to people you may not even know. Consequently, if you fail to use spell check, even on text messages, you risk conveying an image of sloppiness. Once those communications leave your domain, they also become public domain messages, which means they could be used in legal proceedings or other regulatory processes. In other words, if you don't want what you write to be read in the local newspapers, please be careful of how you construct your messages.

You also need to be cognizant of who you copy on emails, on and off the job. Inappropriately copying someone on an email message can be perceived as an equally inappropriate display of power and an attempt to undercut the person with whom you are communicating. This is especially true when job hunting. We may be tempted to by-pass certain levels of decision makers in an effort to quickly get to the "right" person. Yet, that same person you by-passed can make life very difficult, even if you get the job. You never want to leave people with the impression that you inappropriately invoke power strategies.

We have far more control over our Internet presence than we imagine. The extent to which you manage your Internet presence will impact and can expand your personal brand. The choice is yours as to how you understand and use the power of social networking.

SKYPE is another communications phenomenon that must be carefully monitored. Employers are using SKYPE or teleconferencing as the first round of interviews. If you are involved in either modality of communications be aware of your background as you are speaking to people on the computer. They do see more than just your face and if your office (home and/or work) space is congested, you will definitely leave a questionable impression. Your background should also be free of noise. If you have pets, put them up. You may even want to temporarily shut off your land line and cell telephones to avoid interrupting phone calls. And, when using these modalities of communication, you still have to be aware of your dress. Equally important, when you engage in a SKYPE interview, you should be dressed as if you were interviewing on the potential employer's site!

The Interface between Branding, Competencies, and Skills

In an effort to provide you with a “feel” of the meaning of competencies, we will examine in this section a beginning list, and then examine an overview of some of the “hot” ones critical to most employers and definitely warranting mention in the resume, cover letter, and interview processes. After we have overviewed these topics, I want to go back to the principle of developing and working your strategy.

It is important to have a plan of action. You may, however, have to be flexible with how you work and/or modify your strategy should circumstances change. We have to understand the concept of strategy and the potential barriers to effective implementation of strategy. The precursor steps, such as getting your immediate business in line—for example, the unemployment insurance, benefits, and other critical business decisions—along with managing your stress factors and doing the necessary intrapersonal work are only beginning steps. Vision them as the overarching initiatives that are facilitators of your developing and working a personal strategy. They help set the context in which you will work. However, your mindset, physical strength, and focus are critical to your visioning where you are going and how you implement the strategic and tactical steps necessary to evoke the desired change. How you navigate through these challenging times can and will set the stage for how you navigate through challenge and change in your next career/job move. But first, let’s better understand the concept of competencies and skills, albeit they are described and initially addressed in earlier chapters.

Top Competencies and Skills Sought by Employers

At the top of the list is the ability to effectively communicate. Oral and written communication skills are critical. How one orally communicates as well as writes speaks volumes to employers. When assessing your oral communication skills, critically assess your enunciation and pronunciation competencies. You should also be aware of how well you communicate via email. Often we will forget to do the simple things, like utilize our spell check. Inclusively, you have to understand the politics of communication. Who do you copy on memos or blind copy, in addition to knowing when it is important to highlight your individual skills versus defer to your team? In other words, hand in hand with oral and written communications falls the competency of being politically savvy, which also includes knowing how and when to be silent.

Power strategies and understanding organizational politics are necessary competencies in today's competitive work environments. Yet, the effective utilization of power does not have to be negative. Understanding how to stand in your personal power is a very important competency, which is built upon your self-esteem and belief in your knowledge. The ability to influence and effective use of personal power are inextricably tied. You cannot be influential if you do not stand solid in your personal power.

As discussed in a previous chapter, leadership competencies are very important. An individual does not have to lead a major corporation or organization to demonstrate effective leadership competencies. Your involvement in community and/or church organizations can help hone your leadership competencies in addition to providing on the resume critical examples where you have either been chosen for or sought opportunities to demonstrate and develop this critical competency. Whether you are leading the little league club, or a church ministry, your ability to articulate those situations where you have assumed a leadership role is important in your job search process.

Technical Skills are also very critical. While the younger workforce has grown up in a technologically savvy environment, older workers have to catch up. Learning new technologies can often become overwhelming. However, it is critical that you locate training programs that will accommodate your particular learning style. Yet, you should first understand your personal learning style. If you are a hands on learner and the focus of the training program is to work via manuals, you may not be in the best environment for effectively learning the technology. Therefore, first seek to understand your preferred learning style in order to work with a training environment that can effectively cater to your needs.

Changing your brand in order to meet the new dynamics of today's global environment does not mean what you have done in the past is wrong or that it was ineffective. It simply means that there are now competencies and skills we have to further develop. Therefore the obvious question is how does one enhance and/or obtain these competencies and incorporate them into their branding process? First, critically examine how many competencies you already possess and how you have successfully utilized them. Having that appreciative conversation with yourself is germane to your getting a handle on those areas of work and life where you excel. Cluster those competencies into constructs.

Many critical competences address your honesty and integrity, drive, ability to influence and impact, how you self-initiate and your self-confidence. Equally important, many of the dimensions of these

competencies are centered on your ethics. Do you do what you say and do you do it in a timely manner? Are you reliable? If you are expected to produce a report or project for your manager, do you do what is required as well as go over and beyond the basics; thus favorably impacting people's perception regarding your ability to self-initiate and your self-confidence? Do you deliver what you promise when you promise? Or, do you joke about your propensity to shirk responsibility, not realizing that people are storing those "jokes" in long-term memory?

When you are dealing with people, are you seen as a person of your word? Do people perceive you as being honest, or view you as an individual always trying to circumvent the system? How do you physically demonstrate self-confidence? In my business communications classes, I ask students during the first week to observe people walking, and make a note of how many walk with their heads down and shoulders slumped. I next ask their initial impression of the people walking with their heads in the down position. The results are always startling to the students, first because they are not really cognizant of their "walking style," and second, because they are always amazed at the negative personal image that is projected when someone is walking with their head toward the ground.

For the most part, people are not even aware of how they are perceived simply walking around every day. When you walk, do you walk with purpose, or are your steps seen as tentative? When you walk, are you constantly looking at the ground? Do you smile? Smiles can open many doors. When you speak, do you speak with confidence? Are you okay with saying no, I don't know the answer to something versus trying to give the impression that you have all the answers (risking looking ridiculous)? Are you confident enough to offer help to others and still manage your work load?

When you are perceived as an honest person that operates with self-confidence as well as integrity, people will listen to you and you are able to influence. However, if you are tentative in your actions and communications, you won't be perceived as an individual that is the "go-to-person" the individual able to make a valuable contribution—even if you are, which only emphasizes how important it is to accurately assess your abilities in these areas. We should remember we are dealing with perception and the resulting actions that drive the perception of others—which impact your ability to get hired, promoted, or influence people to want to help you in your career/job transitioning processes

When you communicate, do you use proper English? Irrespective of how we talk when we are at home, there are communication protocols

in the workplace. Even when you are out in nonwork-related situations, how effective are your communications? Recently, I was having dinner at a restaurant and three ladies sat in the booth behind mine. Their communications between themselves was loud, and riddled with “bad” English—no, they weren’t cursing; they simply could not construct a grammatically correct sentence. I was silently climbing the walls; not because I am a teacher but because I am sure they had no idea of how they were publicly demeaning themselves. I made it a point to look at them as I was leaving. They were relatively young women. The saying that there are only six degrees of separation between people could also mean that at some point in time, I could be interviewing them for a job. One never knows how people who sit on the periphery of your life could at some point in time move beyond the periphery into a center-stage position. Therefore, you cannot afford to always be “loose” when in public. Bad habits are also hard to break. If you have the habit of destroying the English language when in public and/or social situations, it is not hard to imagine you doing the same in the workplace. We should also practice using proper English in concert with a strong voice projection. And, of course we cannot forget the concept of eye contact.

In the broader American culture, the ability to look another person in the eye has tended to be perceived as your being trustworthy. Unfortunately, from a cultural perspective this is a very touchy subject. In some cultures, it is considered an insult to look a person in the eye. But, we have to be cognizant of the cultural context in which we operate in order to make an informed decision as to how we choose to function in that environment.

Do you self-initiate? Do you actively seek opportunities to expand your knowledge, make a contribution, or volunteer? Are you self-initiating to make your life better? Do you offer solutions when concerns, issues, or problems are expressed, or are you the doom and gloom person that can clearly communicate the problem and then stop at that point, never offering options for solutions? Do you self-initiate outside the workplace? Are you perceived as a well-rounded person? Your record of service, internal to your workplace and external to your community, is important. Your “energy” and how it is projected will lead many to form impressions—people you may need to write references or worse yet people for whom you could work.

How receptive you are to change and your ability to be flexible points to your comfort with the concept of paradigms, paradigm shifting, and your understanding the dangers of paradigm blockages. Many

of the competencies that have thus far been addressed in this chapter and previous ones point to your ability to be comfortable with shifting your thought processes and thinking outside the box. And, how you process information is critical. Are you a strategic thinker or do you get bogged down in minutia? Are you analytical and able to quickly solve problems? Can you see the bigger picture and integrate multiple streams of knowledge or do you tend to tunnel vision? Are you comfortable with thinking outside the box, or are you recognized for your not-too-subtle approaches to block change? Can you quickly make decisions and be flexible if those decisions have to be reworked? These competencies or lack of possessing them will impact your ability to execute your personal strategy. In order to evoke personal change in your life, you have to seek that change in places where you typically would not look.

When I teach, one of the first strategies I require of students is their learning how to holistically look at information and integrate many different variables before coming to a conclusion. An antiquated paradigm that still plagues the United States is our propensity to want to solve problems from a silo mentality. No matter how many times a teacher may try to teach you systems thinking as either a standalone concept or one that is integrated into varying curricula, unless you are willing to mentally move beyond the walls that form your personal silo, you will not understand how to comprehensively view, understand, and evaluate your current environment.

You have to learn and internalize the fact that critical competencies such as problem solving and decision making are built upon very complex foundations that includes analytical thinking, the ability to think outside the box, and systems thinking in concert with the ability to incorporate multidimensional variables—in all that we do. Even when we previously discussed stress management, a critical concept I communicated was one's ability to look at what evokes stress into your life from a systems perspective!

Inclusively, you should assess whether or not your brand and way of working suggests you have a strong customer service focus. The ability to understand the needs of your clients is so critical that I have chosen to devote an entire subchapter to the concept.

Customer Service—A Core Competency and a Critical Component of your Brand

I will not be presumptuous and attempt to prioritize which core competencies are more important than others, but I will work to help you

understand the magnitude of certain ones in today's economy. During one of my management lectures, my class discussed customer service and how their organizations—large organizations—continue to fail miserably in this area. Customer service is not just relegated to how an organization interacts with clients. In today's environment where it is critical that an organization have a positive working relationship with suppliers, executing customer service and sound communication skills can be germane to an organization's success.

Organizations are not just competing with local competitors and neither are you. With today's online purchasing capacity, the brick and mortar that has attracted many customers to organizations in the past are no longer the requirements for growing and/or expanding a business—profit, nonprofit, service, or manufacturing. The venues in which people can do business are international markets, which mean that organizations must always look for their key points of differentiation. Consequently, whether you are currently holding a job, or looking for a job, be clear as to how you differentiate yourself as well as effectively convey in your resume, cover letters, and personal interviews your excellence in providing one of the key differentiators for today's organization—*customer service*.

Most of us have had the “misfortune” of experiencing bad customer service. There are far too many domestic organizations facing economic downturns . . . many due to poor customer service and its impact on the organization's financials. If we are clear as to what people do not like, we can become even clearer regarding actions we must take to enhance our deliverance of excellent customer service. Yet, some people cannot make this simple deduction. The ability to deconstruct these constructs enables you to clearly articulate your enhanced abilities to deliver above and beyond the customer's expectations. If you are applying to a “smart” potential employer, they will want to know this information and how you perceive your deliverance of good customer service can impact their bottom line. Consequently, it is important that you are not only able to articulate your understanding of customer service but also able to provide concrete examples of how you execute this important competency.

For example, time is critical in today's environment. We live such busy lives that we do not have a lot of arbitrary time to spend with people who fail to respond to our needs. Therefore, it is important that an organization is always aware of how much unnecessary time, due to its own issues, it is taking away from the customer—particularly if you are in a service business. Other constructs that make up poor customer service include, but are not limited to:

- Failure to return calls and/or emails
- Customers constantly receiving voice mail and being jumped from one extension to another without hearing a “live” voice
- Excessive wait time due to an insufficient number of employees to service the customer
- Uninformed employees who do not fully know or understand policy, procedures, product, and services
- Other issues regarding response time not identified above
- Failure to listen to the customer’s concerns—even if you think they are wrong
- An attitude that connotes that the organization and/or employee is always right—even if it is in most cases.
- An attitude of being condescending
- Failure to deliver all that is promised when it is promised
- Hours of operation that are not conducive to the demographics and schedules of the customers
- “Attitude”
- Poor presentation on the part of the workforce—for example, taking the concept of casual to an inappropriate level
- Lying to the customer—worse yet, getting caught lying
- Deferring blame on your error versus taking ownership for it and apologizing
- Not apologizing

How does one develop within themselves good customer service competencies? First, understand what the concept of a “bias for action” means. Simply, you should always be proactive toward resolving issues and/or concerns. You should always seek out information rather than develop an attitude of “I don’t know, or care to know.” You should seek to address customer service/relationship needs before they get out of control, and understand and intimately know your product line and/or service. You should never take personal time for anything, and that includes answering your cell phone or personal visitors, when there are customers. You should greet each customer with a smile that speaks to that customer from the heart. Sometimes the hello you give may be the only voice of civility that the person hears that day . . . so make it count.

Take the phone off voice mail. People want to hear a live voice even if you have to redirect them. Leave your “attitude” at home. Even if you have had a bad day, think about the fact that some of the people you will come into contact with may have had an even worse day. So, wipe the chagrin off your face and be a beacon of light. Apologize and do it

with sincerity. Never defer the blame. You represent the organization. You are a team, and the team must always stand strong. If the customer has been significantly disadvantaged, offer something in return. Even something small can work toward rebuilding good will. Equally important, never lie to the customer. People are very good at perceiving and intuiting a lie. Therefore, the lie you tell, irrespective of how small can reflect upon the entire organization in that person's mind. It is better to ask for forgiveness than to attempt a cover up.

When you see lines forming, or an inordinate amount of time is being taken to service the customer, immediately seek options, and involve your management. This action will communicate to the customer that you care about their time. Time for many people is a very valuable commodity

The ability to execute exemplary customer service also becomes a part of your personal brand. And, if you choose to go down the path of entrepreneurship, which we will later visit, it can make or break your business. You want to be able to highlight on your resume areas where you have excelled in customer service and the impact that it has made upon the organization. You also want to be able to list customer service as a key competency with your accomplishments being the qualifiers that help you demonstrate your understanding of its importance as an organizational deliverable.

Last, look and act professional. Do not use your cell phones when interacting with customer, eat in front of them (or smoke), or chew gum. Equally important, always dress professionally and be well groomed. Even if you are in a casual environment, business casual is not an excuse for sloppiness.

Customer Service: Its Interface with Diversity

I have taught diversity for many years, and what continues to be so interesting to me is how the concept of diversity continues to change. Many years ago, when we first began to address the concept of difference, it tended to be confined within the boundaries of race, ethnicity, gender, and disability status. However, in today's environment, there are many subcategories that fall under the definition of diversity. Understanding difference in an intercultural context is also very important. We cannot assume the way in which we are taught to respond to situations and circumstances is the same for everyone. Therefore, when engaging in customer service, there are some basic points we should always keep in the forefront of our minds.

We should never assume that a person's behavior may be interpreted within the parameters of our personal understanding. For example, if a person does not make direct eye contact with you, do not assume that person is lying. Direct eye contact in their cultural context could simply be a sign of disrespect, particularly if the person is younger than you. If you offer to shake a person's hand and they back away, do not assume they do not want to interact with you. It could simply mean that within their culture, that level of personal contact is not appropriate. The same principle holds true if you experience a person physically coming close to you, and you begin to back away. Your cultural context may suggest that to be in that level of physical contact is an invasion of space, whereas in other cultures, it is not inappropriate to engage in a person's personal space. Similarly, the fact that someone is late all the time is not necessarily a sign that they are being disrespectful. Every culture does not perceive time as linear. If adhering to strict time rules is important to the business context in which you are interacting, make sure that the point is reinforced. Do not take for granted that someone will be at a 6:00 p.m. appointment at 5:45 p.m. as you might be.

The manner in which business relationships are formed is also different across cultures. In many cultures, getting to know the personal side of an individual is germane to beginning the business relationship. Yet, in the American context, it is not as important. Curt conversation can also be perceived, when cross culturally interacting, as impolite. Even within regions within the United States, polite conversation is a precursor to doing business. Yet, in other regions taking time to engage in polite discourse can be perceived as a time waster. Consequently, we should understand that behavioral differences that ensue because of culture are not just limited to when we are operating outside the United States.

Country and ethnic imprints occur even if you are generations removed from your original country. As previously said, they tend to be reinforced via our family traditions. Equally important, we cannot assume that language will have the same meaning across cultural or regional context. So, you have to employ sound interpersonal communication skills by reading the person's body language, which could indicate that they do not know what you mean. Or, simply ask the question if you believe clarification is required. Regional differences can be just as prevalent as ethnic and/or cultural differences. I continue to be amazed and slightly amused at the differences between people's behaviors in the north versus the south. And, even within those demarcations, differences prevail.

It is not always important that you are able to demonstrate your ability to be a cultural expert. It is, however, important that you convey to potential employers that you understand the concept and are astute in asking the appropriate questions before assuming that you have accurately assessed a situation through your cultural lens. Again, the concept of lens is very important. As I have suggested in the beginning of the book, there is a need to privilege your lens, and when working with people it is equally important to recognize that they too have a lens which “colors” how they see the world, which can be very different from your colors and views. Consequently, key to sound customer service is our willingness to be open and ask questions to clarify understanding as well as confirm the accuracy of the communication process when we are unsure of another’s actions.

It is not respectful to be servicing customers when you and your colleagues are talking in a language that the customer does not understand. People can and will assume you are talking about them, even though the conversation could be addressing something far removed from the customer. If, however, your language is the dominate language in that particular context then that is a very different situation. For example, when I work in the French West Indies, I fully understand that French is the spoken language. Consequently, it is up to me to make sure I can communicate in this cultural context or have an interpreter by my side.

Gender bias is also another area we have to be very careful of when engaging in customer service. Throughout my career in both the business and educational sectors, I have often encountered people who openly assumed I was not the person in charge when engaging in a service conversation, particularly if a male colleague was present. And, from a personal context, we won’t even discuss what has happened when I would go to buy a car and a man was with me. The salesperson in many situations did not even address me, although I was making both the decision and purchase. Needless to say, in those situations transactions did not occur.

A cultural “customer service” story I often share with my business students was the first time I visited England. I automatically assumed that my navigating through the country would not be difficult because we both were English speaking countries. But, if you look in dictionaries, there are demarcations between American “English” and that spoken in the United Kingdom. My infamous wash rag story was the one that helped me realize years ago that I had to up my “A” game when it came to understanding diversity and language differences.

When I first visited England in 1998 and arrived at my hotel, my first surprise was the difference in the room versus my expectations. You see, I had ordered a single room, which means something very

different in the United States versus in many European countries. Next, when I went to take a shower, I noticed I did not have a small towel to wash with. I immediately called housekeeping and asked for a “set of towels.” When they were brought to my room, I received the same towel configuration I already had, which prompted me to make the call again. By this time, I was disgruntled and clearly focused on “poor” customer service. When the same configuration of towels arrived the second time, I just decided to make do and deal with the issue once I went downstairs. I vowed to “have a conversation with the front desk.” Fortunately, my common sense kicked in and I decided to have a conversation with the front desk that focused on my learning the “customs.” To my surprise, when I asked about the towel situation, the staff promptly shared that this hotel and most others did not carry the customary towels I was accustomed to using in the United States.

Fortunately, I “got” the lessons and was able to expand those lessons to other areas of my life and travels. First and foremost, I learned to never assume understanding. I learned to simply ask clarifying questions versus look like an idiot ensconced in ignorance.

Concluding the Commentary

Never for a moment assume that the remainder of the competencies and skills previously identified are less critical—they are not. The list is simply too long to go through the details of each competency.

However, a few more competencies/skills I believe warrant a brief discussion before concluding include employers will want to know how well you understand and apply the following praxes:

- The application of theory to practice in your individual work environments
- How to use the application of theory to practice in effective problem-solving of business situations from both a human capital management perspective as well as understanding the business management point of view. In other words, as I always suggest to my students—can you make the business case?
- How to demonstrate skills via the organization of ideas and clarity of oral and written communications?
- How to be effective in conveying your concepts, plans, and strategies via appropriate platform skills?
- How to effectively communicate your understanding of what constitutes an effective team and how the team should function when working to reach specific goals?

- How to enhance your ability to learn from experience, to test what is learned against new experience and to extract new learning in a continuing fashion?
- How to think and act strategically, ethically, and globally? (Boyatzis, 1982)

I also want to be clear that when discussing competencies, I am not just speaking to individuals who are in professional positions. If you are in a technical, craft or operative, and/or labor job, the competencies described above are germane to your work as well. Remember, you may be the first point of contact that a customer sees or hears. Therefore, if you cannot demonstrate your understanding of how to go above and beyond the average responsibility—you may not be at the head of a recruiter's list.

Team skills are not complex, and many organizations require an individual being comfortable in working with cross-functional and/or self-managed teams. Consequently, a person's ability to do the following and demonstrate past experiences with these competencies are important. Can you . . .

- Delineate a team assignment into identifiable components and define its task in terms that are understood, shared and, agreed up via consensus
- Associate work steps to each component in concert with deadlines for reporting result
- Identify dates where enough leeway is built into the schedule
- Assume a team leadership role for "managing" the time lines and insuring that assignments are on task, in addition to being responsible for "bringing" together the final product
- Define and concretize team meeting agendas
- Engage in good interpersonal communication skills, which include confirming, crediting, building, clarifying, providing constructive feedback, self-critiquing team efforts, and effectively listening to one another

When interviewing, your ability to describe how you executed the above components of team management and team building are added pluses when selling yourself to a potential employer.

Mastering competencies may sound overwhelming. However, if you pause, critically review the list, research definitions in concert with examining what you do on a daily basis; I respectfully suggest

that you will discover that you routinely utilize a majority of the list and its subcomponents on a daily basis. Unfortunately, we are not always trained to concretize how we work and live life in terms that potential employers can understand. In other words—we have to learn their language.

PART II

Engaging the Next Steps of the Job Search Process

CHAPTER 7

As Corporations Set Forth a Vision—So Should an Employee!

Are you doing what you really believe you should be doing at this stage in your life, or have you allowed fear and a lack of confidence to prevent you from stepping out into new things—or higher levels of old things? If you don't like your answer, then let me give you some good news! It's never too late to begin again! Don't spend one more day living a narrow life that has room for only you and your fears. Make a decision right now that you will learn to live boldly, aggressively, and confidently. Don't let fear rule you any longer. (Meyer, 2011, p. 44)

Most job readiness training programs largely focused on helping you understand how to navigate through the mechanics of the job search process. Never for a moment will I underestimate the need to learn how to effectively navigate those steps. Technology is driving today's processes and invoking more nuances to the job search process than in the past, supplanting many pen and paper and traditional networking processes.

However, I firmly believe that learning those steps are not what one initially needs to do. Until you critically assess the issues that are identified in part I and take time to engage in the initial steps that we are going to address in part II, you will put at risk obtaining a career or job change that truly makes you happy.

Many people are fed up with the quality of their lives, particularly with the stresses and strains they are living under, which impacts one's health, family, and even finances (Vaill, 1996). When we deconstruct this proposition, it may infer that people are working jobs or are engaged in careers that do not bring them joy. Yet, the most sustainable behavioral change is intentional; meaning it is affected by your will, values,

and motivations—self- directed by what drives you and gives you joy versus what you believe others want you to do (Boyatzis, 2010)

The discontinuity that erupts from losing a job or realizing that the one you are on is failing to bring you joy is a perfect time to engage in an intentional change where you embrace the chaos around you and “feel” in the deepest recesses of your soul the possibilities that you can embark upon—in other words you allow the grandest vision of you to emerge.

Self-directed change positions you to look at who you are versus who you want to be. Yet this is rarely a linear process (Boyatzis, 2010). This intentional change will also call for your being authentic, where you are your “real” self wherever you are, wherever you go— living consistently with your core values. This intentional change however also means that you have to really come to grips with what are your core values. What are those values that you will not compromise? This intentional change also means your understanding and committing to an integrity that is never compromised. The pieces of your life must fit together so that you feel coherence and consistency. Equally important, you have to maintain the will to continually learn while helping others do the same (Friedman, 2006).

Intentional change, as a theory at the personal level, incorporates the essential components and process of desirable, sustainable change in one's behavior, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions (Boyatzis, 2006). The change may be in your actions, habits, or competencies. It may be in your dreams or aspirations. It may be in the way you feel in certain situations or around certain people, and it may be a change in how you look at events, life, or work (2006).

Intentional change, however, is sustainable—it endures; thereby at many levels incorporating your active engagement in the learning processes (2006). Yet, the actual change process itself will be discontinuous, appearing as emergent or catastrophic changes over time and effort (2006). However, the more self-awareness one possesses the likelihood that the change will be a set of smooth transitions (2006).

While across many literatures there are various recommendations with respect to how one should engage in an intentionally driven change process, I believe as do others that the first step is your having a vision of where you want to be.

This research indicates that we can access and engage deep emotional commitment and psychic energy if we engage our passions and conceptually catch our dreams in our ideal self image. It is an anomaly that we

know the importance of consideration of the ideal self, and yet often, when engaged in a change or learning process we skip over the clear formulation or articulation of our ideal self image. If a parent, spouse, boss or teacher, tells us something that should be different, they are telling us about the person *they* want us to be. As adults, we often allow ourselves to be anesthetized to our dreams and lose sight of our deeply felt ideal self. (Boyatzis, 2006, p. 611)

Connect Your Goals to Your Vision

Self-directed intentional change involves visioning and committing to a challenging personal vision that motivates the setting of more difficult and specific proximal goals. These goals appear to be linked to higher performance levels (Masuda et al., 2010). Yet, achieving these goals requires working with a strategy, which are the intention steps for actualizing those goals and focus that cannot be compromised. Most important, you have to find time to work toward your vision and resulting goals. Align your intentions by staking out time to reflect, meditate, and stay in tune with yourself (Fransecky, 2007).

Do you take time to reflect upon where you are in order to align your reflexive actions? Do you study the nuances of what you want—by researching and evaluating what are viable components of your new career (2007)? Have you learned to surrender and live in the moment versus viewing the actualization of your goals as a battle plan? Surrendering into the vision can help release the energy that fuels you. You learn to go with the flow of the vision and goal setting versus “tackling” the steps (2007). Yet, often our efforts are either slowed down or thwarted by fear, which has the ability to be our greatest enemy.

“It is important to note that you can’t just sit around and wait for fear to go away. You will have to feel the fear and take action anyway. Or, as John Wayne put it, “Courage is being scared to death, but saddling up anyway.” In other words, courage is not the absence of fear; it is action in the presence of fear. Bold people do what they know they should do—not what they feel like doing.” (Meyer, 2011, p. 44).

Change is not about settling for mediocrity. Unfortunately many people who allow fear to overtake them end up being people pleasers, prone to being controlled and manipulated by others, giving up the right to be themselves (Meyer, 2011). Visioning true change means giving yourself permission to expand your mind in ways that you have yet to experience. Visioning true change also means that we do not give

into our fears, but plan steps that handle even the interims strategies we need to invoke in order to get to our goals. Visioning true change allows you to not give up the right to be yourself. You never want your primary focus in life to be what others want (Meyer, 2011).

Therefore, when you sit and “feel” your vision, give yourself permission to focus on the grandest vision of who you can be and what moves your heart. Then articulate that vision into goals. I will always believe that we each have gifts given to us in love by our Creator and that the foundation of those gifts serves as the underpinning for our ability to envision the best we can be. Too often we abdicate our dreams because we buy into the unwarranted restrictions others attempt to place upon us—actions to which we have the ability to say no (Robinson-Easley, 2012).

To reach the potential that is our Creator-given right means, we have to believe we are entitled to it. A love for ourselves and belief that we are entitled to being all that we can is critical to evoking our personal change (Robinson-Easley, 2012). Doing so also means we are grounding ourselves in faith (irrespective of our religious beliefs). A grounded faith has the ability to sustain the soul in its search for truth and knowledge (Sanford, 1992). You see . . . when you allow yourself to be still and “feel” your vision, you are in essence allowing your truth to emerge.

Let's look at some examples. One of the greatest psychologists, Carl Jung developed his important psychological praxes by having a glimmer of an idea, which propelled him to proceed on faith as he searched for his truth until he found it (Sanford, 1992). Albert Einstein faithfully worked through the idea of relativity over the course of many years. The emergence of his theories took time. Similarly, his way of understanding the forces and movements of bodies and energy in the universe began as seeds of thoughts. Yet, through faith he nurtured each of his ideas and beliefs and never gave up on actualizing his propositions (1992); lessons in strength and commitment we each should note.

If any of these people had lacked faith in themselves and their ultimate truth, their ideas would have perished (Sanford, 1992).

If faith sustains the soul in its search for knowledge, so does knowledge increase faith and bring it to fruition. To know the truth is to have faith confirmed and strengthened. To know that there is healing in the soul is to have our faith in the healing process confirmed and renewed. To know something of God is to have our faith in God enlarged. (Sanford, 1992, p. 63)

And, I might add, insert the word and concept of God with however you personally choose to identify your Creator! Loving ourselves and

learning to step out on faith and knowledge that our faith will sustain us is critical for our personal and family survival (Robinson-Easley, 2012). Loving ourselves also requires our aligning ourselves with our own center of being where we, through faith, learn to have a relationship with ourselves (Sanford, 1992). If we spend our life keeping ourselves safe, we rob every one of our gifts and talents simply because we are too afraid to step out and be willing to find out all we can do in life (Meyer, 2011).

When we nourish ourselves, we give ourselves permission to move to a higher level by caring for our inner being, which many call our soul. Working on the self in order to heal past and present hurts—releasing that which blocks us requires work. Yet, if we are to vision our highest self, it will have to come from a place where we are centered and grounded in a belief that through faith we can and will climb mountains. . . . those mountains become our personal and most important achievable goals. In other words, take time to work on ourselves (Sanford, 1992) to move past the fear that can and will bind us. To heal past hurts and notions of our being limited requires an ease of movement on the inside; which means going into our very core—our soul. With increased care for our soul, through an ever developing relationship with self, we allow our desires to more fluidly manifest from the inside (Sanford, 1992).

The ultimate foundation of faith is not that everything will be all right but that the soul can be sustained whether things are all right or not. From this comes the strength to endure things as they are and grow stronger in the process. (Sanford, 1992, p. 60)

From this comes the inner determination to move as did the Einstein's of the world toward our personal vision and goals, grounded in a deep faith that our Creator has our backs! When you center with faith, give attention to your soul and love you, with an immovable self-respect, you will not fear visioning the grandest vision of who you can be. You will know and believe in the deepest recesses of your soul you are entitled to that grandest vision. Yet, if you fail to acknowledge the greatness that lies within you, you are choosing to be one among the walking dead (Quinn, 1996).

Interesting, Carl Jung also addressed the concept of the walking dead. He, however, addressed this concept in relationship to one's soul—the death of the soul that emerges from the failure to engage in knowledge of the self. Death where one loses the opportunity to experience the light that comes from self-knowledge (Sanford, 1992). Think about

how many people you know that gave up on their dreams for reasons that really made no sense? Look at them—really look at them! Are they happy? Are they productive? Do they walk with purpose? Or, do they seem to saunter their way through life?

When you love yourself and have self-respect, you will not allow others to denigrate you. You will choose to go inside you and examine all that you have been waiting to emerge. When you love and have self-respect, you are willing to intelligently pursue or fight for that which is inherently yours to claim. When you daily walk around as if the world has dealt you blows to which you no longer have the strength to fight, you simply will succumb to your perceived failure (Robinson-Easley, 2012).

It is death to the soul to become unconscious. People die before there is death to the body, because there is death in the soul. They are mask-like leeches, walking about like spectres, dead but sucking... You can succeed in going away from your problems, you need only to look away from them long enough. You may escape, but it is the death of the soul. (Jung, *Dream Analysis*, p. 90 as cited in Sanford, 1992, p. 117)

We have to collectively learn to walk tall with our eyes toward the heavens, for those heavens, however, we define them in the present are ours to claim (Robinson-Easley, 2012). We have to understand that there is significant danger in seeking solutions to new problems in the same places we found the old answers, which is a tendency of people when they are afraid to step outside their box (Quinn, 1996).

So how does one engage in the visioning process? First, go back to the strategies identified in part I. You cannot relax into a moment if your body and mind are stressed. When you focus on de-stressing, you can be far more generative in your thought processes. Find quiet time to just sit and meditate. Feel life, feel your environment. Input into your environment those things that make you happy. Scent, which lifts my mind, is an important relaxation therapy for me. Consequently, when I want to become reflective, I light my candles or incense and sit in my favorite chair where I can lean back and just “be.” Feeling the moment, I allow my mind to move into the direction of “feeling” those things or situations that give me the most joy, where I feel most creative and generative and not “boxed” in by circumstances. Equally important, I visualize the kind of environment I want to have while I allow my mind to reflect.

Boyatzis (2010) suggest eight major learning points when you engage in self-directed intentional change

1. You engage your passion and create your dreams (However, I am going to interject by saying you have to first take the time to visualize those dreams in order to understand what you are going to create).
2. You are clear about who you are—in other words, you know thyself—your “real” self (my personal addition—the centering work previously described, in concert with aligning our soul with a deep seated faith is so critical to our “intentional” determination to succeed).
3. You identify your strengths and gaps or discrepancies that require change (again my personal interjection—a little Appreciative Inquiry on the self goes a long way!).
4. Yet, you focus on both, attending to both your strengths and gaps and not allowing one to become your primary focus (more of my perspective—view the attention you give to your gaps as opportunities to take you to a higher level, which can be quite exhilarating versus working on problems to be solved).
5. You create a personal learning agenda, and fit this agenda into the structure of your life, work, and learning style (which means you also have to be cognizant of your learning style and develop your strategy that serves as the foundation for your daily agenda).
6. Find settings in which you are comfortable practicing your new behaviours.
7. You experiment and practice new habits and actions and learn from those experiences.
8. Last, you develop and use your relationships as part of your change and learning—focusing on coaches, mentors, friends, and others who can help you assess your process.

Moving from Visioning to Strategic Design and Implementation Predicated upon Your Goals

Once you vision the grandest vision of you and the resulting goals, you have to focus on the strategy for implementing this vision and resulting goals. Executing a strategy for implementing your vision is critical. Strategic implementation is problematic for many, largely because it is very process oriented. I firmly believe that strategic implementation at the personal level is also aligned with personal leadership.

Personal leadership is the leadership of the self...the ability to define a direction for your leadership and life and move in that direction with consistency and clarity (Jay, 2010). Yet, it is the consistency

and clarity that can typically pose problems. People can and do become overwhelmed, which is why identifying your strategy into manageable steps is critical. You see...one of the first prerequisites to strategic implementation is a commitment to get the job done.

Once you have developed the grandest vision of who you are, you have to put it into terms that you can understand from goal-oriented and process perspectives. Moving this change into a process helps keep you consistent with your level of commitment, and it helps you integrate your strategy into the day-to-day components of your life. Unfortunately, people fear what they don't understand or cannot see in front of them. Transparently keeping your processes in front of you can help you and those committed to helping you, stay on target. Integrating your steps into your daily routine removes these processes from the plausible realm of daunting or unachievable venues because "I just don't have time."

Historically, strategic thinking was primarily relegated to senior leaders, leaving others more focused on functioning in the moment versus preparing for the future (Stowell and Mead, 2008). Similar to the long-term success that many businesses enjoy, an individual's success is dependent on his or her ability to execute tactics and perform in the moment as well as execute plans for all of tomorrow's accomplishments (2008).

Yet, taking action is often hard for a variety of reasons. We must diligently focus on overcoming fear of the unknown or making mistakes. Many organizations desire people who are not afraid to face failure simply because mistakes can and do serve as our greatest teachers, (Stowell and Mead, 2008). For example, when NASA selects astronauts, they focus on candidates who not only have experience and technical qualifications but who also have significant experience with failure and have demonstrated the ability to recover after setbacks (2008).

So, what exactly is strategic implementation? Once an overarching vision has been developed with an associated mission, which is your statement of purpose, specific goals are set. Your mission can simply be the intent to be all that you are designed to be. How you articulate your mission in life is your choice. Your strategy is the plan of action broken into tactical steps that are disseminated into individualized operating units. Strategic implementation requires effective feedback processes and a constant scan that there is goal congruency among all units (Robinson-Easley 2012).

Goal congruency is critical. Everything you do should have some connection to your goals, which means we have to insure that our goals link to our daily efforts and resulting tactical steps. You need to be able

to “see” where one tactic is supportive of another, ultimately leading to completion of strategic goals (Robinson-Easley, 2012). Goals and objectives need to be verifiable, which in essence means realistic and able to be brought about in a timely manner (2012). People can and do lose hope when initiatives drag out. Consequently, you have to make sure you are importing into your strategy reasonable time lines. Often, just the idea of doing something strategic can be overwhelming for people. Therefore, many often recommend that to counteract the intimidation, you should break the strategic initiative into incremental parts and concentrate your energy in these areas (Stowell and Mead, 2008). You should also be willing to realistically review your performance outcomes and if required take corrective action to appropriately stay on course (Robinson-Easley, 2012).

In concert with your strategy, learn to anticipate the unexpected (Robinson-Easley, 2012). Early in my doctoral program, we began to study scenario planning, which involves scanning the environment for indicators of change that may or may not be visible to the naked eye. When engaging in scenario planning, one must carefully examine the political, economic, social, cultural, and global contexts to understand what the possibilities of an immediate shift to our environment could be and how we would have to incorporate potential change into our strategic-planning processes (2012). Understanding and planning for those shifts is similar to playing chess. When you anticipate various moves, you learn to lay multiple options. If we remain insular to our context and global environment, we will be clueless as to the potential dangers we can and may encounter (2012).

To better understand this concept, let’s go back to my comments in the beginning of the book. I have continued to posit that the rules of the employment game have changed, yet many people never received the “memo.” In other words, many factors in the environment, such as our competitive stance, requirements for success, and innovation morphed to new levels. However, because we are not prone to engaging in scenario planning, many people missed these signals.

What does a real scene relative to scenario planning look like? Let’s take one we typically take for granted: education. Not too long ago, if a person matriculated through an undergraduate program, they had sufficient education to progress through their chosen professions (Robinson-Easley, 2012). However, as time has passed, the educational requirements in most careers have continued to morph to new levels. Where a few years ago a bachelor’s degree was sufficient for entry-level positions, now a master’s degree has become the prerequisite for either

entry or career movement. Unless people have closely watched the trends, we miss them and are caught off guard, thus requiring additional time to return to school to catch up (2012). Therefore, as you develop your own strategy, incorporate into your goals time to engage in scenario planning, which may be as simple as daily reading the news regarding your profession, industry, economy, and your respective country's international position.

As you mobilize your strategy, you will need to regularly use your knowledge, experience, and information to identify when opportunities and threats emerge. You cannot allow yourself to become so inflexible and committed to the specifics of your strategy that you lose the ability and flexibility to make small or large adjustments as you matriculate through the plan (Stowell and Mead, 2008). Arming oneself to understand environmental shifts requires basic skills that are not always standard-operating procedures (Robinson-Easley, 2012). How we think—our prevailing paradigms—need to shift in order to understand the linkages that serve as quiet indicators of change (2012). Often those indicators are not dramatic but nevertheless are in our face. We simply have to learn to view the world and think about the realities in front of us from a system's perspective (2012). Your commitment does not guarantee that everything will come together perfectly, but it does mean that you are determined to succeed through the long haul and no one has to convince you of the merits of your plan, which becomes a part of you and what you are about (Stowell and Mead, 2008). One must learn to improvise and be creative in response to the variety of circumstances you can and will encounter (Stowell and Mead, 2008).

Impediments to Avoid When You're Implementing Strategy

There are many downfalls to avoid when working to implement your personal strategy. First and foremost, as previously discussed, your mindset needs to be one of success. Equally important, work your strategy in incremental steps by incorporating your tactical steps into your daily routines. Otherwise, you risk becoming overwhelmed. Never consider strategic implementation an event. I still have memories of my days in the corporate-business sector where leaders would gather every four to five years and devise a strategy that often wound up on one of the executive's bookshelves. They had done their periodic duty, and it was now time to go back to business as usual. Unfortunately, I saw the same in higher education (Robinson-Easley, 2012). You are at a position in your career and life where focus is critical. You cannot afford

the luxury of giving up or becoming overwhelmed. Unfortunately, the simplicity of project-management strategies tends to allude many.

Your implementation processes have to be well thought out and designed, incorporating options that result from your engaging in critical scenario planning. Your goals should be well-developed goals and include tactical steps that allow you time and space to reflect upon what you are doing each step of the way (Robinson-Easley, 2012). You should set metrics that are achievable and define your success by your terms; but most important they should be obtainable metrics that allow you to visualize and actually see results. The actualization of results keeps the hope factor alive—something you cannot afford to lose (2012).

Be prepared to routinely think through what paradigms may need to change relative to outcomes and become highly skilled in the areas of visualizing *and* invoking results. Over the past 12 years, a significant portion of the student population I have taught were adults returning to school (Robinson-Easley, 2012). At the beginning of each class, I would ask them why they returned to school. While many had noble reasons, few could articulate, when asked, how the education process drove their strategy and if they even had a personal strategy where they had identified key goals and tactical steps. Many were even shocked by the question (2012).

Use tools that help you stay on course. Understand now that you have a strategy, time management is going to be very critical. Far too often people spend time caught up in activities that are not focused on achieving their respective goals. You have to be ready to incur tunnel vision when it comes to implementing your strategy. Get up each morning addressing a list of goals, duties, and events you believe you are obliged to do. Those that do not address your strategy and tactical steps should be reevaluated. Is it necessary to complete these activities right now, or can they wait while the more pressing responsibilities for your strategy are done?

Do you use a calendar—paper or electronic, it does not matter. Keeping abreast of your time, appointments, and range of activities is critical when looking to effectively manage your time in order to get to your end results. Critically evaluate how you incorporate downtime into your day. Breaks are necessary, which further drives the need for time management.

When we take time to write down our responsibilities, we also can visually access how to consolidate tasks in order to maximize our efficiency and time. Do you waste a lot of time on the phone? Is it more prudent to allow your phone to go to voice mail (obviously unless it is

an emergency) and take a block of time to then respond to those non-emergency calls?

Staying on purpose and working your strategy will require you to incorporate into your daily repertoire of activities a different mindset relative to setting priorities. Yet, I am positive that when you engage the visioning process and resulting steps, in concert with being diligent in avoiding pitfalls, you will find life taking on new meaning!

CHAPTER 8

The Alignment of Your Personal Vision to Your Mission and Career Strategy: Implementation Now Begins!

In chapter 7, I began to touch upon the issue of strategy implementation. In this chapter, I want to delve into the topic in more depth.

Once you have completed your visioning process, determined your mission for this next phase of your life, developed your strategy and resulting tactical steps . . . the next step is to begin the processes toward driving this change, which requires your developing and implementing some succinct project management skills. Yet, many do not realize how critical basic project management skills are to the success of the aforementioned initiatives as well as to the daily management of life.

In today's fast paced and competitive environment, the ability to implement work is a critical strategic competency. Do you have friends or colleagues that always seem to be in disarray? They are always rushing someplace—never on time, are their clothes in disarray, they run out of gas unexpectedly, their work seems to be haphazardly done . . . and the list goes on! They seem to add inordinate hours onto their day because they are disorganized.

Project management is an important competency to learn as one daily manages his/or her life. In an organizational context, project management is the task of getting a project's activities completed on time, within budget, and according to specifications. For you, project management skills are fundamentally no different in scope.

Once you define your strategy, break the strategy into tactical steps and define the objectives and scope of work within each step; decide

how you are going to incorporate these additional activities into an already crowded day. The best advice I can give you is the advice given to me when I began my doctoral program.

When I began that program, I was working as the Dean of Students at my former university. My family responsibilities as a wife and mother, job responsibilities in concert with embarking upon an intense degree program were going to significantly challenge my time management skills. In conversation with a friend one day, she strongly advised me to remove the drama from my life immediately. In other words, she highly suggested telling those friends and colleagues who always tried to take up an inordinate amount of time by importing their issues onto others—see you in three years when I complete this degree. Needless to say, this was the best advice I ever received. Ironically, when I would periodically check in to see if they were still “alive” and well—I always found them to be in the same place doing the same silly “stuff.” My refusal to allow them to project their drama and issues upon me freed up a lot of time.

I also learned to insure that I always had everyone's schedules, (even down to mine and the kids' clothes) planned in advance, therefore reducing time to “look” for stuff. I also incorporated a friend's time management strategy. She rarely answered her cell phone when it rang, choosing to carve out a specific time in her day for returning calls. Needless to say, she better managed her time. At first, I use to think doing this might be rude, but as my days continued to compress in time, invoking this habit inevitably freed up time.

Another important lesson I learned was to always be “prepared” by keeping my vehicle always gassed up, extra money on me, and keeping everything I would need to immediately leave the house in one place. I had many friends forced to evacuate New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina hit who had war stories regarding gas tanks in their cars with little to no gas, only a small amount of money on them, and again the list goes on. You see, relying on the availability of ATMs is not always a good thing. In this particular case, they had no ATMS to go to unless they could leave the city and if they had little to no gas, moving through roadways that were blocked for miles with people also evacuating meant you could run out of gas before you even left the boundaries of the city.

Now you may be asking at this point, what does this have to do with project management? My reply is simple—everything. You have to always be in a state of readiness for just about anything. Time is money and if you are constantly wasting time looking for something

versus having everything you need laid out in advance, you will always be chasing your “tail” so to speak and wrought with the perception that you just cannot manage it all because you tend to wallow in disorganization, which you may also “wear.” Disorganized people are not actively sought for jobs. Yet, you can change—but even the change requires you to be organized.

I have managed to set simple routines in my life that make handling a long and/or difficult day a much easier task. These routines also include my invoking downtime for me. You cannot manage a full schedule if you are tired. I often use outlines to define my required work. Outlines separate the elements of your tactical steps into successively more detailed tasks, where deliverables or concrete results are identified (DiVincenzo, 2006).

People have always asked me—do you sleep because of the perception that I work so hard. My reply—Yes, I work hard and make sure I get the seven to eight hours rest I need, and I play hard as well. But when I work, I am focused and uninterrupted and when I play that is my priority at that time. Learning to focus on the task at hand is a critical competency.

Inclusively, when you are managing your strategy in concert with you day-to-day life, you have to practice “being” at the level to which you aspire. In other words, understand that your multitasking does not afford you an excuse to “sloppy” in anything. Moving you to the next level means that every aspect of your life has to be “in order,” suggesting nothing but the highest level of professionalism. Forming habits are important. Yet, forming habits that catapult you to a higher level is even more important.

Organizations want individuals who can multitask, are and stay organized, look and act professional, and have everything in order and at their fingertips despite the chaos of the day. Concomitantly, being able to seamlessly move through multiple priorities also enables you to demonstrate your ability to creatively solve problems, prioritize, and make effective decisions. Consequently, learning to or becoming even more proficient than you already are at effecting excellence in project management definitely helps move you to the front of the “line” when the time comes to being selected for a position.

Understanding the cost structure that supports the project in project management is very important. You have to think through the financials associated with developing your strategy. For example, if going back to school is one of your tactical steps, do your homework to determine the schools best suited for your aspirations and circumstances,

the costs associated with returning to school (e.g., tuition, books, fees, and/or transportation to and fro), options for financing your education and/or training, and assessing how long it might take to complete this particular tactical step. A critical step in investigating options is your determining what resources these particular options have embedded in them. For example, would it make more sense to take a job at an educational institution if tuition remission was available as an interim step? What schools provide a broader range of scholarships? My point in using school as an example is to illustrate the criticality of identifying resources and associated activities such as people who can help you, and other plausible areas of support.

You should also identify and commit to a time line for starting and completing your tactical steps. In organizations, managers use different methods to measure progress. However, the one thing these varying methods have in common is their comparing where your tactical step and strategy are compared to where your plan says it should be (DiVincenzo, 2006). Monitoring yourself can take the form of diagrams that show milestones or show the value of the completed work against the value of the work scheduled to be completed (2006).

Incorporate the concept of quality standards into every aspect of your project management. Remember, the habit of incorporating high standards of quality is what employers expect—what better time to start than now? You should also engage in appropriate risk assessment and scenario planning. Factor in the possibility that the rules of the game could again morph while you are in the midst of executing your strategy. Yet, if you are constantly conducting your scenario planning, you won't be surprised and should have little stress when you have to remodulate your plan. The key is for you to be flexible. Objectives will shift, setbacks will occur—but anticipate and adapt to change without losing focus of your goals (DiVincenzo, 2006).

CHAPTER 9

Research and Analysis: Critically Deconstruct the Nuances of Today's Global Market

Your vision is in place, your mission for this next stage of your life is identified, and you have developed the strategy. The obvious question is what is next on my agenda. Each step of your strategy will require you conducting research regarding the nuances of those tactical steps and their respective options, pros and cons.

In today's technological age, most people can easily navigate their way through the Internet. Social networking sites have become multifaceted options for both job seekers and employers. For example, the networking site LinkedIn reported that its rate of new membership doubled in 2008 just between the months of August and November (Rodier, 2008).

While recruiters still use sites such as Monster.com and similar job boards, they are conveying a preference for sites where they can target people from specific professional groups (Rodier, 2008), which is why sites such as LinkedIn work well for them as well as the job seeker. You can target your credentials, build your brand, and compare and contrast yourself to peers on those sites and network. However, I want to continue to be clear regarding the issue of your personal brand—you should carefully develop as well as manage it on all Internet resources. Incongruent and/or inappropriate information placed on sites you may believe have no bearing on your job search, such as Facebook or My Space can be quite detrimental to your quest. And, don't forget you can link social networking sites together now, which enables people to seamlessly navigate your personal pages.

Conducting your research also means personally networking with people. Being in transition does not mean that you should disappear from social and/or business scenes. In fact, now more than ever you need to be talking to colleagues and friends to get an insider perspective on the information you need. Yet, when looking to network, be clear as to why you want to meet with someone. Connecting can take on many forms in today's technological environment. If you state your reason for wanting to connect, perhaps that exchange can take place via phone, email, SKYPE, or in person. In other words, give people an option with respect to their time.

A critical part of your strategy may require your taking on a part-time job while you professionally prepare yourself for your career transition. If this is the case, approach that part-time job search process in the same manner you would when looking for a full-time career move.

Your strategy may also require you to consider a geographic relocation. If that is the case, again your research becomes even more critical. Often times we become mesmerized with a particular part of the country. However, the glamor of living in another region should not factor into your research versus an intense analysis regarding the viability of living there. Research their job market, housing market, rental market, demographics, educational systems (if you have children or anticipate returning to school), the social climate (for you as well as family if you have a spouse and/or children), crime statistics, and other pertinent information that we tend to take for granted in our present location.

If geographic relocation becomes an option, don't hesitate if you can financially afford to do so to visit the area before you engage in a job search process. The ability to leisurely examine a location is very important. It affords you the opportunity to view options from a different paradigm.

You should carefully research the career options you are considering. Leave no stone unturned when examining your options. What are the minimum educational requirements? What has been the history of employment opportunities in this field? On sites such as LinkedIn you can easily network with people in similar or the same career paths. Reach out to them and exchange. While Internet research is valuable, you need to incorporate multiple streams of data in order to make informed decisions.

Your research should also include a more personalized dimension of information. As I have continued to say throughout this book, think about what gives you joy. Many people have learned to take the

things that give them great happiness and turn them into profitable businesses.

Sit, reflect, and feel inside your heart all the things that you love to do. Then make a list. Begin the research. How have others turned these same or similar passions into entrepreneurial enterprises? What is the level of your knowledge on the subject matter? What additional research, studying, or education will you need? What amount of capital is needed for start-up? Are small business loans available? Are there available grants if your passion falls into a nonprofit classification? Are there grants available through the government to go back to school to get training and would your passion fall under this umbrella?

These are just beginning questions. I am sure once you begin to search your heart you will come up with more. However, the critical point to always keep in mind is that you have to do your homework when beginning the strategic implementation process. Research is important—it helps delimit surprises.

CHAPTER 10

Developing an Effective Resume

Foundational Thoughts on the Concept of Resumes

The resume has been described as a persuasive summary of your qualifications for employment (Locker and Kaczmarek, 2009). Consequently, if you are in the job market, having the resume up to date makes you look well organized and prepared. When you are already employed, having an updated resume enables you to take advantages of opportunities on the spur of the moment. And, if you are a student, building your resume is important because it helps you become more conscious of what you need to do in the next couple of years or so to develop yourself as an attractive candidate (2009). Yet, for many people, writing a resume is a painful process.

For years, I have respectfully suggested to people who come to me for advice on writing their resume that writing a resume should be a healing process; a point that I will come back to. A successful job and/or career change is no longer based on how many resumes you send out but is largely predicated upon how effectively you brand and market your most valuable resource—you. Effectively communicating who you are and what will make you stand above the crowd takes time and skill.

Often I am asked to critique an individual's resume and/or curriculum vita. Unfortunately they all look the same, which is not good. When structuring your resume and I am going to include in this concept curriculum vitas for those of you who use vitas versus resumes, you have to first be reflective about who you are, what you have done in your life, and where you want to go. Yet, I continue to be amazed at the traditional ways in which people are taught to write a resume, even when we are positioned in economies that are highly competitive and the same holds true when writing the vita.

Over the years I have participated in academic searches, I have found it easy to “sift” through the “blue smoke and mirrors” that people try to promote in their curriculum vitas. For example, far too often I have seen academics “lump” together their conference presentations and proceedings with their publications. Yet, search committees typically want to know what journal articles, books, book chapters, manuscripts, and conference proceedings you have produced—for example, your publication record in addition to your conference presentations. Unfortunately, if search committees have any modicum of experience your merging of information is the first thing they will focus on, and the lumping together of information that should be separated can invoke a negative impression regarding the applicant.

There are two fundamental truths that are associated with the resume and/or curriculum vita processes. If correctly written, a well-structured resume or vita will constructively point out what you have done in life that makes you a unique and contributing human being. If you choose to articulate who you are from the deepest recesses of your soul, the resume or vita will reflect your magnificence and also give a glimpse to employers your future capabilities. The second and equally critical point is that a well-constructed resume or vita also should become a critical component of your roadmap, if you choose to routinely revisit it. I have always made it a practice of monthly viewing my resume when I was in the corporate sector and my vita when I came to the academy.

When you take the time to frequently review your resume or vita, it becomes a very personal reminder of what you need to do; for example, requisite next steps in your strategy designed to further develop you. Let me provide you with an example. A few years ago, a distant relative came to my home town in an attempt to relocate. This person possessed both an undergraduate and graduate degree from very reputable institutions. However, she had no outside activities, was underemployed for years, lacked computer skills, and had no accomplishments that she could report on the resume. As hard as I tried to extrapolate competencies and accomplishments . . . there was nothing there, which meant that there was very little that was marketable about her. Even in a good economy she could not find a job because she never positioned herself to stand above the crowd in any manner.

This outcome was a learning experience for her. She had no choice but to return home. Yet, upon her return, she immediately began developing a very different personal strategy to evoke positive change in her life. I have always said to those I counsel that even if you come to the

realization that there is little to articulate in terms of what differentiates you from the mainstream, you have not yet lost the game. This is now your opportunity to develop your personal vision, design your strategy, and begin the change that you may need in your life. I believe it worse to have matriculated through life unaware of your deficiencies versus come to an awareness of your current status and begin to make the change. In fact, the harsh reality can be a jolt that fundamentally changes your life forever...if you reflect and choose to engage in reflexive action that addresses those obstacles that are negatively impacting your life. In other words...it is never too late to make change!

The ability to describe how you stand above the crowd, irrespective of your job title also directly ties into the final stages of the job search process—the interview. Knowing who you are and how you have successfully navigated through life is healing. We need healing energy when engaging in the job search process. We need to feel the freedom to acknowledge all that we do in life—even if in our minds, it is our everyday processes. We need to also understand that what we do on an everyday basis, everyone cannot recreate.

I recently had this conversation with a former student. This lady is awesome, yet, when I looked at her resume, it clearly did not reflect all that she is. She wrote the resume to the standard resume text, which reflected nothing of her personal strengths. First, I knew her to be an excellent student who had matriculated through an undergraduate degree program while working full time, raising two children, and concomitantly maintaining a high academic average—as a single parent. Immediately words such as time management, ability to effectively prioritize, focus, leadership skills, decision making, problem solving, critical thinking, and a host of other competencies came to my mind that should have been reflected on her resume. She is clearly an individual that is a cut above the crowd. But she understated herself to the point that it was negatively impacting her job search. In addition, both her children are the recipients of full-time academic scholarships and are in college—direct by-products of her intellectually guiding them through the academic process, which resulted in this high achievement—clearly indicative of her achievement orientation.

She never thought of herself in this light. All that she had done to her represented her daily duties—yet simply having an email conversation regarding the changes she needed to make in her resume invoked an immediate change in her reflection and reflexive actions. As a result, what started out as an “I am having difficulties” conversation quickly

emerged into a new awareness of her beauty, strength, and formidable abilities, which are clearly core competencies needed in today's work environment.

This same concept holds true for our younger generation. They have to learn that their accomplishments in life, despite how "normal" they may seem to them are often critical points of distinction. As my son matriculated through his undergraduate program, I often had this same conversation with him when he would develop his resume for summer jobs. He had graduated from a highly competitive academic high school program, was accepted to his college of choice with academic scholarships, was a walk on for the college's football team despite his having only one year of high school football experience, maintained a high GPA while being in a competitive athletic program, and was a leader on his campus for various organizations. Yet, in his mind . . . he was just "doing" him.

We, however, had to deconstruct what "doing" him really meant and how it placed him in a much more competitive position with respect to the job market. Your accomplishments that amplify your competencies and skills do not have to just emanate from your job. Think about what you have done your community, church, or other public venues. Also, I believe we should never be afraid to go beyond one page. If the layout (e.g., spacing between paragraphs, appropriate headings, and verbiage, using power words) is appropriate, you will make a much more positive impression. You have to understand that the global environment is now your competition.

A Sample of How Our Global Competition Constructs the Presentation of Their Credentials

Moving beyond the domain of our typical two page resume, in Europe the "Europass" was created in 1998 to provide transparency of vocational qualifications for people. The Europass serves as both consistent yet comprehensive document for presenting an individual's skills and qualifications in an effective and clear way.¹

The Europass consist of several documents, the European CV, the certificate supplement, the Diploma Supplement, the Europass Language Passport, and the Europass Mobility document.² Utilizing the Europass, EURES (European Employment Service) is an organization with the mission to facilitate the free movement of workers within the countries of the European Economic Area. The organizations participating in the network include public employment services, trade

unions, and employer organizations. This partnership is coordinated by the European Commission.³

The primary function of the EURES and its associated organizational partners is to inform, counsel, and provide advice to potentially mobile workers on job opportunities and living and working conditions in the European Economic Area; assist employers in recruiting workers from other countries; and provide pertinent advice and guidance to workers and employers in cross border regions.⁴

A Few Underlying Constructs of the Europass

Since our employment competition is a global market, let us examine some of the underlying constructs of the Europass. First and foremost, a prospective employee is usually required to present his or her curriculum vita, which in Europe tends to be more comprehensive than our normal resume, and allows a potential employer to learn more about the individual. Second, there is a requirement for a language assessment and documents to indicate language competencies in concert with an overview of an individual's training.

Far too many high schools in the United States have ceased to require language classes. Yet, the technological advancements of today's global society allows for instant global communications. When I have internationally traveled, I have found little tolerance for our failure to understand and respect that English is not always the dominate language in a particular locale.

Many if not most of people who reside in Europe speak more than one language. I will never assume it is because they are smarter than people in the United States. The geography of being able to cross into different cultural contexts as easily as we travel from state to state provides a different paradigm for intercultural competence. Yet a sensitivity and understanding of global competencies are qualities we should be able to either demonstrate an accomplishment in, either via our travels and or studies, or show some forward movement toward learning.

One can easily infer that the requirement of Europass documents mean that to be marketable in a European context, the acquisition of *ongoing* training and language proficiencies are preferred. Yet, many of us teaching in higher education still grapple with college students whose writing and oral communications are not at an appropriate level, largely due to a carryover from grammar school and high school deficiencies that have been allowed to develop and continue.

When preparing yourself and developing the resume to market your competencies and skills, you have to be very cognizant of your competition and incorporate into your professional development strategy areas, which will require your focus. Embedded in the concepts and constructs associated with the Europass is the proposition that your documents should continue to grow. This is a critical concept when we begin to identify our personal strategy and develop the resume. The resume (and/or CV) should be looked upon as a progressive document that is indicative of efforts you have put into developing and investing in you! When communicating with prospective employers in the interview process, you should also be able to articulate those investment strategies and results!

Yet, far too often we stagnate and do not even realize we are stagnating. Your resume should represent your roadmap. A little over ten years ago, when I was in my beginning years in the tenure track process, I wrote to five college presidents asking their advice on how they had constructed their careers. One person responded, and he made the choice to communicate by calling me. We talked for a while regarding my career aspirations. He offered to send me his curriculum vita with the advice that if I followed the structural format of it as well as took note of the opportunities to which he availed himself I would be well on my way to my goals.

My first reaction when I saw his CV was that I was not as far away from the goal as I initially envisioned, which was encouraging. Yet, what was most important to me was the depth and breadth of opportunities to which he availed himself domestically and internationally. And, at times he stepped out of higher education to gain more experience in areas of educational policy. I began to follow his roadmap and years later have never regretted that decision, which often times required me to work exceptionally hard. Yet, the opportunities that I took advantage of because I had that roadmap have served me well.

Understanding What Is Really Important in a Resume

A critical part of the resume (and vita) are your accomplishments. In other words, are you prepared to articulate what you have done in life to make a difference? Your accomplishments do not have to only result from your work life. How have you evoked change? What acknowledgments and/or awards have you been given? What programs have you designed? What creative ideas have you developed that help either your work organization or an organization with which you have an affiliation? What

personal accomplishments make you stand above the crowd? Can you articulate your accomplishments quantitatively and/or qualitatively?

In your resume, you should at least display five to ten bulleted accomplishments, and they should link to your competencies and skills. In other words, mentally visualize the linkages: these are the competencies and skills I possess and this is how (via your accomplishments) I have demonstrated them in my life.

Having made this linkage clearly heightens your readiness for an interview, irrespective of the interview modality. You are clear as to who you are, what you have done, and how what you have done is transferrable to the organizational environment you desire. And, while we are on the topic of transferability, remember the concept of transferable skills. You see, since many organizations today are look for critical competencies, your ability to demonstrate them in one industry in a manner that conveys strength and focus clearly positions you to demonstrate them in another industry. People might try to convey that you do not have industry-specific competencies, but never walk away from a conversation before you invoke the concept of transferrable skills.

Transnational skills are also important competencies to communicate on the resume. Transnational analytic skills require the ability to convert culture-specific and culture-general information into understanding (Koehn and Rosenau, 2003). These are important for individuals looking to expand their careers within a global organization. Koehn and Rosenau (2003) developed a representative list of transnational analytic skills. A sample includes

- Ability to discern effective transnational transaction strategies and learn from past successes and failure
- Open yourself up to continuously engaging in divergent cultural influences and experiences
- Understand what it means to develop transnational efficacy
- Understand and interpret the synergistic potential of diverse cultural perspectives in problem solving
- Envision viable mutually acceptable alternatives
- Proficiency in other languages
- Skill in interpretation and the use of an interpreter
- Understand how to avoid and resolve misunderstandings across diverse communication styles
- Ability to overcome problems/conflicts and accomplishment goals when dealing with transnational challenges and globalization/localization pressures (Koehn and Rosenau, 2003, p. 110)

Yet, over and above the analytic skills that should be communicated (either as accomplishments or in-progress learning initiatives) are the emotional factors that also are incorporated in transnational competencies, such as the motivation, eagerness, and ability to open up and continuously learn from unfamiliar and uncertain cultural influences and transterritorial experiences (Koehn and Rosenau, 2003).

The Actual Structure of the Resume

The first section of your resume is obviously your contact information. I highly recommend your never listing your work number as a point of contact. And remember, when you are identifying your contact information, be cognizant of what your email address says about you and what your cell phone message also conveys. One of the worse things a person can do is have a cell phone message that does not sound business appropriate or requires the caller to listen to a minute or so of music. You are wasting their time and money, and I guarantee you are also risking their hanging up. Time is money in a business context.

I have always recommended a resume including an objective. While some will argue that point that it is not necessary, my personal experiences during my recruiting days could be summarized by the comment, "Don't make me have to think about the job to which you are applying."

The typical, "I want to save the organization because of my skills," objective does not work. Keep the objective short and to the point. Remember, recruiters have only a very short period of time to read each resume on their desk. Consequently, you need to be clear as to which position you are applying. Inclusively, many organizations require you to upload your resume into their resume banks. So, being concise and conscious of your wording is critical because the computer is scanning for requisite information. State clearly the job that you are looking for. For example, if you want a mid-level management position in operations, simply state it.

The next component of the resume is a very brief summary of your qualifications. This is the section where you identify your years of experience in a particular organizational context and level of position for which you have experience.

Next, I recommend a listing of your competencies and skills. And, I would suggest even titling this section "Demonstrated competencies and skills." Go back to the list that is identified in the book in order to begin thinking about which competencies you can identify and demonstrate through your work experience and/or accomplishments. Also,

if you possess language skills, this is the area where you should identify them. And clearly if you possess transnational competencies, they should also be incorporated into this list.

Following your demonstrated competencies and skills should be your educational accomplishments that should also include a brief overview of training and development courses you have that augment your educational experiences. Many ask if identifying a GPA is important. In all my years of recruiting, the only time the GPA was relevant was if we were recruiting new college graduates.

You should follow with a brief rendition of your job history. The rule of thumb is to go back at least ten years. However, this is a section where people make one of their biggest mistakes. For some reason, they seem to feel that they need to identify the minutest details of the job duties. The critical information is the organization, geographic location of the organization, years on the job (e.g., 1994–2004), job title (s), and a very short paragraph (if that long) of your functional responsibilities. Additionally, you have to make sure that the level of job matches its description. For example, recently I was counseling an individual who was at a director level in her previous place of employment. However, the manner in which she identified her job duties suggested she was at a lower administrative level of responsibility. Your utilizing power words are very important when describing both the job duties and your accomplishments. Most electronic resume programs are also designed to scan for power words, such as designed, developed, implemented, or led, just to identify a few.

The next section of the resume (which can also serve as your last unless you want to end with the traditional “references available upon request”) is a listing of your accomplishments. Again, focus on accomplishments where you have made a difference and can clearly articulate those differences either via quantifying or qualifying statements.

Because we are a technologically driven society, many prospective employers are requiring applicants to either upload their resumes or submit a resume that will be scanned. It has been suggested (Locker and Kazmareck, 2009, p. 544) that to insure that your resume is scanned correctly, one should

- Use a standard typeface
- Use 12 or 14 point type
- Use a ragged right margin rather than full justification since scanners cannot always handle extra spaces
- Do not utilize italicizing or underlining

- Remove bold type
- Avoid using lines, boxes, script, borders or leader dots
- Do not use two-column formats or indented or centered text
- Insure you have plenty of white space

So what would the resume format I described above look like? I have always recommended the following format. It blends the varying styles of resumes delineated and helps the organization focus quickly on critical information. Over the 30 years, I have utilized this format, I have always had clients and/or colleagues report back that this format propelled them through the interview process. However, getting to the final stages of writing this information is not for the light hearted. You have to be prepared to sit down and take a long hard inventory look at your competencies, skills, and outputs in life. Today's environment focuses on results.

If you think about it from an unbiased perspective, achievement and results orientation are competencies that propel organizations to the next level. I also suggest that your ability to clearly articulate accomplishments in concert with your competencies and skills readies you for the interview process, particularly if the interviewer decides to engage in behavioral interviewing. You see, by virtue of your having gone through the exercise of putting this information together, you have already conducted an inventory of times and results where you were at your best. Additionally articulating your competencies and skills enables you to define for the interviewer why you were able to achieve the documented results!

Some of you may choose to look for a job in more than one industry. We are a computer generation and unlike years past where one had to have a resume professionally produced you can produce your resume on your computer. Therefore, if the industries to which you are seeking employment have specific foci, then by all means write more than one resume. The majority of the information will be the same.

However, the wording in your objective can be tailored to a specific industry, and the same holds true as to how you word your accomplishments. Varying industries may have job-specific language and standards. Therefore, how you word your accomplishments may need to incorporate that job-specific language to ensure clear communications between you and the individuals reading your resume.

Cognitively Pulling This Information Together

So let's vision the cognitive mapping of what I have just identified in writing this resume. First and foremost, you have identified your vision

and goals and where you would like to move relative to a career and/or job. You have done an accurate inventory of where you sit relative to competencies and skills. You are clearly able to articulate those competencies and skills via a listing on the resume.

When identifying your educational experiences, which during your assessment process should also let you know if you are adequately prepared, you are also listing your training and development programs also, over and above your degree and/or diploma accomplishments. Mentally, however, you should be envisioning where your future educational needs should be to progress in your career and incorporate this information into your personal strategy. Remember, you may be asked about your plans relative to training and development and/or future educational goals.

You have also thought through your accomplishments. Now, today you may be a little light on them, but again if you are, they should also be a part of your strategy. And, you may have to own up in the interview process that you have work to do in this area. However, it is far better to own up and be able to communicate a next-step strategy than to stare blankly at an inquiry from an interviewer regarding what you have done to make a difference in the world today!

Always keep your resume up to date. As a motivation strategy, look at it weekly. It becomes a very clear reminder of the need to work your strategic plan. And, if you update it routinely, the development of your resume for future needs becomes less of a burden. I keep my curriculum vita on my computer and on my USB drives (in order to insure I do not lose it), and each time I do something that belongs on the vita, I routinely update it as well as look at it to remind me of where my next development strategies are needed.

You see, we all have room for improvement, and it is not shameful to admit it. My deficiencies lie in my language skills. Even though I have internationally traveled and taught as well as presented in foreign countries, I am very limited in other languages—far too limited. However, similar to what Koehn and Rosenau have suggested, I had to become proficient in using a translator, particularly when I teach in the French context. Yet, I am quick to state where I need to progress with this competency and my strategies for that progression.

There is a lot of debate as to how long the resume should be. I take the position that it is not necessary the length but the formatting of critical information that is important. The format I propose allows recruiters to scan for critical information. In a few seconds they will know what is the position to which you are applying, why (via your qualifications summary) you believe you to be qualified for the position, and what

skills and competencies you bring to the organization if hired. Your accomplishments also help them identify in their mind a behavioral profile, which is important to understanding if you are results driven and can fit into the organizational culture and context.

Some organizations might ask for references in advance. Most want to know your references during the time you interview. However, it is important that you compose a list of professional and personal references, ask people if it is okay to use them as a reference and help them understand the positions to which you are applying and what kind of information in advance of a reference call you will need to have highlighted.

So, for now, let us take a look at how the formatting of this information could look.

Your Name
Address
Telephone contact information (home and cell)
Email address

Objective

Qualifications Summary

Demonstrated Abilities

(Example)

Computer skills...customer service skills...demonstrated leadership abilities...supervisory experience...fluid in Spanish...prioritizing...decision making...team skills...attention to detail...problem solving...achievement orientation.

Education

(Do not forget to include related training and development coursework in concert with appropriate certifications)

Professional History

(Remember; do not focus on dragging out this section. You want to be clear, yet succinct in the delineation of your job duties)

Representative Sample of Key Accomplishments (examples)

- Designed and delivered a customer service training program for associates. Customer surveys indicated six months following the delivery of the training program, satisfaction ratings increased by 30 percent.
- Elected president of my condo community association for the second consecutive term.
- Graduated in 2.5 years with my Master Degree in Finance while working full time, raising a family, and typically taking a full-time academic. Maintained a 3.8 GPA and graduated with honors.
- Increased sales by 25 percent within a six month time period.
- Completed a language proficiency course (written and verbal) in Spanish while working full time.

References available upon request.

CHAPTER 11

The Criticality of a Cover Letter: What Strengths Do You Bring to an Organization?

There are different approaches to writing a cover letter. However, over the years major points I have stressed to both students and colleagues I work with is that in this document you are focusing on how your competencies and skills match the specific organization and most important position to which you are applying. Common mistakes many make is communicating in the cover letter why the organization is a good fit for the applicant's personal needs. Quite frankly, the organization could care less about your needs.

When writing the cover letter in application for a specific position, you should be clear yet succinct in communicating the relevancy of your competencies, skills, and accomplishments compared and contrasted to the job duties and if you have the information, organizational context. You also want to provide an indication that you have some knowledge of the organization.

The use of a standard business letter format is very important. Far too often, I have seen people fail to import simple, yet important information, such as date, inside address, salutation, proper format (e.g., block format), and signature lines, which contradicts any references you may have to your attention to detail competencies. The tone of your letter should be positive, highlighting your strengths in concert with their organizational needs. Yet, you should also focus on being balanced in this approach and not sounding arrogant. Consequently, it pays to have a friend or colleague read your cover letter before you send it out just to make sure that the right tone is conveyed.

In today's electronic environment, often one may question if a cover letter should even accompany the resume. However, if you pay attention to many of the employer job sites where you have to upload information, there usually is the option for a cover letter. From a protocol perspective, I clearly recommend your including the cover letter, and never one that is generic. There should always be a specific company name and if possible interviewing authority's name attached to it...even if you have to call the organization to get the name of the director of human resources.

In closing this section, remember that the resume and cover letter are the initial contact between you and the hiring authority and clear opinions are formed at this stage of the job search process. Documents riddled with typographical errors, disjunctive language, or even the failure to use good business communication skills will immediately knock you out of the race. For both the resume and cover letter, keep the formatting simple. Resumes and cover letters that are "creatively formatted" can lose their format if required to upload a resume.

CHAPTER 12

The Foundations of Effective Interviewing

Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice, it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved

—Winston Churchill¹

You sent in a marketable resume and cover letter and so far people like what they have read. Now, the rubber really hits the road . . . it is show time . . . you are scheduled for an interview! So, before you embark upon that interview, let's first understand some of the basics of the interview process along with the respective typologies of interviewing.

In today's environment, recruiters use technology to their advantage. Often before you actually are asked to visit the prospective employer (particularly if the position is out of state), they may want to conduct a telephone interview. When this occurs, you will receive a call with a predetermined time. Please make sure you clarify which time zone this time is set for if the position is in another region.

Even though you are not "seeing" the interview team (or it could be the human resources department) in a face-to-face setting, how you come across on that telephone interview is critical. You should plan to take the call in an environment where there are no distractions and clearly not at your current place of employment. Carve out quite space and time and please do your research in advance of the phone interview. You will be asked if you have questions, and your questions are important. As they interview you, interview the prospective employer as well. Nervousness is common in all types of interviews. However, if you have fully developed your resume, have researched the organization, and are aware of your strengths and weaknesses, you can significantly delimit

your nervousness. Video conferencing is another way that organizations conduct preliminary interviews. You may be asked to set up on your end a site, or they may have a dedicated site. And, as previously stated, interviewers are using SKYPE.

Approach that interview process as if you were actually on their premises. Remember, however, that sometimes when using video conference technology there can be lag time between question and responses. So don't allow the technology to distract you. Again, be prepared . . . well dressed, questions in hand, and a calm demeanor. And, if you are using SKYPE be aware of your background. It should look professional and most important, clean!

How do you acquire a calm demeanor? Preparation is the key. If you have developed your resume according to the format I recommended, did the prework of looking inside yourself to determine what it is you really want, your answers will flow, particularly if you have addressed the area of accomplishments. Identifying and understanding where you have previously added value is important in an interview process. Your confidence is boosted and you are better able to discuss how your competencies and skills correlate to the needs of a potential employer. Preparation also helps you delimit rambling when answering the questions, which is very annoying when interviewing. Your answers should be on point, and if you require clarification with respect to the question, by all means ask.

Developing your own questions is critical . . . not just because it shows that you have researched the organization, but because it also allows you to get feedback with respect to those concerns that are important to you. Think about how much time you spend at work, and think about how debilitating it can be—mentally, spiritually, and physically—when you spend time in a place you do not want to be. Therefore, ferreting out the organization's culture, opportunities for professional development, insuring that the organization's core values, goals, and strategies are congruent with yours are critical questions to ask. But, never ask about money and benefits until it is time to negotiate an offer.

Having passed through the preliminary interview process, you are now on your way to the next stages of the interview process. First and foremost, remember that this is actually a process. Let's first address the scenario where you are traveling out of town for the interview. Generally the employer will ask you to make your travel arrangements and they will reimburse you. If money is an issue, work to find a way to free up a credit card for potential travel expenses. Why? Organizations are run by people, and despite the critical state of this economy, people still do

not like giving jobs to those they perceive as “needing” them. Now, I did not say this made sense. Often times there are many aspects of this employment process that defies logic. But, it is what it is. Never look desperate . . . even if you really need a job. Pray for inner peace and the ability to discern what is really yours for the asking.

Always try to arrive the night before. It is far easier to navigate travel faux pas’ that can occur if you do that. I still to this day remember the horror of a major travel delay even when I left the day before. It was a nightmare. I was flying into New York, and all flights from Chicago were grounded for an indefinite time due to weather in Chicago. Now, understand the weather in New York was fine. I managed after three hours of delays to get on a flight to New Jersey, rented a car and then drove another three hours to get to my final destination with one hour of sleep. My point . . . even with advance preparation, things happen and you may need additional time to navigate through obstacles.

Once you arrive at your destination, do not be surprised if you are asked to interview the evening you arrive, over dinner. Therefore, do not think for a moment that you are simply having dinner. That dinner will represent the first stage of your interview process. You will also be required to get up very early in the morning in order to begin the interview process. Your personal stamina will be very important. During what is a very tiring process, internally focus on maintaining your inner peace. If the job is for you, you will have it. Trust that your Creator will provide all that you need.

Types of Interviews

In a 2010 survey by DDI of over 1900 interviewers and 3,523 job seekers internationally, data suggested that interviewers often rely on intuition and have little formal training in developing an effective interview (Newhall, 2011). Consequently, that means that pressure can and will be on the interviewee to better understand the process of interviewing and to insure that they are significantly prepared.

In an ideal state, interviewers should have a clear understanding of the competencies and skills required for the position (2011), which is why going through the resume development process that forces you to deconstruct both your competencies and skills is critical. It is important for employers to not only understand where you stand in today’s environment relative to those competencies and skills but also assess your ability to be trained and developed for future roles in concert with organizational strategic growth (2011).

Years ago, the field of human resources coined the concept of “stress interview,” which I have always found interesting. While interviews in general are stressful, some organizations approach the interview process with the intention of invoking stress. It is their way of seeing how you handle yourself. For example, after driving three hours to an interview, having dinner that evening, getting up for a 7:00 a.m. breakfast, and interviewing for 8 hours, in one of my interview experiences, I was then told that my day would end with my taking a two hour psychological test. Understand I still had to drive three hours home after this psychological test.

Fortunately, during the interview process their answers to my questions helped me determine that I did not care for the culture of the organization. Yet, I also felt that it was to my advantage to do my best with this segment of the interview because it would serve as critical practice for other interviews down the road. With that mindset, the psychologist called me a week later to say that I passed that test with a score higher than he had ever seen.

Behavioral interviewing strategies are also often used. Questions that focus on how you either responded to a prior situation or a given context can often help the interviewer understand critical information (Newhall, 2011). And, many employers will require you to take tests that are designed to evaluate your emotional intelligence.

If the position to which you apply is not a professional position, still be prepared to extensively interview—carve out more than an hour or two. The overall process could take all day. The formats can vary. You may see a number of people individually during the course of an eight hour day, or you may have to engage in panel interviewing, or a combination of both. You may have to interview with a variety of organizational levels, dependent on the job. Lunch could be a part of the interview process. Therefore, during all meals, use your best table manners. If table etiquette is not your strength, research what constitutes proper table etiquette before the interview.

When organizations require you to take a battery of tests, they want to know how you approach situations, engage in critical thinking, understand the many facets of problem solving, and engage in decision making. Are you collaborative? Do you listen carefully to people within your organization, and when faced with crisis are you able to quickly make a decision? Equally important, the potential employer wants to know your strengths . . . core competencies and skills. Again, if you have developed a resume that addresses your competencies and skills and identifies your accomplishments, you won't have a problem with the

questions in the interview process that will address these issues, or in any type of test situation. Also understand that one of the stress strategies during the interview process that is designed to “test” you can be long pauses of silence just to see how you respond. Consequently, do not take this type of situation personally. Make sure you have completely answered the previous question and if the pause possibly connotes the need for you to “fill” the space, simply ask if there is additional edification required with respect to your response.

Make sure during each stage of the interview process that you obtain the name and position of the individuals with whom you interview. Get a business card if possible. With respect to follow-up, there are many pros and cons as to the appropriate type of contact. Some people still prefer cards, sent to each interviewer; others feel an email is sufficient. I think you have to personally feel out the situation and decide for yourself.

Critical Information to Discern Regarding Your Prospective Employer

You can learn a significant amount of information about an organization by closely observing it as you go through your interview process. How do people communicate with one another? Does the organization claim that it has an open environment, yet everyone has a closed or semi-closed door? Does the organization promote an egalitarian organization, yet as you look around there are clear delineations of hierarchy? What is the ambiance you can instinctively feel? Never deny your intuitive feelings. Does the environment seem cold and rigid, or do people really look and sound comfortable and happy with one another? Don't be afraid to ask in the interview how the interviewers would describe the organization's culture. And, you are entitled to know how the organization views opportunities to move forward in one's career.

You also want to know more information as to the projected and/ or desired outcomes of this position and the relevant resources that they are willing to provide in order to insure success with delivering the desired outcomes. Often, prospective employers will paint a very pretty picture of the organizational goals and objectives and objectives of the job for which you are interviewing, only to find out once you take the job that the bench strength and resources promised does not exist. Another question that is germane to know is how the organization supports one another from a team-based perspective, and their views on diversity and globalization. How do they perceive themselves

being positioned to compete in a global environment, and are they current with their strategy, and perspectives regarding the need to be flexible in their approach to strategy and business when dealing with the dynamics of a changing environment? Aligning yourself with a rigid organization in today's dynamically changing global environment (unless you deem this opportunity to be very temporary) can be the kiss of death for your career because you can become stifled in a culture of inflexibility.

Observe how people dress. Do people present themselves with pride, or do they slump their shoulders and look as if they just rolled out of bed? If the latter is true—all I can say is run! That type of demeanor among a significant number of people is a very bad signal, possibly inferring that people feel psychologically beat down. Inclusively, are you the type of person who is comfortable with being casual, yet you see an environment that is very formal in their business attire? Could you be comfortable in this type of environment?

A General Overview of the Interview Process

As I have continued to posit throughout this book, a consistent message that employers are sending through multiple sources is that they are looking for employees with skills and competencies that are much higher than those required in the past. Recently in one of my human resources class, we had a discussion on the requisite skills and competencies employers are requiring for entry level positions in a number of job categories within the federal government. A higher level of education is being asked for positions that bear the title of assistant, which in the past did not necessarily require the completion of a baccalaureate degree with movement toward a master degree. Students shared experiences where they have interviewed or looked at jobs that were asking for these higher levels of educational qualifications, but were not particularly focused on a specific degree.

So what does all of this mean in today's environment and how does it impact an interview process? A continued theme throughout this book has been our need to be very realistic about where, as a country we sit with respect to our international competition. In many ways, we are dramatically behind our international competitors in both hard and soft skills. We simply are not *consistently* teaching these competencies in our high school and college curricula. Yet, on the bright side, we often possess competencies and skills that we may not normally acknowledge. So, when you develop your resume, it clearly pays to have examined all

that you do and have accomplished and compare and contrast those accomplishments and daily work to the competency list. Consequently, when you approach the interview process you are prepared to respond to the interviewer's questions.

However, in the spirit of moving forward, let's examine the interview process for positions that do not require you to do managerial or professional work. First, never think for a moment that even if you are looking for a technical, craft, administrative, or laborer's position, you do not have to approach the application process with a resume, irrespective of your having to complete an application. If nothing else, having a resume in hand helps to demonstrate that you are serious about being a part of the organization. If asked to complete an application, make sure you fully complete it. You may be asked to complete an online application, which helps the employer manage the application process, but also provides them with information regarding your computer skills. And, if information seems to be redundant on the online application, or you have already documented it on the resume, it is still in your best interest to do complete the application.

What is your "elevator pitch" relative to who you are and why you are looking for a job? In other words, how have you discerned in succinct terms your ability to add value to an organization? How do you approach the inquiry process, which is the potential employer's first encounter with your oral communication skills? When you complete the application, it is their introduction to your written communication skills. When you approach an employer, are you presenting a positive, energetic and professional attitude, and appearance? Are you dressed appropriately? Even if you are just going to inquire about a job, you should always have a professional demeanor. Believe it or not, it is at that point that the employer is formulating their initial impression of you. As already posited, the interview process can take on several formats. You may only interview with the human resource office, or you may have to pass their interview process and then be interviewed by the hiring manager. Therefore, consistency in your presentation is important because they will be comparing notes.

If you are not sure of the location of the interview, visit the site a couple of days in advance, and factor in traffic flows. It pays to be early, and it delimits stress before you actually engage in the interview. Carry a portfolio with extra copies of your resume and a professional looking pen (with a back-up). From my personal perspective (and I am not promoting a specific brand—just expressing my preferences), I like Cross pens because they are not too expensive, but they give the impression of

class. Start out with a silver set, and a couple of extra refills. It's the little touches that suggest that you are a cut above the crowd.

Your portfolio does not have to be leather, but it should be well organized with copies of your resume, directions, telephone numbers for contacts within the organization, written questions you will reference when asking questions of the interviewer, your list of references, and blank paper in order to take notes. Turn the cell phone completely off. Even if it is on vibrate, it is distracting when it goes off. Your ability to give an appearance of organization is important. You never want to have to fumble and look for information. It should always be immediately assessable and you should never have to ask the interviewer or receptionist for a pen or paper.

A professional appearance is always important, which means no jeans. Even if you are not interviewing for a professional position, you still need to be well dressed, which means clean and pressed pants (men), or skirt (women), a blazer, coordinating top, and, preferably men, a tie. Shoes should be polished, heels in order, hair well groomed; minimum makeup on ladies, no body piercing showing, small conservative earrings for women and absolutely no body parts revealed, other than the normal . . . meaning no low cut tops or short skirts. Nails should be average length, clean, and your hands groomed. Ladies, some industries have issues with long nails. Employers may believe that long nails will hinder your output if you are computing and/or on a manufacturing line, and if you are working in an industry where sanitation is important, many people perceive long nails to be unclean.

Now, you may ask, why in the world am I stating what should be the obvious? Recruiters still share horror stories about how people walk into an interview dressed inappropriately.

So, in summary, no matter what type of position you are looking for these are some critical points to consider:

- Identify your goals, accomplishments, competencies, skills, core values, and what you want to experience in a position—irrespective of the position. You should be able to talk through these points with clarity and focus.
- Develop your self-assessment process, which should become an ongoing endeavor—where are you at this particular stage of your life, where are you going, and what is your strategy? Now, I am not suggesting you provide them with the details of your strategy, but employers want to know that the manner in which you have approached life . . . in the past and present . . . has been with

well-defined intent and purpose. Consequently, think through the reasons (logical ones) as to why and how you matriculated through each position in your past and how your experiences, skills, and competencies gleaned from those experiences now currently impact your desire and intent to work for this organization. Also be prepared to talk about how your education has (or will—connoting a well-defined plan for filling those present gaps) augmented your career path. In other words, you never want to give the perception that you have simply muddled your way through life!

- What is the organizational culture and climate you seek? You will spend a lot of time in your job. Therefore, you need to know the environment that you could be working in.
- Differentiate between a job and a career move and be able to articulate why it is important for you at this stage of your career.
- What restrictions do you have with respect to a job—for example, travel, hours, location restrictions. Leave any conversation regarding family out of the interview process. Just know your limitations and be able to address questions (legally appropriate) in a manner which is honest, but yet does to import an attitude of inflexibility.
- The resume, once developed should be an ongoing development process. You need to look at it on a weekly basis to determine its congruency with your strategy and tactical steps, as a critical reminder to stay on target
- Constantly research the job market, discipline, field, and top organizations in the field. Identify what differentiates one organization from another. This is information that will be germane to your selecting where you need to send your resume.
- Understand what constitutes a realistic job search. A few resumes/applications a week does not constitute a serious job search. You have to be prepared to put forth an eight plus hour a day effort to effect the changes you want in your life relative to career strategy, your ability to evoke opportunities, and your readying yourself for the next level. In other words, moving your strategy forward in concert with looking for work is an eight to twelve hour a day process if you are serious about changing you! Finding a job is a full-time job. And, if you are already working and are concurrently engaging in a job search process, time management becomes even more critical because you have to give proper attention to the job search and personal development strategies.

Inappropriate or Illegal Questions in the Interview Process: Wrong, but Often Asked

A couple of years ago, I was interviewed by a local newspaper. The reporter wanted to highlight and discuss the issue of interviewers asking illegal questions in the interview process. For people who are professionals in the field of human resources, this tends to be a no brainer type issue. However, as I listened to his line of questioning and responded, it occurred to me that these questions warrant discussion in a broader context than just the offices of human resources or the classroom where Equal Employment Opportunity law is taught. Knowing the boundaries that are legally yours when people choose to probe into your life is important. However, knowing how to respond in a manner that does not aggravate or disengage the interviewer is equally important. Right or wrong, the person interviewing you may have something you want or need—a job.

A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely
rearranging their prejudices

—William James²

So, let us first set the context. Most aspects of the job search process are protected by several federal as well as state laws. And, while federal law prevails, many state discrimination laws are broader and more stringent than federal law. Under the overarching purview of the Civil Rights Act, and further delineated under Title VII, if an employer, or potential employer discriminates against you based on your race, gender, ethnic status, and religion, it is illegal. Nondiscrimination laws also cover people with disabilities, covered veterans, and pregnant women. The landmark case of *Griggs versus Duke Power*, which was decided in 1971, has made it difficult for employers to justify their actions predicated upon their not “intending” to discriminate. Very simply, the Supreme Court was very clear that the intent to not discriminate does not lessen the issue of impact and the resulting responsibility of that impact as it pertains to protected classes of people. You are probably thinking, what does all this mean for you when interviewing? Very simply, employers cannot ask you questions regarding the following:

- race
- ethnic origin
- birthplace
- your age (you can be asked if you are over age 18)

- marital status
- religion
- family status-including if you have children or not (the appropriate inquiry would be whether or not you can meet work schedules or job requirements)
- whether or not you are an US citizen (they can ask if you are authorized to work in the United States)
- disability status (the employer can inquire if you are able to perform the essential functions of the job with or without accommodations)
- credit rating or garnishments (if the job requires significant financial responsibility you may be informed of a background check)
- convictions (the application may require you to stipulate if you have a conviction and if you do, you are obligated to honestly answer the question. However, arrests or pending charges that do not result in convictions are off limits unless the employer can show that they are substantially related to the job)
- And at no point in time are questions regarding your health and sexual orientation appropriate.

Your Options and Strategies

You can choose to ignore the question(s), or you can ask how the question relates to your qualifications and the job requirements. Many times interviewers are not trained in this line of questioning, unless they are human resource professionals. And, while some interviewers may be intentionally looking to discriminate, most are only concerned with their ability to get the right candidate for the job. As a result, if they are not trained in the law, they can and will ask inappropriate questions, not out of malice or intent, but out of a lack of knowledge. So, the question becomes, how do you communicate that you are the right candidate without allowing someone to step inappropriately into your personal and very private space?

One tactic may be to simply state “ can you help me understand the information you are attempting to obtain? If I better understand the intent of your question, perhaps I can respond without an encroachment upon the legal parameters of the law.” This way you are not getting into a confrontation, you are protecting your right to privacy, but at the same time you are showing that you are willing to meet the interviewer half way and compromise.

You also have to rely upon your intuition. Sometimes the illegal question *is not* framed from the perspective of simply attempting to obtain

the best candidate. Sometimes the person is point blank being racist, sexist, or arbitrarily invoking other prejudices. Trust your instinct. If you feel that there is malice and intent behind the question, you can simply refuse to answer it based on the fact that the question is legally inappropriate, and in a most professional manner state why you believe not answering the question is the right thing to do. But at the same time, you should be pulling together and processing all of your impressions of the organization from the moment you walked through the door. The fact that an individual is willing to go down this line of questioning should clearly be an important part of your impressions of the organization.

Organizations that have dysfunctional cultures and allow discriminatory behavior typically cannot hide their issues. We just choose not to see them because we are more focused upon what we want. You intuitively feel the organization's culture the moment you walk in the door. By culture I mean the personality of the organization. If you look around, there are indicators that you should quickly note. For example, as stated earlier, if the organization professes to have an open door policy and as you walk through the building you see nothing but closed doors, rest assure that the likelihood of their having a real open door policy is nonexistent. If you see women in primarily support staff roles, be aware that there could be issues of the existence of a glass ceiling for women. In other words, women are not rising through the ranks of the organization. If you walk through the door and you don't see anyone similar to you in race and ethnicity—this is another indicator you should note. I was once visiting an organization where I was invited to come to the table to discuss some consulting opportunities, and as I was standing in the lobby, I noticed how the receptionists treated job applicants—in the most disrespectful manner I had seen in a very long time. What I later found was that this mode of treatment, which was quite demeaning, was pervasive throughout the organization. This organization had an inordinate rate of turnover, which in and of itself was another clear indicator of a dysfunctional organizational culture.

I chose not to consult to this company. If they treated their employees in a disrespectful manner, I could only imagine how they treated contractors. I did not want to work with people who devalued human dignity. And when it gets down to the basics, those are similar issues and questions you will have to answer for yourself. If the organization says it has an egalitarian environment, but you see strong indicators of rank and privilege, believe what you see and not what you are hearing. Many organizations are quite proficient at false branding.

They publicly promote an image that does not accurately represent who they are.

Equally important, your personal interview of the organization should not just start with the exchange of questions. When you first talk with them on the phone, you should be making notes of how they interact with people. When you drive into the parking lot, take notes. As you walk through the door, take notes, and most important as you meet, greet, and interact with those that are interviewing you, not only take notes but allow your instincts to be fully active. In all my years of being in business, I have learned that the only time I made mistakes is when I did not “listen” to my instincts.

In closing . . . expect rejection. It is a part of life. Every application you file and interview you have is not going to yield a job. Move on with the next steps and keep the process going. This is not personal. There are many applications that employers are considering. Trust that *your* position is forthcoming! We always have to remember that those individuals who persevere are the individuals that get the job and are able to evoke their desired change.

CHAPTER 13

Follow-up and Persistence: The Dynamics of Effectively Marketing What You Can Do to Make a Difference in an Organization

Change is a process that really is beyond the domain of a simple descriptive analysis; which is why change is so challenging. The process of moving toward change begins with one's ability to understand the situation from a holistic perspective in concert with understanding how we internally respond to challenge (Robinson-Easley, 2012, p. 51), which means we should first understand the concept of holistic analyses.

Finding your “niche” can be accomplished, albeit it won't always be easy. Transitioning to new opportunities requires you working harder than ever before. In 2008, Stern reported how one career coach who worked for an outplacement and job-counseling firm stated that even if you were mid-career, people were getting jobs—they just had to work harder for them (Stern, 2008). Four years after that reported perspective, we still see even in bad job markets, industries, and professions struggling to attract talent. The difference from the “old” days is the now-mandatory competencies and skills required of their talent.

Even if you are looking for interim work while you implement your strategy, you may have to take the skills you learned in a less-productive or shrinking industry and look at how to translate them into a growing one (Stern, 2008) in terms recruiters understand . . . achievable steps

if approached from the correct mindset. Your ability to stay focused on your vision, mission, and strategy is not only critical but also life empowering. Yet, we have to understand that daily there are people and/or situations designed to take us off our path. Your professional as well as personal expectations should never suffer because people are working to move you off the path to which you have committed. There is far too much at stake.

Being proactive is about taking control to make things happen rather than watching things happen, which incorporates you aspiring and striving to bring about change in the environment and/or self to achieve a different future (Parker, Bindl, and Strauss, 2010). Personal initiative has been defined as a constellation of behaviors. From an organizational perspective, these behaviors should be consistent with the organization's mission. However, from the venue of self, personal initiative also incorporates long-term focus, goal direction, action orientation, persistence in the face of barriers and setbacks, self-starting tendencies, and proactiveness (Kring, Soose, and Zempel, 1996, p. 38 as cited in Parker, Bindl, and Strauss, 2010).

A key criterion for identifying proactive behavior is when the employee anticipates, plans for, and attempts to create a future outcome that has an impact on the self or environment (Grant and Ashford, 2008, p. 9 as cited in Parker, Bindl, and Strauss, 2010). So what does this really mean? Your visioning and mission processes are critical to your staying focused. "See" the criticality of this new future in your life and believe in it so strongly that under no circumstances will you allow yourself to be moved off the path. Believe in the greatness your Creator has invoked in you. Equally important, you understand that effectively self-regulating "you" is critical when enacting your goals versus being distracted by off-task demands (2010). In other words, never lose site of the relationship between your personal vision and your respective strategic goals. If you fail to accomplish or remodulate those goals (remodulate if necessary because of environmental and/or personal changes), you will not accomplish your vision—which means you ultimately fail YOU!

You also have to understand and follow the *sequencing* processes necessary to stay on task. More specifically, goal generation, ergo your strategic planning, has to occur before task engagement, otherwise you will get lost in the tasks, thus failing to create an effective road map for action (Chen and Kanfer, 2006 as cited in Parker, Bindl, and Strauss, 2010). It often becomes hard to follow through when we lose site of the reason for the actions. Utilize whatever project management strategies work for you to insure that you stay on task. Personally, I prefer to

have my strategic goals and tactical steps written. Having something in writing helps me to stay focused and better in tuned with understanding how I need to allocate time. In doing so, I have also learned that you can accomplish far more than you imagined simply because you understand the tasks and their respective scope. I have also learned via having my goals and tactical steps written that when I have to make choices between ancillary actions, I have something in front of me that helps me engage in a juxtaposition of what engaging in those ancillary steps means to either enhancing or compromising my overarching goals. And, equally important, when I have goals and tactical steps written (with allocation of time attached to each), it becomes easier for me to know when and how I can schedule some much needed “me” time. Working toward your goals never means you compromise your “me” time. Staying balanced is very vital to your ability to effectively implement your goals.

How proactive you will be often emanates out of personally held beliefs about what is important and a strong ownership to the outcomes, thus resulting in resilience (Chen and Kanfer, 2006 as cited in Parker, Bindl, and Strauss, 2010). Do you understand the consequences of failure to follow through? Can you look yourself in the mirror and live with the fact that you gave up or worse yet, allowed inconsequential people and/or events to take you off task? Earlier chapters described both the changing landscape of work, workers, and employer expectations. Your drive will also be impacted by your understanding the current state and your honest assessment of how you compare to this current state in concert with the valence between your desire and your future goals. In other words, just how bad do you want the change? Other researchers term these critical factors for staying on target as one’s perspective toward “can do” and “reason to” (2010). You, however, should focus on insuring that your vision is broken into smaller goals that you can meet (Marks, 2006), so that the “can do” does not become impacted by the enormity of the task.

Your perceived ability to be able to achieve your goals and stay on target, for example, your “can do” also includes self-efficacy perceptions. Your belief that you can be successful in achieving your vision and goals may be directly tied to your belief that you can execute and what the associated risks are with respect to execution (Chen and Kanfer, 2006 as cited in Parker, Bindl and Strauss, 2010). I respectfully posit that you “can do” or self-efficacy is also tied to how good you feel about yourself! Are you feeling energized, or are you constantly tired, feeling depressed, and carrying excess weight that not only impacts your health but also

your self-esteem! Ladies—do you feel “pretty” and gentlemen do you feel “handsome”?

Despite our being a very visual society, there are also personal perceptions of personal power and influence attached to how we intrinsically feel about ourselves. And, if you are inclined to summarily dismiss this proposition, let me make a personal challenge. Take the time to invest in you—your health, weight, personal upkeep . . . even your ability to get a good night's rest and take some “me” time and see how refocused you become! Equally important, if not more important, take the time to invest in your “spiritual” self—however you choose to manifest your spirituality. Mind you, I did not say your religiosity because everyone does not have to be religious to be connected to a Creator or Source. Yet, taking time to ground yourself in prayer . . . not a prayer of desperation but one of asking for strength, help, and focus to move toward your life purpose; grounding yourself in a belief that your Creator will work on your behalf is liberating and a critical part of developing your self-efficacy. My personal prayer is simply: “Lead me to, my God; Guide me through, my God; and order my steps.” The simplicity of asking and knowing that my God never wants me to fail has continued to keep me lifted in my darkest hours.

Inclusively, it has been suggested that people become highly motivated by future-oriented identities (2010). Strauss, Griffin, and Parker (2009, as cited in Parker, Bindl and Strauss, 2010) identified the concept of “future work self,” which was described as an imagined, hope-for future identity that captures an individual's hopes and aspirations in relation to his or her career. So, what does this mean in a practical perspective? Your vision and resulting goals may be described by many as “lofty.” However, who are they to denounce the grandest vision you have of you? People are first and foremost always going to have their personal opinions. Many will attempt to tear down your goals simply because they are “lofty.” In other words, do not fall victim to allowing people and their respective opinions in your personal space. They are not gifted with the vision and understanding of who you are and equally important WHOSE you are! I have never believed that our Creator has ever wanted us to be comfortable with playing small.

When we relent and play small, we have to understand that we are then providing those naysayers who possess less-challenging desires and will with a sense of comfort. In other words, they thrive in an environment of mediocrity and aspire to take as many people along with them on the road to mediocrity as they can muster. Consequently, their environment becomes even more enhanced when we play to their respective

levels. Yet, as I have continued to suggest throughout this book, the landscape of change continues to morph to a higher level, which begs the question if there is even space for mediocrity in today's world?

While it seems like I am beating this horse dead, I am going to end this chapter by reiterating that far too often our personal perception of success is closely connected to how we “feel” about ourselves, which is why paying attention to and rereading the first few chapters of this book is important. It is often difficult to feel the power we personally hold when we are depleted; whether it is a spiritual, mental, or physical depletion. Taking time to rejuvenate is important to your success. Taking time to spiritually align you is even more important.

Managing your stress is vital to your ability to stay focused. I have always been amazed by the power and strengthening ability of simply exercising. Taking 30 minutes to 1 hour a day can and will change your life as well as your perceived self-efficacy. Over time, research continues to reinforce the proposition that the achievement of personal goals is indeed connected to one's ability to self-regulate; such as dealing with emotions associated with setbacks and engagement in appropriate reflection (Parker, Bindl, and Strauss, 2010). Reflection can and will enhance our attainment of goals when we work to understand the success, failure, or consequences of our proactive behaviors (2010). Yet, reflection without reflectivity—action upon our reflections can simply be wasted time. And most important when you feel lost—pray. Spiritual alignment in today's challenging world is so critical to our successfully navigating through its tumultuousness!

The challenges that lie before us are great, yet the opportunities clearly can and will outweigh the challenge.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

—Lao Tse¹

CHAPTER 14

Exploring the Landscape of Options: The Mindset of an Entrepreneur

As the Blog developed over the past four years, the economic landscape did only a modicum of turnaround. It was at that time that I began rethinking the focus of some of our posts. It seemed that we needed to begin a conversation on alternative paradigms for working through this difficult economy. And one of the most obvious topics we had missed was the role of entrepreneurship in today's environment. Interestingly, in many institutions of higher education, the discipline of entrepreneurship is being emphasized, I suspect due to the changing landscape of our organizational contexts.

What continues to be emphasized today is our inability to rely on the constancy of others. As we have seen through the small number of economic reports just in this book, the number of traditional jobs in our economy is far below the number of people who need work. As my mind pondered how we could help people visualize options in concert with continuing to suggest that they actively engage in their personal visioning and strategizing processes, my mind returned to the trip I had taken in 2010 to Turkey.

Although I have addressed this trip in earlier chapters, I want to reiterate what has continued to stay with me regarding this country . . . so much that I often incorporate the concepts I learned into my business lectures. You see, in less than a decade, this country rose from being under the supervision of the IMF to number 14 in the European economy (albeit only a portion of Turkey sits in Europe). During the two weeks there, we had the opportunity to meet and extensively talk with business leaders who had grown businesses from very small start-up "shops"

to multimillion dollar international enterprises. While I was interested in the operations side of their businesses, I was more interested in what constituted the mindset and competencies of their entrepreneurs.

“A wise man/woman will make more opportunities than he/she finds.”
—Francis Bacon¹

Yet, to make those opportunities, as I have continued to posit, one must have an accurate view of their world. In summary, understand the mandated skills and competencies that the workforce of the *world* is being challenged to possess. And, we must have a clear understanding of what constitutes a global economy and a global workforce in order to understand *where* our business and educational opportunities lie.

Beginning the Walk toward Being an Entrepreneur

Small businesses have a very positive impact on our economy. The estimated 29.6 million small businesses in the United States

- Employ just over half of the country's private sector workforce;
- Hire 40 percent of high tech workers, such as scientists, engineers, and computer workers;
- Include 52 percent home-based businesses and 2 percent franchises;
- Represent 97.3 percent of all the exporters of goods;
- Represent 99.7 percent of all employer firms; and
- Generate a majority of the innovations that come from the US companies.

(US Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, September 2009, http://www.score.org/small_biz_stats.html)

Yet, many people are afraid to go down this path because they often do not know where to start or they fear failure. Becoming an entrepreneur is a clear option to a shrinking job market. But one has to clearly understand what it means to be an entrepreneur and have a passion for wanting to branch out on your own.

So, where would you start? While my purpose in these musings is not to provide you with the details of entrepreneurship, there are critical areas that should be emphasized if you are even going to consider going down this path. First, I believe the beginning point is the commitment to be an entrepreneur. Think about where you are in your life. Do you want to continue working for someone else? How does this option fit

into your grandest vision of “you”? What is it you can do and/or make that gives you passion? What does it mean to be on your personal “A” game?

While starting your own business is clearly an option to working for someone else and/or continuing to be in the ranks of the unemployed, you must understand that owning your own business is not only a means of making an income but also a lifestyle change.

First, similar to your vision of you, you should possess a vision of you and your business option; vision your business and its respective product(s) as well as societal impact. Your vision should include how the business will manifest itself in its market and how you are an extension of your product. How do people see you? How do you see yourself?

Now, what do I mean by that? Let me share an example. Suppose you want to go into cosmetology. The worst thing in the world is to go into an establishment that is promoting itself as being able to improve your looks and the people rendering service are not together. The ability to vision your product and your personal brand is germane to understanding your market niche. For example, years ago, I worked with a client who had a nail tech business. For years, she enjoyed never having to market her business because there was little to no competition. Then overnight the situation changed and the market became flooded with competitors who were undercutting prices by 50 percent or more.

I asked her to vision what differentiated her services from others and her niche. The simple fact was that she had always catered to an upscale clientele that tended to require a dramatically different level of services and products, which she always gave, but never really thought about the value of what she was providing or the demographics of her clientele. I helped her take her vision, and already carved niche into an expanded vision, complete with new marketing and advertising strategies. Concomitantly, I asked her to look at how her establishment had to change . . . the motif, decor, and how she looked. Her customer focus also had to change relative to how she spaced her clients, respected their schedules, and communicated with them. Many of her clients would come on their lunch breaks, or in between business appointments. These were women (and some men) who were high profile. As a result, time meant money. They did not mind paying for the service, but she had to develop a clear understanding of their expectations and requirements. They would not allow their time to be wasted because she either fell behind, or was late getting to the shop, or wanted to talk through the service, thereby slowing down her productivity. These were difficult but necessary changes she had to make.

What entrepreneurs need to clearly understand is customer service as we have addressed in an earlier chapter, and that a client typically perceives his or her time (especially when that client is in business) in relationship to money. In other words, if my time is being wasted, mentally I am calculating that lost time relative to my consulting billing rate, which means I am probably becoming very irate with the person wasting my time!

A clear vision of your product/service, market, and your relationship to it is vital in order to get started. You have to live that vision, breathe it, as well as firmly believe that it is needed in the marketplace. Armed with these insights and beliefs will make the rest of your life changes much more manageable. To be an effective entrepreneur (which is why I asked what constitutes your “A” game) means that you will be working 24/7. That does not mean you allow yourself to get out of balance, it just means that you have to work extremely hard to develop balance, while developing your business.

“Focus on your potential instead of your limitations”

—Alan Loy McGinnis²

Setting the Context—Developing Your Mindset for Entrepreneurship

As I traveled and visited other cultures, I am amazed by the relationships that I see between employers and employees. In most of the international countries I have visited that have prospering economies, employees are respected, loved, and provided with substantive tangible and intangible benefits. In return, workers are very loyal to their employers. Yet, in the United States, we have lost ground with respect to our workplace relationships. However, not too many years ago, those relationships existed in our organizations . . . then someone “flipped” the psychological contract to the point that we no longer can count on retiring from the organization to which we may have given years of our lives. If a person now stays on a job five years . . . eyebrows are raised as to why they stayed so long. This trend is not only toxic to the employee; it is destroying our productivity and profitability. We do not develop lasting relationships where people feel committed to the organization and are willing to give it their all. When I juxtapose our current paradigms regarding the workplace and our relationships with our employees, one thing is very clear to me. Those relationships have to change and the mindset of an entrepreneur can be the beginning catalyst for a movement that is long past due.

It Pays to Love!!!

While in Turkey, I kept asking the leaders we met what, in their opinions, were the most important characteristics of leadership. Their answers kept coming back to the concept of others . . . the employees, the customers, and service to their market and country. You see, the concept of love is not only indigent to relationships but also critical to the success of our business initiatives; particularly if we are going to be successful in regaining position in our global marketplace. Our global competitors understand the necessity to have strong relationships between the organization and the workforce. I believe that love should be a critical component of an entrepreneur's mindset.

Years ago, I consulted to a client who had a very successful business. While he was very competent in his trade, I saw his business fail for one major reason . . . he dismally treated his employees and they retaliated in ways that caused the business to fail. I kept telling him that he did not require sophisticated management systems, he simply had to change his mindset regarding the people that worked for him, but his mindset and attitude toward people did not change. Unfortunately, this dismal attitude also extended into his relationships with his customers. As his business failed, he continued to blame everyone but himself.

Over the years, I have found that smart business leaders know that the concept of love extends beyond family and friends. Herb Kelleher, who is the epitome of a successful leader and is discussed in management books across the world, built one of the most successful businesses of our time . . . Southwest Airlines . . . primarily on the concept of love. While people thought his strategy was what enabled the airlines to succeed, it was the simplicity of his philosophy toward people that enabled the airlines to be profitable when most airlines were struggling. I had students study how other airlines attempted to imitate Southwest Airlines' operational strategies; yet never could come close to Southwest Airlines' success, even when they mastered the operational strategies. What they could not master was Kelleher's philosophy because they did not see it.

Most ailing organizations have developed a functional blindness to their own defects. They are not suffering because they cannot resolve their problems, but because they cannot see their problems.

—John Gardner³

Herb Kelleher articulated in countless interviews over the years that if you treat people with dignity and respect, paid them well, let them know they were valued, you would outpace the competition every time . . . and

they did. Interestingly, when Kelleher retired, Southwest Airlines began to have problems. He eventually had to come back. It appears that the other leaders did not understand how to enact and translate his philosophy into their leadership competencies.

I purposely would listen to Southwest employees when I flew on the airlines, and I often flew Southwest because of the organizational culture that carried over into every realm of their service. I had students in all my business classes, undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral, study the airlines. I wanted to see if others saw the consistency of this simple philosophy. Every employee I heard talk about Southwest Airlines during my travels had nothing but positive feedback with respect to the organization. They did not know I was listening to their conversations. Usually, when employees are talking among themselves, you can “hear” the real deal. But their conversations conveyed their high regard for the organization, and the highest respect for Herb Kelleher. My students found the same consistent attitudes in their research.

Another organization that similarly has grown in leaps and bounds because of the attitude of love and respect for the workforce is Starbucks. In interviews, Howard Schultz often talked how he saw his father treated in his workplace and vowed that his organization would never extend that same or similar treatment. Consequently, despite economic challenges, we have continued to see Starbucks bounce back and excel. I have yet to walk into a Starbucks and observe a disgruntled workforce, and in my business you are taught to easily spot them.

So, what are the critical points of this discussion regarding the option of entrepreneurship? First, choose the people who will work with you carefully. They should embody the same values, mores, and attitudes you believe are going to be germane to making your business initiatives a success. Even family members must share the same values because the valuing of people is critical to entrepreneurial growth and development. Far too many businesses have failed because of incongruent values among family members.

Equally important, as the business owner, value your employees. If you do not treat them with dignity and respect, honor their hard work, empower them to really be a part of the business and make suggestions, pay them appropriately, and give them the appropriate benefits that they need for themselves and their families, you will not see the success you desire. They are your front line. There has to be mutual trust and respect, and there has to be mutuality in vision and goals. Employees have to believe that there are going to be positive outcomes for them in the long run if sacrifice is a part of the start-up process.

Many entrepreneurs forget about this when the business starts to make money. They forget their promises that their employees would share in the returns. The breaking of a psychological contract will break a business.

In summarizing my musings on this topic, I respectfully suggest that if you consider going down the path of entrepreneurship, you should have

- Passion for what you will do . . . love your work; because when you love it, it does not become work. That love will enable you to put in the required hours to develop the business.
- Vision—your business and how it contributes to society and the global market. Once you have developed this vision, your ability to understand what it means to be on your “A” game is significantly magnified.
- Love the people you work with and those you will be servicing (e.g., your forth coming customers) . . . remember the example of Herb Kelleher.
- Explore the business aspects of starting your own enterprise by utilizing Small Business Associations and other professional organizations that are there to help you via providing free and public services. They will even help you conceptualize and give you pointers on how to develop a viable business plan. These resources can typically be found in any major metropolitan area.
- Research on your own those success stories and critically examine the core competencies and skills that appear to have significantly impacted the business. In other words, study and learn from others.
- Research to better understand what constitutes success in your proposed enterprise and what would be the best geographical location for launching your business. Just because you live in a certain locale does not mean that your business needs to be there. Growth opportunity clearly is defined by multiple variables associated with the market: potential customers and competition just to name a couple. So, be prudent and do your homework.
- Critically and carefully examine financing opportunities. Your local Small Business Association can help you identify options for financially launching your business.
- Never shirk the responsibility of developing a solid business plan. And, equally important, as you are encouraged to engage in scenario planning for your personal strategy, you should do the same

for your entrepreneurial endeavors. A sound plan is your roadmap. Yet, with good ongoing scenario planning processes in place you can plan for the unexpected. An excellent example was Motorola Corporation. People in my age bracket will remember the Motorola that made televisions and phonographs. Yet, Robert Galvin, who was president at that time was savvy enough to understand that his organization could not effectively compete with the Japanese market that began to take over his company's product lines. Galvin saw this coming in advance enough to invoke a different organizational strategy—hence the company we now know.

CHAPTER 15

The Global Application of This Book

The Universality of These Issues

There are far and few business, public and non-for-profit sectors on an international basis that are not impacted by today's economic downturns. In their 2012 report, "Global Employment Trends 2012: Preventing a deeper job crisis," the International Labour Organisation posited that the world faces the additional challenge of creating decent jobs for the estimated 900 million workers living with their families below the standards of our poverty line (The Financial Express, 2012). Equally critical, the financial crisis of 2008 and the Great Recession have morphed into a global jobs crisis that most forecasts predict will persist for years given current policies (Palley, 2011).

The complexity of today's economic challenges is intimately intertwined with our global connectivity. Consequently, when one nation experiences economic setbacks, the whole world can be impacted. Globalization places all workers in international competition via global production networks and trade. This phenomenon creates job insecurity and downward wage pressure (Palley, 2011). Unfortunately, while the global unemployment rate continues to grow, recovery efforts do not appear to be translating into jobs. For example, despite resurgence in various global economies, job recovery in the Asia-Pacific region continues to lag behind growth (Accord Fintech, Mumbai, 2012). People across the globe are facing similar challenges. The challenges you face are not personal. They are simply the product of today's environment. Yet, how you and others across the globe choose to deal with today's environment is personal. You can become a victim of change or you can become an active contributor to change by innovating and reinventing you!

While my context for writing this book is the United States and the lens I privilege is that of an African American woman, clearly the perspectives discussed are not country or even continent specific. Each of us who desires to evoke change in our lives embarks upon a journey that infers the need for acting with a sense of urgency. Interestingly, many organizations are feeling that same sense of urgency. They too need change. They also need employees who are flexible in their thought processes, willing to comfortably engage in changing their paradigms, and not afraid to face the “new-ness” of today’s global environment.

I respectfully suggest that the economic challenges organizations and people are experiencing across the globe are going to continue to manifest a very different construct for the concept of worker in a newly defined economy. As the concept of work continues to morph, the profile of the worker will continue to morph. Innovations and technological advances are ongoing. The global boundaries are continuing to diminish, yet for too many years, we have remained numb to the limitations of our insularity and the resulting paradigmatic paralysis it invokes. Today’s challenges are forcing paradigm shifts that many never imagined. Yet, if we can internalize this one thought, it will make all that we face so much easier to navigate through.

Change your thoughts and you change your world.

—Norman Vincent Peale¹

CHAPTER 16

Engaging in a Conversation between Both Parties of Today's Working World: The Need for a Different Dialogue between Employers and the Workforce

Over the years I have taught management and leadership, I have had to explain to students the relationship voids that exist between employers and employees on a global front.

If I were to categorize our workplace relationships, I believe it is fair to say that many employees have lost faith in their employers. In the eyes of many, the psychological contracts that use to exist that preserved the dignity of the worker and provided them with some modicum of security were critically broken by the mid-1990s. Organizations cut costs by retrenching under the auspices of reengineering. Exacerbating these downward relational spirals were the outcry with respect to CEO salaries, irrespective of whether they failed or took their respective organizations to new levels.

Yet, the relationship between employer and employee is critical to businesses surviving in today's global economy. Organizational leaders need to acknowledge how stretched is the employment relationship—so stretched that many organizations may already have incurred irreparable damage. No matter how much technology organizations invoke into their workplace, their largest expense and investment is their workforce. The intellectual capital possessed by employees continues to be germane to an organization meeting its strategic goals.

What is the impact when this employment relationship is stretched? A workforce that does not possess the competencies and skills needed to drive the overarching strategy is a detriment to the organization. While the relationship between knowledge and prosperity has been a recognized relationship for years, more recently researchers and management thinkers are writing about and discussing the importance of the knowledge economy, which places the knowledge worker center stage (Namasivayam and Denizci, 2006).

Across many industries, particularly service organizations, the relationship between human capital and structural capital can be intense. In service sectors, it is almost indistinguishable (2006). As a result, it has been suggested that organizational human resource practices that engender and support employee creativity will greatly improve the delivery of value to customers (2006).

There are social factors which are also stretching the employment relationship. Declining birth rates, greater longevity, and aging populations are just a few of the shifts in western industrialized nations that are predicted to continue (Jorgensen and Taylor, 2008). New conversations that will bridge the gap of employees, organizations, and institutions of work should occur. You see, the critical stakeholders in this conversation are not actively triangulating or agreeing on mutual objectives (2008).

New Circumstances, New Thoughts—New Conversations

Ironically, in strategic human resource management, we teach that if an organization is continually doing effective human resource planning and development, they will be very cognizant of their manpower strengths as well as voids. When looking to address those voids, an assessment of the core competencies and skills juxtaposed to the amount of training necessary to move the organization's intellectual capital to the next level is clearly an analysis that is germane to the organization's success. Armed with that knowledge, the organization can have some very truthful conversations with their employees regarding the deltas that exist between their bench strength and the required core competencies and skills needed to move the organization forward.

Training and development strategies typically are executed to do three things in an organization: address operational and/or service deficiencies that exist owing to the need to retrain employees, upgrade the core competencies and skills of employees through employee development training tied to the annual performance management process via

varying modalities of training, and drive the succession planning processes by insuring that those who have been deemed as fast-trackers are in fact possessing the critical competencies and skills required of their executive leadership team.

Now you may wonder why I am going through this level of detail as to what should occur. My point is a simple one . . . if employers are executing appropriate human capital strategic management strategies, they should know well before a crisis develops what core competencies and skills they need. And, if they are engaging in appropriate human resource planning and development, they would have already determined whether or not it is less costly to train versus hire new people in concert with having gone through a critical assessment of their workforce with respect to an analysis of its “trainability”!

Armed with this information, it is important that the leadership of the organization engage in an honest conversation with its workforce. New circumstances and changes call for a different subset of actions and behavioral responses.

You see, when you give people information as to the current state of the organization, commit to helping them get “up to speed,” you have flipped the paradigm that the organization does not care about its workers. At that stage of the game, people have a choice as to whether or not they will choose to elevate their competencies and skills to the level now required by the organization.

It is when you do not share this knowledge and inadvertently change the rules of the game that anger builds and no one wins in that case. Over and above losing people either by layoff or termination, you have lost the confidence of even those who stay . . . why? Generally, the prevailing attitude is that if you did it to “them,” it is just a matter of time when I will get mine. Consequently, there is an ongoing onslaught to productivity and profitability levels and no one “wins.”

So, What Are the Options?

First and foremost, leaders have to realize when the employment relationship is breaking down. They have to be intuitive enough to have their ears to the ground of their organization and deeply listen to the point that they hear the heartbeat of the organization. They need to listen beyond the mere hearing of words. Leaders need to hear the pulse of the organization and at their core understand how people feel about their treatment in the workplace. And, if the vibrations the leader picks up does not seem to be “right,” the leader should not be afraid to engage

in open conversations with first, the leadership and management teams to get their “pulse,” and then with the employees.

Now you might wonder why I suggest engaging in conversations with the leadership and management teams first. When executives go straight to the employees and bypass the people whom they rely on to help lead and management the organization, in many ways they are disempowering their executive and management teams. Change is a collaborative effort and everyone has to feel that their part of the process is valued. The fine art of bringing people together is just that—a fine art. It cannot be left to chance. In many respects, the utilization of a whole systems approach, using strategies such as Appreciative Inquiry as described in previous pages from a whole systems modality is an excellent way to bring the organization together, identify the collective vision people have for the next steps of the journey, be open and honest about the strengths as well as areas that require strengthening and concomitantly lay a strategy for “shoring” up the organization.

When these actions occur, people are able to express their voice, which leads to buy-in. I remember many years ago, the problems an organization I worked for faced. We were stressed to cut 30 percent of work out of the organization. The leadership team had promised that people would not be laid off, and attrition and retirement plans would take care of the positions no longer needed. Once the organization got over the “fear” of cutbacks, and honestly looked at where we were in our alignment of work to our organizational strategy, it was easy to see and buy into where the “fat” in the organization had to be cut. At the time, I was in human resources and responsible for designing the core competency training programs to “shore” up our talent management strategies. When we combined those initiatives and took a long hard look at where we were versus where we needed to be, obtaining the buy in from employees was a much easier task.

Unfortunately, far too many organizational leaders wait until a crisis emerges before they take action and/or make the decision that the organization does not possess the bench strength it needs to make rapid, yet systemic change. Strategic planning, couple with scenario planning where you examine all the possibilities coupled with effective and open communication and employee engagement, can dramatically change the dynamics of the organization and place it as well as the employees on paths of greatness.

Engaging people in the process of evaluation and change lessens the impact of challenging their self-esteem. Improvement is a part of life. If you continue to live productive lives, you have no choice but to grow.

When people see growth aligned to purpose—a purpose that they can relate to in an environment where they “feel” the love and care, I am convinced, even after many years of being in corporate America that they can and will rise to the occasion. And, for those that summarily dismiss the challenge and do not want to engage in the work that it will take to holistically develop themselves and their organization—then maybe it is time for them to go and embark upon their own agenda and path. The difference with their leaving the organization is that they were an active part of the decision making process to go. Consequently, they cannot blame anyone for their forthcoming challenges.

Some leaders may make the argument that it is not their responsibility to engage employees in the business decision. After all, as leaders, they run the business. Yet, if we revisit the propositions in chapter 2, this argument does not hold true for organizations that are looking to grow in today’s global economic environment. People are the organization’s most valued resource and most costly resource. Research throughout the years has and continues to prove that when people feel disempowered, devalued, and left out in the “cold” once a workforce reduction occurs—everyone suffers; the organization, the workers who left, the workers who stayed, and the families feeling the stress from all parties.

I believe if we are to overcome the trauma of a challenging economy and holistically engage in restructuring our workplaces and workforce, people need to talk to one another. These are not personal issues. These are issues brought by a natural occurrence—change. Yet, we cannot deal with this level of change via the use of strategies that we know have failed us in the past.

Life is and can continue to be a blessing, if we choose to live it to its fullest!

CHAPTER 17

Concluding Thoughts

People are searching for inner meaning and balance in their lives. Chaos, change, disruption to the status quo, and imbalances in wealth as well as poverty lead people to search their inner self for answers that work to restore the cognitive dissonance that emerges with high levels of chaos and change (Easley and Swain, 2003). I believe many people across the world want to emerge more holistic, which may be a major contributor to the continually growing interest in workplace spirituality.

Interestingly, the desire for inner meaning and balance is not new. The outcomes of these perspectives are continually growing research streams that investigate and theorize in the areas of spirituality in the workplace, organizational justice, the development of hopeful organizations and societies, developing an understanding of what constitutes good organizational citizenship behaviors and how to bring people back into a sharing of governance, power and decision making in both the public and private sectors through the theoretical frameworks of organizational behavioral strategies such as Appreciative Inquiry (Easley and Swain, 2003). In other words, in the middle of our chaos and constant change, we still look for new ways to celebrate the beauty of man and the human spirit (2003).

While some may argue that some of these views and paradigms have been diminishing as we continue to move through a tumultuous economy, I still believe that the guiding praxis for many enterprises that understand the critical yet connecting relationship between productivity, profitability, and an self-actualized workforce is to continue to strive toward rediscovering the values and ethics that inspire people to be their best. Researchers are suggesting that the very survival of society

continues to be experienced less as a gift of fateful nature and more and more as a social construction of interacting minds (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987; Cooperrider, 1986). Under these conditions, ideas, meaning, and systems take on a whole new life and character where ideas are thrust center stage as the prime unit of relational exchange and reality (Bell, 1973). Therefore, to understand how to unbridle our troubled organizations and emerge with far more noble ideas as to their responsibilities in this continually changing global environment, there has to be even more effort directed toward understanding the internal dialogues and interpretations that ensue within the people. In other words, organizations and their leadership should better understand how their workforce is looking within themselves (Easley and Swain, 2003).

While these are noble aspirations for those enterprises that understand the relationship between productivity, profitability, and an inspired and self-actualized workforce, as an agent of change, paradoxically I have always believed that you cannot “empower” others to believe in themselves. The conflicting circumstances—changing global contexts, failures to have effective public policies to address issues, ineffective corporate responses to the changing dynamics, and all other related issues are not going to go away overnight. Effectively coping with these dynamics is calling for an internal locus of control and desire to stay current with the morphing environment that goes beyond the concept of empowerment.

Finding one's self is not just about psychologically liberating the self from the confines of a specific organization that is causing us strife. Finding one's self means connecting to your inner guidance system that will “tell” you if you choose to quietly listen, the multiplicity of gifts, talents, and resulting opportunities that begin with “you.” Finding one's self also means taking steps toward your own opportunities, dreams, and desires...even if in the beginning they are baby steps. Finding one's self means coming to an internalized understanding of what makes you happy and evoking a plan to bring yourself to that state of happiness. Lastly, I believe that finding one's self most importantly means fully embracing the wonderful person you are and your specialized and personalized blueprint—self-knowledge that enables you to stand firm in your belief systems and move past any troubled waters that may come your way.

I also believe that over and above a very long list of competencies and skills, those organizations that recognize the challenges that lie ahead of them want people who have come to this level of self-actualization in

their life. A liberated employee is one who is able to stand in his or her personal power and will have fewer propensities to make organizational decisions for the wrong reasons—particularly for reasons arising out of fear and intimidation. You see—once you become a liberated and self-empowered worker, you cannot be “bought” for any reason and as a result are free to align yourself with organizations and their respective visions that move and inspire you as well as others to produce for the betterment of society. In other words, liberating “you” enables you to align yourself within a place of peace, joy, and productiveness, devoid of qualities that aim to deplete one’s spirit.

We continue to live in a global society that knows no boundaries to dynamic change. Each day, different challenges await us. And, each day we are challenged to grow beyond which we ever thought we could be. The choice is ours to either personally shrink back or to call upon our Creator for help in rising to the many different occasions that are coming our way . . . for you see

To keep our faces toward change and behave like free spirits in the presence of fate is strength undefeatable.

—Helen Keller¹

In closing, I sincerely hope this book provides you with a different perspective and paradigm regarding your present employment situation. Most important, I hope this book helps guide you toward emerging victorious as you find the newly enlightened “you.”

Many blessings on your quest, visioning and strategy development processes as you embrace the world and all that you are designed by your Creator to be. Life truly is a blessing . . . as are you!

Notes

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