A New Year and New Career Possibilities
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Introduction
Many of us seem to be tossed about like tiny boats in the eye of a storm. Most of the time, just trying to stay afloat is all that we can do to survive the winds of change. Instead of following our internal compass to destinations we dream about, we are often forced off course by elements beyond our control.

A career at work is like a boat at sea. It needs a captain at the helm, a map to follow and a wealth of insight to reach a safe harbor. Although you may receive help from managers and mentors, you are the captain of your career and you’re traveling on a journey in the workplace. Whether you’re a new employee, currently employed or out of work, I invite you to re-examine who you are and where your career is headed from a fresh prospective.

Take a few minutes and assess your life in the workplace. Ask yourself some questions:
- What were my most satisfying jobs?
- Which professions interest me the most?
- What is my dream job?
- What were my most satisfying jobs?
- What are my greatest accomplishments at work?
- What basic human needs seem to be the most compelling? What professions and trades do they suggest?
- How well is my organization positioned for the future?
- Where’s my industry and my career going?

Look Inward to Discover What Makes You Tick
There is tremendous power within you. But how do you go about identifying and discovering your unique personal attributes - that combination of your innate strengths, talents and inclinations that will produce a passion for a particular type of work? In Hinduism and Buddhism, dharma is the ultimate law of things – their essential nature. The dharma of a fire is to burn, of the wind, to blow, of snow, to fall wet and cold. Answer the question, “What is my dharma?” and you will discover who you are.

What are your personality traits? Are you analytical, creative, funny, inquiring, outgoing, quick, or serious, etc? What do you care about? People more than things? Ideas more than data? Look inward and ask yourself, what is my essential nature? What is my core? What are my unique gifts? What do I value the most about myself? Ask a few friends or family members what they most value about you. Find a mission in life. What are you concerned about? Want to change? Write your answers down and share them with others. What are you passionate about? A passion for your work will lead you to satisfaction and security. If you follow your dharma, you will pursue the right livelihood. Always remember that there is one thing that you can do better than anyone else in the universe. The trick is to discover your calling.
Choosing a Profession

In our current economy, you can’t predict how long you’ll be working where you are so it makes sense to work at something that will continue to be in demand in other places. Jobs are the most portable if and when they are (1) critical to an organization’s mission, (2) add value to the organization, (3) align themselves with specific organizational strategies, (4) require your skills and knowledge and (4) contribute directly to the bottom line. Unfortunately, few jobs fulfill all of these criteria, and have the most potential for lateral or vertical mobility within or outside of organizations.

*Thinking in terms of jobs rather than trades or professions is a common mistake.* A job is a small piece of a trade or a profession – a task you can do adequately without knowing its place in the overall scheme of things (such as changing tires as opposed to being a certified master mechanic, processing loans as opposed to being a lawyer or accountant, or assembling computer boards vs. a hardware designer or engineer). In a job, you’re more vulnerable to change.

Some of us spend much of our lives searching for a profession, while others stumble on something by chance. Either way, you need to find a profession that will bring you to your full potential, one in which you can excel and something that produces a deep passion within you. In a trade or profession, you are part of a long tradition of specialization, which address basic human needs. When a particular trade or profession addresses increasing numbers of human needs, that individual profession populates increased numbers of industries and organizations creating more stable, portable and versatile careers. Trades and professions remain the stable foundation on which to build careers. What is your current profession/trade? In how many industries is it critical?

Your basic interests, personality, unique talents, and values often predispose you toward certain professions. Your family history or community might pull you toward specific industries or organizations. But it all comes down to what you do best. What comes most naturally to you? You will always be happiest in a profession that harnesses your unique talents, fits your personality, allows you to work in a congenial atmosphere, and in one where your industry and organization values your skills and knowledge.

Your Profession’s Vitality

Each industry and organization requires certain professions to achieve its mission. Review your organization’s mission and strategies carefully to determine the relevance of your profession. Ask people who know the intimate mission and strategies of the organization to name the top five professions required for achieving its mission and strategies. Is yours included?

Here are some basic questions to explore:

- Is your profession essential to the purpose of the organization?
- Will your profession transfer to other industries and organizations?
- Do the competencies in your profession have broad application to other professions?
- Does your profession provide you with satisfactory financial and personal compensation?
- Does an obvious path to mastery exist for your profession? Is it age independent?
- Is there professional and educational support?

If any of your answers were “no,” you should be especially alert to economic, political, social and technological trends affecting your industry and organization.
How Does Your Industry Stack Up?
Many people work most of their lives in a single industry and spend little time thinking about the trends that will directly affect them. When the inevitable changes occur, they are unprepared for the sudden loss of a job, for the merger or shutdown. One key to building a stable work life is to keep your eye on the bigger picture – the industry in which you’re working or planning to enter.

Every industry has a core of continually evolving professions and competencies that outlast it and can be transferred from one industry to another. An organization competes successfully by organizing the work of professionals to address its needs. In the process, it creates, changes, and eliminates jobs. It fills those jobs with a constantly shifting group of workers. An industry’s need for your profession and its responsiveness to trends are two important factors that determine whether you can achieve a rewarding career in the industry.

Where is your industry in its life cycle? Is it growing, stable or losing ground? The answers to these questions will keep you in touch with signs of changes coming your way. Take stock of your industry and your organization. For example, unless you’re the accountant or the national sales manager, don’t expect to find a stable career building hula-hoops. Is your profession essential to the mission of the industry? Are you essential? Are you in a “Primary Profession” where your expertise is absolutely required for the organization to accomplish its core mission? Or are you in a “Secondary Profession,” such as human resources, marketing, or education that is not essential to directly accomplishing that mission, but nonetheless important to the efficiency of the organization. Primary professions afford you the best chance of building a long-term career in your industry. Here are a few questions to help you analyze your industry.

1. **Is your industry serving one or more important human needs?** Industries expand in response to various human needs (food, health care, shelter). The more urgent those needs, the more in demand for goods and services provided by that particular industry. Pinpoint the human needs that your industry addresses. How would you rate them? Are they highly relevant to survival, moderately utilitarian or unimportant to human needs? (hospitals vs. hula-hoops).

2. **Does your industry keep up with changing technologies and demands?** Changing technology often challenges the very survival of an industry. Competencies become marginal or obsolete while others grow more important. Look at the recent technological shifts in your industry. How have they changed? What technologies will become obsolete in three to five years? What technologies in other industries might affect your industry? What technologies will affect your profession and your job and what do you need to learn in order to take advantage of the shifts in technology?

3. **Is your industry peaking or growing?** Is your industry emerging or declining? How is global competition affecting your industry? How do you rate your industry’s practices and performance against an international standard? Is your organization keeping up with leading edge global industries?

4. **How many new products and services generated by your industry can you name that did not exist a few years ago?** The number of new products and services generated is a good measure of a healthy industry. What new products are on the drawing board? What is the source of your industry’s innovations? What is the implication in your profession for expansion or contraction?
How Does Your Organization Stack Up?

Organizations come and go. Some rise and fall in a matter of weeks or months while others endure for generations. Organizations that survive adapt to changing economic, technological, and societal conditions by continually reshaping services, products, and the workforce. Organizations create and eliminate jobs. With the notion of a lifetime job out the window, you will probably work for a number of organizations over the years. So the question is, “How do I find an organization that is going to be around long enough - and an organization that is stable enough - to help me achieve my career success?”

Certain common denominators often determine which organizations will make it over the long haul and whether you will be there to be part of their success. Ask some basic questions:

1. **What is the character of your organization?** Do your ideas about your job and your profession run parallel with your organization’s purposes? Are you a good fit with the organization’s culture, values and mission? What basic needs does the organization serve? Do those needs fit your passion and values? Is your profession highly essential to the organization’s success? If you answer yes to these questions, you are more likely to be creative, productive, and find fulfillment in the organization.

2. **What is the organization’s values or purpose?** What human needs does the organization address? Rather than listening to what an organization says, take a look at what the organization does and trust your instincts. In addition to earning a living, compare your ideas about work with what you know about the organization. Always try to find an organization that is in sync with your purpose and values.

3. **Is your organization viable?** Does it have a strong sense of purpose? Does it; have strong leaders in core professions? Support research and development and promote a learning culture? Exhibit growth potential? Share its profits and reward employees? Does it value open communication and share authority?

These questions will help you assess the strength and durability of your profession, your organization and your industry. Nonetheless, there are times your needs as well as your organization’s needs change. Careers, like organizations, must adapt to changing technologies, competition, and other external factors. However, the human needs which you and organizations both serve will always be there - you will just have to change the way you deal with them.

**Summary**

The question we hear so often is, “How do I find an organization that is going to be around long enough - and an organization that is stable enough - to help me achieve career success?” Whether you’re a new employee, currently employed or out of work, this article presents a number of issues to assess the strength and durability of jobs, professions, organizations and industries. Are you essential to your organization? Which job should you look for? Which organizations are the strongest? How do you choose a profession? Which organizations are positioned for success? Where is your industry in its life cycle? These questions and others will help you assess the strength and durability of your profession, your organization and your industry.
About the Author:
Caela Farren, Ph.D., is President of MasteryWorks - a leading Career Development solution to large to mid-size companies, including Sprint, Lockheed-Martin, and Capitol One. MasteryWorks provides enterprise web portals, training, consulting, and an assessment framework for employees and managers. For more than 30 years, Caela has been a tireless advocate around complex issues redefining the workplace. She envisioned the current workplace climate by more than a decade, when she published the book, “Who is Running Your Career: Creating Stable Work in Unstable Times” (Bard Press, 1997). Through MasteryWorks, she oversees solutions that create the foundation for impact-filled “career conversations” - centered on increased contribution, performance, and fit. Her strategic approach consistently delivers on employee engagement and retention goals for her clients.

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