

Thinking about Vocations

At various times one turns to thinking about the future, particularly with respect to vocations or jobs.

This issue has occupied my mind since my retirement from the IBM Company in 2001. Not so much, anymore, in regards to my own vocation, but rather in the context of how do I help those I come in contact deal with the matter.

Context

There is little doubt that the world is rapidly changing, usually in complex, and often opaque, ways.

Even after computers beat grandmasters at chess (once thought highly unlikely), nobody thought they could take on people at free-form games played in natural language. Then Watson, a pattern-recognising supercomputer developed by IBM, bested the best human competitors in America's popular and syntactically tricky general-knowledge quiz show "Jeopardy!" Versions of Watson are being marketed to firms across a range of industries to help with all sorts of pattern-recognition problems. Its acumen will grow, and its costs fall, as firms learn to harness its abilities.

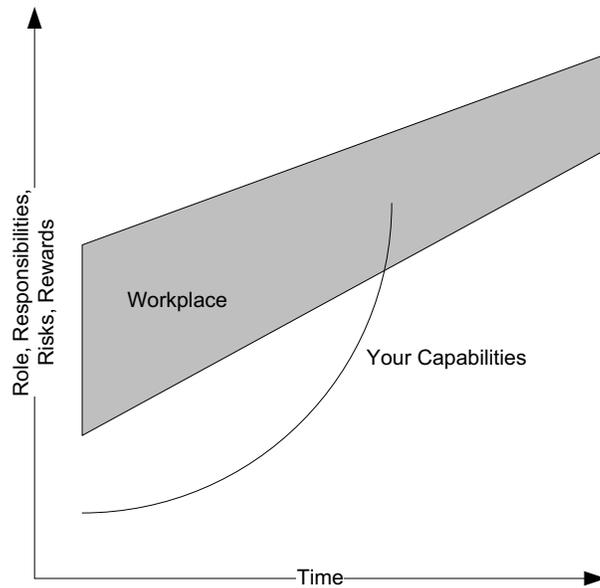
The machines are not just cleverer, they also have access to far more data. The combination of big data and smart machines will take over some occupations wholesale; in others it will allow firms to do more with fewer workers. Text-mining programs will displace professional jobs in legal services. Biopsies will be analysed more efficiently by image-processing software than lab technicians. Accountants may follow travel agents and tellers into the unemployment line as tax software improves. Machines are already turning basic sports results and financial data into good-enough news stories ("The Future of Jobs: The Onrushing Wave," 2014).¹

Hence, the first issue that needs to be dealt with is the nature of your context. You cannot know which path to take if you do not know the destination, or, to put it better, destinations. After all, if you're going on holiday, you would like to have several destinations to pick from. So it should be, in my view, when it comes to jobs.

First, take the time to think about the future.

The idea we're working toward here is depicted in the following diagram.

¹ Your attention is drawn to two recent, relevant, and valuable books on the changing nature of jobs; *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies* (Brynjolfsson, 2014), and *Average is Over: Powering America Beyond the Age of the Great Stagnation* (Cowen, 2013).



The workplace presents sets of roles, responsibilities, risks, and rewards (more about these later) and suggests if you could find a job that has the specifics in these areas that would appeal to you, you would be happy. The arc represents your capabilities that change over time. The idea then is to adjust your capabilities to intercept the workplace. The adjustment is, of course, what education and experience are all about.

Capabilities

Capabilities comprise knowledge, skills, experiences, attitudes, and behavior. Life and the culture from which you have come profoundly shape your capabilities. Formal education focuses principally on developing your knowledge and skills. The sets of knowledge and skills are largely prescribed for you in K-12 education.

In higher education you begin to take charge of your education by selecting schools, programs, and courses. This needs to be done with some forethought in order to be most efficacious. Few students, in my experience, do this thinking.

Roles, Responsibilities, Risks, and Rewards

This notion of looking at vocations in terms of roles, responsibilities, risks, and rewards has formed over the last dozen or so years. It is a product of experience and observation, and several mentorships during my career in IBM.

Roles

A role is a statement of who you want to be. For example, over 49 years in business and higher education I have played many different roles – systems engineer, marketing representative, industry marketing representative, industry consultant, principal,

executive consultant in business; lecturer, senior lecturer, director of online programs, acting director of the graduate program, department chair in higher education.

Roles imply a place in the organizational hierarchy.

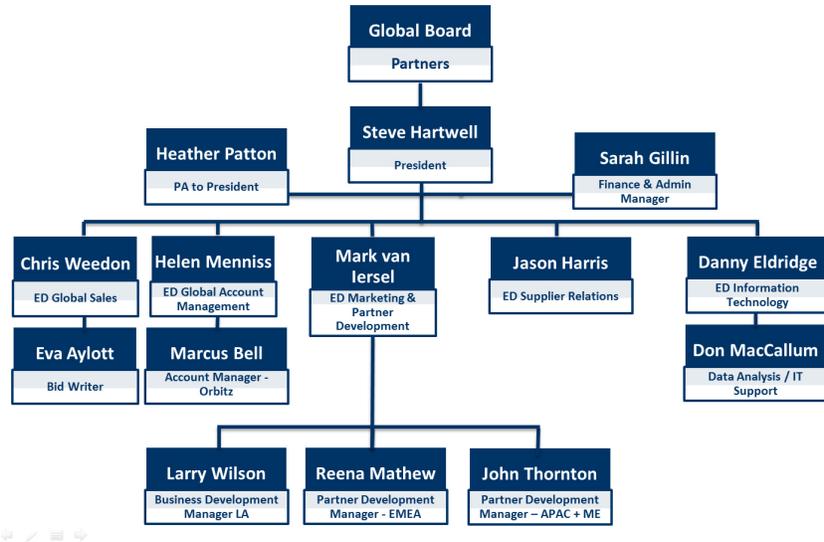


Figure 1 <http://www.globalstartravel.com/organization-chart>

Roles imply responsibilities, risks, and rewards. That implication is not, in my view, sufficient. For example, if someone asks you the vocation you wish, just saying “president” does not seem to bring much value.

Being president of a SMB² in the pharmaceutical industry brings a bit more value. However, there are still, for me, too many implications. For example, suppose you tell a recruiter you want this role. Can s/he be very helpful operating on only this piece of information?

Responsibilities

Responsibilities begin to fill this information void. A specification of responsibility provides a notion of responsibility and authority. That is, one may want the role and authority, but may not be comfortable with the accountability.

Risks

Roles plus responsibilities yield a set of risks. Some risks you may be willing to take; others not. For example, I have been very adamant during my career as being unwilling to take risks associated with traveling to certain countries around the world.

² Small and medium-sized business.

Rewards

Roles plus responsibilities plus risks yield rewards. Here is a very interesting graphic that brings to the fore this notion of rewards.



Figure 2 <http://www.businessinsider.com/employees-want-more-recognition-over-more-money-heres-how-with-facebook-2011-9>

Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that if you can develop a clear and compelling statement of the roles, responsibilities, risks, and rewards that are most satisfying to you, then you will be in a much better position to obtain a vocation with these characteristics. That's the first point, but it may not be the most important point.

The most important point may well be that the development of such a statement (more about this development follows) may reveal things about you that were otherwise hidden.

Creating the Statement

First

With pencil and paper in hand (or some other way to record your thoughts and decisions) find a quiet place to sit and think on the matter of the roles, responsibilities, risks, and rewards as they pertain to you. Success at this requires deep introspection. A review of *The Value of Introspection* (Drogan, 2009) may be of some help here. The aim is to produce the statement.

Role - - -	Responsibilities - - -
Risks - - -	Rewards - - -

Figure 3 The Statement

This is not, and should not, be easy work. If you find it easy then I would suggest you are not digging deep enough or, more worrisome, not being as honest with yourself as you need be.

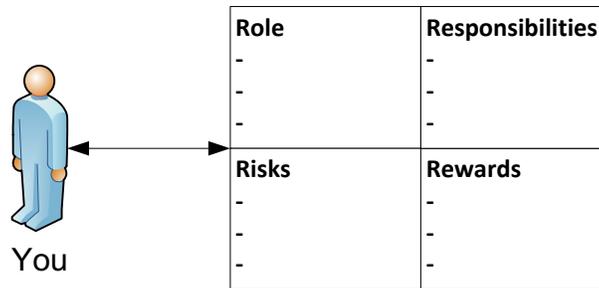


Figure 4 The Statement and You

You write:

William Forrester to Jamal Wallace in *Finding Forrester*, “No thinking — that comes later. You must write your first draft with your heart. You rewrite with your head. The first key to writing is... to write, not to think!”

Then you read what you have written, you think about what you have written, you rewrite. That’s the meaning of the bidirectional arrow in Figure 4.

Sooner or later you and your statement begin to converge, to agree. In a way, the arrow becomes thinner and shorter. You’re feeling pretty good about what you have written. Now comes another hard step.

Second



Figure 5 You, the Statement, and Your Best Friend

Go to your best friend (i.e., the person who will tell you of your need for a breath mint), ask s/he to read your statement as a representation of you and what you wish to achieve.

In what way is the statement similar to and different from the way s/he sees you?

Listen carefully to what your friend is saying. Rewrite your statement if necessary. Look for that convergence between you, your statement, and your friend.

All this is not one pass and done. This takes time. If you are doing it well there will be useful feedback from you as you reconsider, from your friend providing insight that would otherwise be lost to you, and from your statement (sometimes the words on paper do not match the thoughts in the mind).

Hunting

You now have a clear idea of what you want to do in terms of roles, responsibilities, risks, and rewards. It's time to go hunting. Rather than hunting alone, you want a pack on the hunt with you.

Your statement forms the basis of a marketing profile that you can give to others to help them help you to find the job you wish. Here's a sample of such a profile.

Street City, State, Zip	Name E-mail	Office: Telephone Home: Telephone
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PROFILE

Financial Controller with experience managing complex business issues in multinational manufacturing environments. Strategic business partner who adds value by making financial information understandable and actionable across the business at all levels. Have developed a strong reputation for financial control, system development and for improving processes and procedures across functional areas. Resourceful, inquisitive and analytical problem-solver and continuous improvement leader.

KEY SKILLS

● Analysis & Modeling	● Investment Evaluation	● Strategic Planning
● Budgeting & Forecasting	● Process Improvement	● System Implementation & Development
● Cost Accounting	● Project Management	● Team Building & Leadership
● Financial Reporting & Control	● Staff Supervision & Mentoring	

OBJECTIVE

Financial leadership position (Controller, CFO or similar)

TARGET COMPANIES

Ametek	Charter Oak Partners	Heartland Industrial Partners	Lorad Medical
Applera	Conoptics	Honeywell	Novamatrix Medical
ATMI	The Eastern Company	Hubbell	Perkin-Elmer
Branson Ultrasonics	Ensign-Bickford	Ingersoll-Rand	SPX
Canberra	FKI Industries	ITT Industries	Thermo Electron

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

PECHINEY (formerly American National Can Company) Norwalk, CT **1989 – 2002**
Cebal Americas division (\$240MM manufacturer of tube packages for toothpaste, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals) of Paris, France-based aluminum producer and converter and specialty packaging manufacturer.
Division Controller 1999 - 2002
◆ Direct Finance, Accounting and Information Systems for a global business with seven manufacturing plants in the United States, Brazil, Canada and Mexico.
Manager, Financial Systems & Control 1994 – 1999
Senior Financial Analyst 1991 – 1994
Financial Analyst 1989 – 1991

GENERAL FOODS **1986 – 1989**
Birds Eye business unit (manufacturer and distributor of frozen vegetables).
Senior Financial Analyst, White Plains, NY 1988 – 1989
Financial Analyst, Waseca, MN plant 1986 - 1988

EDUCATION

MBA Finance, 1986, University of Wisconsin – Madison, Madison, WI
BA Economics, cum laude, 1983, Lawrence University, Appleton, WI

Figure 6 Marketing Profile

Notice how this is laid out on a single page. Imagine that the pack has this. They know, in a nutshell, who you are, what you can do, what you're looking for, the companies you're interested in, and some of your experience.



Figure 7 All Your Friends Looking Out for You

You are looking for your friends to give you ideas of opportunities which you can pursue as appropriate. I believe something like this is called crowd sourcing.

crowd·source

/ˈkroudˌsɔːrs/

verb

gerund or present participle: **crowd-sourcing**

obtain (information or input into a particular task or project) by enlisting the services of a number of people, either paid or unpaid, typically via the Internet.

"she crowdsourced advice on album art"

Figure 8 Google

Coda

You can improve your chances of obtaining the career you want by thinking clearly about your interests and insuring that others understand these interests and help you look for appropriate opportunities.

I've laid out herein an approach to doing this. It's not necessarily easy, but it is, I think, worthy of the effort.

Your future is yours and how you make it is up to you.

James Drogan

June 19, 2014

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