



Do What You Do Best

for Adults

Change At Midlife: Does It Have To Be A Crisis?

Tom, a marketing manager, was not dissatisfied with his career. “I simply wanted to evaluate the direction my career was taking and gain some insight into what would be the best fit for me and what would maximize my performance.”

Tom wasn't drawn into his thoughts about a career change by external factors in the workplace – not by downsizing, layoff, or re-structuring. He was simply coming to grips with the need for internal review and change that everyone goes through as he gets older. The sense that change may be needed can come rather suddenly and unexpectedly, and sometimes the reasons are not altogether clear. Relatively satisfied people can find themselves thinking about change – sometimes major change.

First defined and researched by Daniel Levinson, Ph.D. at Yale, in the 70's and 80's and published in *Seasons of a Man's Life*, there are six Turning Points in everyone's career. These begin in the early 20's and occur until the 60's. Everyone, no matter how satisfied he or she has been with things, makes some kind of significant career or life change at each of these six points. Sometimes these changes are impelled from the outside. More often, there is also an internal component. These Turning Points come upon us about every ten years.

Tom was at or near what we call the Mid-Life Transition – probably the best known Turning Point in popular culture. This Point is significant because it occurs as people feel that some very large and important change is absolutely necessary. Often, people find themselves depressed or burned out. At a Turning Point, especially the Mid-Life Transition, the person is emotionally driven to seek change. One way or another, change is going to happen.

Levinson pointed out that those people who respond to the internal upheavals of the Mid-Life Transition by trying to buckle down and try harder at the same thing may run a significant risk of having their emotions take them by surprise.

Tom decided to take a more proactive approach to mid-life. “I worked with my Highlands Affiliate to gain more knowledge and insight into my career and to plan ahead.” At the major career Turning Points, many people can suddenly begin to feel that their careers need a complete overhaul; this is often simply not the case. It is our experience that most people can feel significantly different and better about their careers and their lives with something closer to a 10% change than a complete overhaul. The difficult part is in finding the right 10%. The place to start looking is not “out there, somewhere.” Usually it is inside – within ourselves.



Donald Super, Ph.D., the father of career planning, said as long ago as the early 50's that a good career decision should always involve several key factors: values, goals, abilities, interests, and personality. Super's dictum is still relevant. The way to figure out exactly what needs to change is to understand what each of these factors means in one's career, and then integrate them into a Personal Vision.

Tom had wondered about his career and why he felt like moving within the company so often. Sorting through his abilities and goals helped him make sense of it all. At the same time, it enabled him to position himself more accurately. “I realized that I have a number of very powerful abilities that allow me to solve problems quickly and intuitively. It means that I need a very fast-paced environment that involves a lot of quick problem solving. In fact, when it's not very stable – what a lot of people would call chaotic – that's when my real talents absolutely shine.”

By taking a proactive look at his career, and most importantly, by carefully sifting through and articulating each of the important factors in a decision about career direction, Tom was able to focus on exactly that part of his career that needed to change. And it wasn't a crisis after all. In the end, mid-life wasn't a crisis but an opportunity to gain new insight and strength.

What Drives People in Organizations Today?

Common sense tells us, and hard research proves, that financial rewards are not the key drivers for successful people. In a study for the U.S. News & World Report, people were asked to name the three things that contribute most to their quality of life.

The things that contribute most to quality of life		
	Men	Women
1	Job/Career Satisfaction (32%)	Relationship with family (33%)
2	Relationship with family (28%)	Job/Career Satisfaction (28%)
3	Money I earn from job (18%)	Good health (19%)
4	Good health (12%)	Religion – Spirituality (18%)
5	Where I live (11%)	Money I earn from job (17%)

According to the Opinion Research Corporation:

- 65% feel they are working too many hours
- 64% feel physically exhausted at the end of the workday
- 58% feel emotionally exhausted.

Source: *Wall Street Journal*

People in organizations have changed significantly – they want more meaning in their lives; they want a better balance between work and family. **But organizations have not changed.**

Employers want more commitment, loyalty, energy and performance from their people but are turning a blind eye to how best to get these things.

The Person and the Corporation – a Broken Contract?

In the 1950's Chester Barnhard, an organization consultant, said: *“We hire people for their skills, but the whole person shows up for work.”*

Corporate America has never taken Barnhard's message to heart.

The elements of the old contract went something like this-

In return for loyal service-

- Corporations guaranteed lifetime employment.
- Corporations were the parent; employees were the children.
- Corporations took people in when they graduated, showed them the ropes, trained them, provided steady advancement, and in the end provided a pension check.

Today, Corporations are not only unable to guarantee employment and security; they are also unable to guide people through the rapidly changing needs and wants of their own corporate structures. There is no readily apparent career ladder.

Individuals are free agents who must be more independent, more resilient and more resourceful in bouncing from company to company and career to career.

mean? It means that training must begin with the individual not as a collection of usable skills, but as a person in all his or her attributes – a person who interacts with others, a person with interests and passions, a person with a family and relationships, and a person with a definable pattern of natural abilities.

We think it is entirely possible for any company to have a committed, energetic and even INSPIRED core group of employees. *The key is to begin with the individual – the whole individual.*

Creating a New Relationship

Creating this new relationship between employer and employee, and making it work well, represents a huge challenge, but a potentially huge opportunity. So what is corporate America doing about it? The employees at one technical world-wide corporation talk cynically about the “motivational seminar *du jour*.”

It is obvious that normal leadership and motivational training are not getting to the heart of the problem. Training that doesn't begin by addressing the whole person will not lead to any profound or lasting change, either in the person, or in the corporation. What does this

