

## Career Security

A recent poll of U.S. workers found that the one thing we most want from our employers is job security. While that's completely understandable in today's crazy world of work, I'm afraid we're more likely to get a visit from our fairy godmother.

The global economy is now more interconnected and interdependent than at any other time in history. If government economic policies change in China, U.S. producers are affected. If consumer tastes change in Europe, American businesses feel the impact. If a South American company goes bankrupt, the people working in its plant in Tennessee will be hurt.

It is a highly turbulent and unpredictable environment. And that uncertainty makes it all but impossible for our employers—whether they are American or foreign-based organizations—to predict what kinds of talent they will need tomorrow or the day after, let alone six months from now. As a result, they might promise us job security, but they can't deliver it.

If you don't believe me, consider this. The average tenure of a CEO in their job is now down to less than four years. If that insecurity can happen in the corner office, it can (and will) happen everywhere else in the organization.

But, you know what? I'm delighted that job security has joined the gold watch and buggy whip. Think about it. Job security was something only employers could provide, and they did so only when it suited their financial interests. We had no control over the situation, so we stood around hat-in-hand, hoping for a little something we could count on from organizations that were more interested in counting their profits.

What's the alternative?

Career security. It's the ability to stay employed in jobs of our choosing, regardless of the economic situation in any country or the financial condition of any one employer. Career security is something we create for ourselves, so we control what happens to us in the workplace. We become the master of our career, rather than its victim.

Instead of hoping that our employer will hang onto us when its business turns down, we monitor the employer's status and if it starts to weaken, we take the initiative and move to a new workplace opportunity. Instead of wishing upon a star when our employer gets bought, moved to a new location or reorganized, we line up options with other organizations to ensure our star keeps rising.

Now, some employers will say that such behavior is disloyal. It's not. There are always two parties in the expression of loyalty, and loyalty only makes sense when there's reciprocity between them. In other words, if we are loyal to our employers, they should offer their loyalty to us in return. The death of job security, however, has destroyed that reciprocity. Employers can no longer be loyal to us, so we must be loyal to ourselves. And, career security is the way we do so.

How is career security achieved? I think it involves three steps.

- **First, we have to get to know ourselves.** We have to figure out what we love to do and do best. That's not our passion; it's our talent. Everyone is born with a natural capability or talent, but only those who take care of it—those who never stop developing its range and depth—can achieve career security. And to make such a commitment, we have to know what our talent is.

- **Second, we have to take our talent to work.** We have to arrive with all of our talent each day and use it to do our best work every day. Employers are desperate for such high performing employees. In fact, according to the Society for Human Resource Management, 70% are now paying bonuses to hire talented contributors, and 65% are paying above market salaries to hang onto them.
- **Third, we must keep our career strong.** We can only work at our talent and use it to do our best work if you are employed by the right organizations and in the right jobs. Career self-management by hoping for the best (or waiting for our employers to deliver it) is a sure-fire formula for career cardiac arrest or what most of us call unemployment. Proactively reaching for opportunities where we can excel, in contrast, is the single best way to increase both the paycheck and the satisfaction we bring home from work.

Job security is definitely an attractive idea, but it's an idea whose time has passed. Career security, on the other hand, is a concept fit for the turbulent world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It has the power and the promise to position us for enduring success. And, it is acquired from the only source we can really count on—ourselves.

Thanks for reading,

Peter

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