

## The End of Endings

January is a fitting time to think about beginnings. They are, of course, a big part of our lives. Each year, we tear the December page off our calendar and begin a new passage around the sun. Many of us also use the same demarcation point to begin diets or physical fitness programs or family dinners every week. Universally, beginnings are hopeful times, which is why it's so strange that we exclude them from our careers.

The conventional way of looking at the events in our careers is to see them as a series of endings. Often unconsciously, we assume that graduation is the end of our education. Finding a job is the end of our search for employment opportunities. And, achieving a promotion at work is the end of our quest to reach for the best we can be in our profession, craft or trade.

Unfortunately, however, this perspective not only squashes your hope, it forces you to see your career as

- an experience shaped by outside forces that are beyond your control and
- a series of disconnected events, each of which leads to its own final and discrete conclusion.

This point of view gave most career changes a bad name. It laced every new assignment, new job, new boss, new work schedule, new employer, and new occupation with a negative feeling. There was no sense of passage, no feeling of progress—no hope—because the event simply occurred. And then, it was over.

Without an overarching rationale or vision, nothing tied the changes in your career together. They all just happened. To you. There was no coherence, no ultimate purpose for you. You weren't advancing toward a clearly defined objective that was meaningful to you, but rather lurching through a series of disjointed events that were imposed on you. And, the only way you had to determine where you were in your career was the change in your pay, and that adjustment was based on your employer's appraisal, not yours.

The result of this nonsensical movement was a deep and dispiriting feeling of helplessness. Your career made you feel like that shiny little ball in a pinball machine. You were being pushed and flipped from post to post and, while the lights would occasionally flash and the bells might go off, you were never in control and never had the chance to establish a pattern or purpose for your work.

And, as if that weren't bad enough, each unconnected event also came to its own conclusion. Of course, you probably did get some satisfaction from the advancement you were able to achieve, even if it was defined by your employers. That satisfaction, however, was always tempered by your knowledge that success meant the end of your endeavor.

The challenge and opportunity of a specific career activity and the happiness it created were transitory, and at its conclusion, they disappeared. You had reached your goal. You were done. The engagement and energy that were stimulated by striving to reach it quickly faded. All you

were left with, at the end, was the memory of that exclamation point of achievement and the hungry sense of disappointment at its fleeting presence.

### **What's the Alternative?**

Such hopelessness is not only unhealthy, it is completely unnecessary. You can instill promise in your career simply by adopting a different outlook, one in which you see career change as a continuum. You can capture a sense of possibility in your work simply by recognizing that each event is connected to the one that preceded it and to the one that follows it and to those that will follow it, as well. They are all stepping stones along the journey you are taking in your career. What sets them in place and holds them together is your commitment to the exploration and expression of your special gift—your inherent ability to excel.

To put it another way, the changes in your employment experience should all have the same purpose: to advance your development and use of your talent. When you ensure that happens, you are the best you can be for:

- Your employer—which maximizes your performance, your perceived contribution and your paycheck; and
- Yourself—which maximizes your self-esteem, your sense of fulfillment and, ultimately, your happiness.

This perspective transforms career events from endings into beginnings. While the outcome is clearly important, it is the ongoing experience of moving forward—the taking of the next step, rather than where the step lands—that is your penultimate reward.

Graduation, a successful job search and the advancement of your career through promotion or job change can be seen for what they truly are, at least in the new world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Graduation is not the end of your professional development, but rather the beginning of your quest for professional expertise. Landing a new job doesn't mean the hard work is over in your career, but rather, that it is just beginning. And, earning a promotion or taking a better job isn't your reward for what you have already done, but instead your single, best opportunity to do even more.

Each event, but especially each job, is a platform for both performance and preparation. It is a crucible in which the challenge of your present work draws out the dimensions of your best self. That expanded capacity, in turn, resets you to advance to yet another and greater employment experience which then draws out even more of the best within you and prepares you to embark on still another challenging opportunity. And so on. And so on. These serial beginnings are the only career victories that matter because they, alone, maximize what is most important in your work—what it does for you.

Thanks for reading,

Peter

Visit my blog at [Weddles.com/WorkStrong](http://Weddles.com/WorkStrong)

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