The Grass is Not Always Greener: Career Paths in Your Pasture
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Career Options
Today, people are moving almost every which way but up. Last-ditch economic survival tactics have forced organizations to be smaller, flatter, nimbler and networked. Organizations are changing through mergers, new leadership, change in strategic directions, or by outsourcing products and services. All of these elements promise to trigger explosive consequences in Human Resources.

The Grass Is Always Greener Syndrome
A majority of American workers are suffering from a disease called, “The Grass is Always Greener in Another Pasture Syndrome.” A wave of current dissatisfaction triggered by the insecurity of economic woes has driven the workforce to seek change. Your most valued employees are about to go shopping and they aren’t just shopping for clothes. The volatile retention statistics are eye-popping. A majority of the best and the brightest are looking to sell their skills and talents to other organizations and competitors that will address and fill their human needs.

More than two-thirds of American executives are worried about their most skilled talent walking out the door and with good reason. The current economic disruption has provided human capital with an ideal opportunity to consider fundamental changes. There is a retention disaster on the horizon of historic proportion particularly for top performers.

Why Do Top Performers Want to Leave?
Making smart career changes require a deep knowledge of the World of Work - industry relationships and interrelationships, organizations, professions and jobs. Competent managers have that knowledge from having worked in the industry for years. Career conversations can provide a “reality check” for top performers before they start shopping for a change. Managers can provide a perspective that allows them to make a smart comparison between their current work and other choices.

Fueled by rough economic times, employees are weighing their current work situation as well as considering meeting their basic needs. These concerns include health care, working environments, economic security, challenging work and learning opportunities, housing needs, support for community involvement, and work life balance through telecommuting and flextime. Before your best and brightest jump into their cars and explore the other side of the industrial mall, your organization needs to do a better job of providing for these basic human needs to keep your top talent retained and engaged. Attractive competitors are addressing these concerns. How many career issues is your organization now addressing?

Comparing Your Pasture to Your Competitors
Job Security has to do with the vitality of the industries, organizations and professions in which we work. Leaders and managers need to focus on the big picture in order to anticipate career opportunities and risks for their direct reports. Jobs live in the bigger context of professions, organizations and industries. To see and anticipate where the jobs will be, one has to study the current state. We strongly recommend
that managers do some research on the questions below as preparation for powerful career conversations.

**Questions for research in the broader workplace:**
Within your own industry, what are the greatest changes that will impact the careers of your direct reports, and where will their professional expertise be needed?

- What are the issues/breakdowns driving these changes?
- Which of your talented people are most needed to address these changes?
- Which professions are most in need?
- What new jobs will emerge or increase because of these issues/breakdowns?
- What jobs might disappear or shrink?
- What competencies and skills will be in the greatest demand to handle these issues?

**Questions for research in your current organization:**

- Based on your organization mission and strategies, what professions will be most important in the next 2-3 years?
- What will be the biggest needs, challenges or strategic imperatives requiring special talent?
- What competencies and skills will equip a professional to handle those needs?
- What offers/proposals/recommendations could you make to your organization that would let your people make a greater contribution to solving those problems or addressing those needs?
- What would be the nature of new jobs or projects that will evolve to take care of these needs?

**Leading Career Indicators**
If you can answer yes to most of the statements below, you can attract and keep great people. Research has shown these are the indicators of vital industries, professions and organizations. How do you stack up?

**Industry**
- Demonstrates high growth potential
- Is a successful competitor in global markets
- Serves a basic human need that will exist for many years
- Keeps up with changing technologies
- Continues to expand products and services

**Organization**
- Has a clear, powerful and inspiring mission
- Has leaders from the core professions of the industry
- Has access to the latest technology and telecom tools
- Conducts on-going R&D – a leader in the industry
- Has well-respected managers – people want to work with them

**Profession**
- Professions you supervise are essential for fulfilling the mission
- Has a clear path for attaining mastery
- Offers a high degree of personal and financial compensation
- Has professional or trade associations for easy membership
- Requires people to work with and communicate with colleagues outside the organization
These **Leading Career Indicators** are the factors that talented employees should be assessing. If you have more negative answers than positive, you may be at risk of losing key people. Do your homework and be able to speak powerfully with your direct reports about the *leading career indicators* that are present or missing in your organization. The objective is to be in a vital industry, in a vital profession, in a vital organization. How much greener can that get?

**Summary**

To drive retention, managers and leaders need useful strategies to address issues of dissatisfaction. They can begin exploring potential retention risks before their top talent explores external options. What is the prescription for the “Grass Is Always Greener Syndrome”? Take the first step and research your competitors. Understand how you stack up on the *leading career indicators* and engage your talent in meaningful, honest, and proactive career conversations.

**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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