
PROLOGUE

The automatic doors rolled open as they had a hundred times over the past six months with her “comings” and “goings.” This was very different—it wasn’t just another going; it was an ending. This was her final exit.

A cold January wind slapped her in the face just as the doors closed unceremoniously behind her. “Isn’t that just the perfect metaphor?” she thought bitterly. “A cold slap in the face as a door slams behind you.”

She made her way across the employee parking lot, picking carefully over treacherous-looking patches of ice. Now the sarcastic voice in her head was gathering real steam: “Another fitting metaphor: Watch your step, or you’ll find yourself sprawled all over the pavement of life. Perfect. This is just so absolutely perfect.”

Her feet nearly came out from under her just then, and she flailed around ridiculously. She couldn’t bear to imagine who might have seen that charming display of grace.

Now she sat motionless in her car, letting the engine warm, the windows defrost, and reality climb slowly over her. “Let go,” she stiffly recited to an icy windshield. “After further review, I’ve been released from my position.” Another image popped into her head like a thought bubble in a comic strip. “I’ve been released from the prison of my dead-end job.”

How did she not see this coming? She felt the indignation rising. How could they do this to her? It was so unfair!

CAREER MOVES

She really shouldn't be surprised. The past few months had been pretty miserable. What started as a "great job" had become a thankless chore. On most days it took every drop of personal discipline to drag her body through that door and chain herself to that desk. The prison image popped up again; she tried very hard to ignore it. That picture was not at all helpful.

Her mind flipped through the pages of her "on-the-job" experience. She remembered how nervous she had been the day she had interviewed for the position and how thrilled she had been to get the job. She would have accepted any position to get her foot in the door of that company. (Come to think of it, she had.) Some opportunity it had turned out to be! The work wasn't hard; it was boring and repetitive and mindless.

She had taken an entry-level position, confident that she would quickly prove herself and earn a promotion. It hadn't taken long at all to discover someone would have to quit, die, or retire in order for her to advance one inch! As the pages turned in her mind, she saw the slow march from completely thrilled...to dreading Mondays.

A gear shifted in her brain as she reasoned with the windshield. "This is so unfair! I did everything asked of me. They were lucky to have me. Losing this stupid job is probably the best thing that has ever happened to me."

The windshield offered no assurance, and the feeling sitting in her throat certainly wasn't relief. It was fear, embarrassment, and hurt twisted into one big knot of

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ugly emotion. As she pulled out of the parking lot for the last time, the full force of it slammed into her.

What she didn't understand was the amazing journey before her, whom she would encounter on the path, what she would learn along the way...and how utterly unprepared she was for this trip.

MOVING SIGNS

Get Ready to Make Your Move!

From her office on the seventh floor, Alena watched Zoe go.

Once the young woman nearly slipped on the ice, and Alena held her breath just a bit. She thought about the days leading up to this moment and sighed as she thought about those virtual “slips and slides.” It had been very hard to watch Zoe fall.

More than once Alena had reached out, trying to help Zoe find her balance at work. If Zoe noticed the attempts, she had given no indication. She actually seemed oblivious to her peril. “At least she sees the ice underfoot now,” Alena mused. “She’s choosing her steps more carefully now.”

Zoe was very bright; there was no argument there. She had great energy and potential. Alena was honestly sorry to see her go. Still, it was the right decision; she was certain of that. Zoe had not taken hold of the opportunity presented to her, and now it had literally slipped away. While she had not managed Zoe directly,

she had seen her work and often hoped to see more effort and ownership.

This organization placed high premiums on innovation, resourcefulness, personal leadership, and initiative. Employees were expected to connect with the strategies and find ways to “plug themselves in” at every level. Zoe had not demonstrated these attributes. She had approached her job from a “just-tell-me-what-you-want-me-to-do-and-I-will-do-it” perspective.

Because she had not looked for ways to engage, Zoe’s role was reduced to the most routine tasks. She seemed satisfied to set up the conference room and prepare handouts for staff and client meetings. “I wish you had shown an interest in the purpose of those meetings,” thought Alena. “You seemed to know what to do, but you missed the ‘why’ entirely.”

Zoe finally reached her car and was letting the engine warm.

“We are not looking for order takers here, Zoe. We are looking for leaders—at every level,” Alena said aloud as Zoe’s car finally pulled away.

Worse than losing Zoe was Alena’s suspicion that the lessons had not been learned. If that were true, they would be repeated again and again.

“Perhaps not,” she said to herself. “Maybe we can still alter the course.” She returned to her desk and wrote a brief note before gathering her things and calling it a day.

DO YOU RECOGNIZE THE MOVING SIGNS?

Moving signs signal change. Typically, a moving sign in your life means it’s time to pack your boxes, sell your junk, and say your good-byes. As they relate to your career, moving signs might work

a bit differently. They do signal change—but they don't always require boxes, sales, and farewells.

It's quite possible to “move” inside the job you have, because the move may not require a change in company or position. It might require a change in mind-set, approach, skill sets, attitude, or perceptions. You may even find it necessary to reinvent the job you have in order to get the job you want! (Even as I write this book I am personally responding to my own moving signs! My title won't be changing, and I will still be working from the same locations, but *what* I do and *how* I do it must change. That's uncomfortable and humbling and . . . so worth it!)

In my book *Designed for Success*, I introduced the “Ten Commandments for Women in the Workplace” using an analogy: “Wouldn't it be wonderful if our careers came with a personal navigation system? I love the idea of a friendly voice saying, ‘Prepare to turn ahead.’ If I missed an opportunity or made a ‘career-limiting’ move, the still friendly voice would say, ‘Recalculating route.’ Imagine hearing the words, ‘You have arrived!’”¹ Unfortunately, our careers don't have navigation systems on board. If we are paying attention, we may notice the signs, but it's quite possible to miss them entirely or simply ignore them. I think that's tragic! If you miss the sign, you'll miss the turn and the opportunity!

In the spirit of paying attention, I've been collecting moving signs. In conferences around the world and in private consultations, I've asked thousands of people, “What are the signals that tell you it's time to make a career move?”

The answers I hear are as unique as the people who share them. Signs are personal things. They come in all shapes and sizes, but I've found nine common themes. Do any of these resonate with you?

1. You feel a generalized discontent.

What begins on the edge of awareness slowly slides to front and center. This reminds me of a child tugging on your shirttail, quietly (at first) vying for your attention. If you don't listen, "Discontent" will raise "her" voice until you do.

At first, this sign is easy to ignore, because you may be in a very comfortable place. Things are generally OK—except for that bothersome little voice telling you something needs to change; there's more for you to do. Tasks may be getting done, but the work isn't rewarding. It doesn't bring a sense of achievement or accomplishment. It doesn't bring you joy. The work has become an obligation rather than a passion. Instead of energizing you, it exhausts you!

2. You can't get there from here.

This one is easy to spot. If you have a clear plan for your career, and your work isn't building a bridge to that future place, it's time to reevaluate. "Can't-get-there-from-here" problems are frustrating because they may require a dramatic shift to correct the course. You may have to move over, down, or out to get yourself back on track.

We find ourselves in "bridgeless" situations when we accept jobs "out of our context." That means we jump to accept a position without considering how it relates to our path over the long term. We may make that leap out of pure necessity or end up here because we didn't have a plan or a vision to begin with. When organizations downsize, merge, or reorganize, employees may be pushed off their career path to accommodate the change. And sometimes jobs just don't turn into what we thought they would become. (What looked like a bridge from a distance turned out to be a wall.)

People sometimes ignore this sign because it's discouraging to think about starting over or moving "backward." Proceed with

caution! Ignoring this signal will lead to some of the signs to follow.

3. You've quit on the job.

Many people quit their jobs without tendering a resignation. I'm not talking about leaving without giving proper notice; I'm talking about disengagement. This is when you keep showing up, but you don't bring yourself to the work. (This sign has integrity and credibility notices attached to it, because you are still collecting a paycheck and your employer isn't aware you've vacated your position.)

If you've quit on the job, it's possible you passed another of the signs sometime back without making a course correction. Down the road, many of the signs look a lot like giving up, giving in, and selling out.

4. There's too much pressure or not enough pressure.

Jobs have "seasons." In our work lives, we go through periods of stretching, balancing, and maintaining. After a time of extreme growth and challenge, we need relief from the pressure. This allows us to stabilize and refresh.

This reminds me of flying a kite. Tension on the line allows the kite to fly. If the tension is too great, the string will snap. If there is no tension on the line, the kite can't take off. *Too much or not enough tension will have the same result—a grounded kite.* The same is true with our jobs. If the pressure is constant with no opportunity to rest, or if there is no pressure to reach, we cannot take off.

Pressure is the gauge. You may need to dial it up or dial it down. Dialing it up may mean seeking challenge; dialing it down may require negotiating some things off your plate, asking for help, or establishing more realistic boundaries.

5. You are off the radar.

This sign may be difficult to find because you are doing just fine. The problem isn't your work; it's what you are working on. Your projects and assignments run off the radar, and that can make you feel "invisible." If you recognize this sign, it may be time to raise your hand and ask for a new challenge, get involved in a critical project, or find new ways to bring greater value to your business partners.

If you are in a support position, for example, providing the information for people on the front line, you might look for ways to make the information more user-friendly and valuable. If you are serving others behind the scenes, find a way to serve them better. Become a partner in success. I often hear this, "I support the team, but I don't feel like I am *on* the team." Put yourself on the radar by getting on the team.

6. Your job doesn't fit your life.

I am inspired by stories of people who looked this sign squarely in the eye and made (sometimes dramatic) changes by tailoring their work to fit their lives. This is a values-based sign. Some make this move to find a better balance between home and work. Others are motivated by their passions.

A dynamic life coach puts it this way: "My career move happened because of my appetite for challenge and innovation. It wasn't reasonable for me to expect the organization I worked for to feed that hunger. The change was up to me."

7. Your job doesn't fit you.

This one hurts because it means your skills aren't suited for the position you're in. What you can do well isn't in your job description. Like a fish out of water struggling to breathe, you are banked.

The most devastating thing about this sign is what happens to

your confidence in the process. The longer you stay in a bad fit, the more inadequate you feel. Your confidence takes a real beating. Repeat after me, “A bad job fit does not make me inadequate or less valuable!” This sign should really say, “Get back in the water. You know how to swim.”

8. You're settling.

This sign resembles some of the others, but it is different all the same. You have settled when your strengths and gifts are not being used on the job but your comfort zone holds you there. A Gallop Poll found that 87 percent of people employed by corporations believe they are not getting to use their number one talent in their jobs!²

Hey, we all like to be comfortable—present company included. I'm not even suggesting that you leave your zone of comfort entirely; I do encourage you to expand it! Push the edges out and make room for more!

9. Your motives have malice.

Only “grown-ups” can face this sign. It is not for those who are weak in the knees, happily playing the victim role, or engaged in a game of blame. This one requires confronting yourself at the core of your intentions.

When relationships or situations have become adversarial and you no longer want the people around you to win—when you need others to be wrong so you can be right—it really is time to bust a move.

This is not an all-inclusive list—perhaps you have a sign of your own to add. That's one of the ways to make this book a personal journey. Use what is here to discover your own signals and solutions.

Ultimately, *Career Moves* is about recognizing and responding to your signs! These are the tools that will allow you to get in the

driver's seat, take charge of your career, and achieve your goals. As Zoe's story unfolds, so shall yours. Your story will be uniquely your own. Here you are an author, an editor, and a publisher. You will tell your story through the discoveries you make, the actions you take, the decisions you own, and the impact you have.

In *Designed for Success* and *Ready, Set... Grow!* I emphasized the personal process through journaling and self-discovery. You will find those elements in *Career Moves* as well. Each chapter includes a "Get Your Move On!" feature. This is designed to assist you in personal application, and I hope you will accept the assignments!

You'll also notice a new layer of exploration—community.

As you read, I encourage you to think about how you can connect with and contribute to the community of women who are searching for and experiencing breakthrough. You have something to offer this growing community, and it has something to offer in return.

Somewhere down the road, I hope you will look back and see how far you've come and the difference you've made. Chances are you will see something else too—the path you've created for yourself has given others the inspiration to set out on journeys of their own.

Let's pick up the journey with a look at how the workforce is changing, what employers are looking for, and what that means to you and, most importantly, *for you*.

RESPOND TO THE SIGNALS OF CHANGE TO MAKE YOURSELF MORE EMPLOYABLE (AND VALUABLE) IN THE LONG TERM

Think about the job you have for a moment. How has it changed?

Perhaps you are being asked to do more, better and faster, at less cost? (I hear those answers a lot.) It's safe to say the workplace has changed and will continue on that path. The needs and expecta-

tions of your customers will change. Your products and services will change. Your competitors will change. You will change too.

What you are able to do will change. Your circumstances will change. Perhaps more important than all of that is this realization: *what you want and need from your work is certainly subject to change!*

The “rules” for employees to be successful, secure, and satisfied are shifting at mind-blowing speeds. Sadly, many employees don’t know they are playing on a new field, in a new game, with new guidelines:

- Job security is long gone. A new mind-set for success is required. You are more like an independent agent, marketing your capabilities, experiences, and results.
- You simply cannot wait for opportunity to present itself. The new workplace will ask you to create opportunity by increasing your contribution—by becoming more valuable.
- Technology has created an “always on call” mentality. It will be more important than ever to manage the boundaries between life and work.
- The skills needed for success will continue to evolve. There really is a stale date on your skill set, and it is quickly approaching. (Whoops, one of your skills just expired.)
- The workforce is mobile and virtual. (You may be surprised by who is competing with you for the job you have or the one you want.)

- Workplaces will continue to “move” at hyper speed. That means you will have to be crystal clear about your purpose, your passion, and your path.
- The resources you need to be successful may come from outside the walls of your organization in the form of mentors and thought leaders.
- Your peers and colleagues aren’t limited to the people who work for the same organization you do; your personal and professional network will be more important than ever before.

That’s a whole lot of moving parts! As I look at that list, I am energized! This is an amazing time to be in the workforce.

If you are waking up to the realization that you want more from your job than just a paycheck, welcome! This is a marvelous journey, brimming with potential, and you can make yourself indispensable and more employable right now.

GOOD NEWS! THE WORKFORCE IS DISENGAGED

I have good news for you. It’s not as hard as you might imagine to stand out in the sea of people we call the “workforce.”

Even more good news: As you stand out, you will deliver real value and create even more opportunity for yourself. As you add value and create opportunity, you will be energized, engaged, and fulfilled. (That’s a whole lot of good news!)

To some degree the workforce is disengaged. In fact, a recent Gallup Poll survey measuring employee engagement revealed that 17 percent of employees are disengaged, 54 percent are not engaged, and only 29 percent are truly engaged. The workforce is filled with people who are not seeing or responding to the signs.³

Every day they bring heads and hands to work but leave hearts and souls at the door. For any number of reasons they *choose* not to fully engage. For many of these people the job is more like jail, and they are doing really hard time. For them life begins when the “whistle blows.”

I call these people the “just mets,” because they do just enough to meet the requirements—nothing more and nothing less. “They are wheelbarrow people,” a manager answered recently in a leadership workshop. “Think about it! You can load them up; they have great utility, but if you don’t push them, they are relatively useless.” How’s that for an analogy?

The secret is in how you apply your “discretionary” performance. Think for a moment about your discretionary income, what is left after the bills are paid. This is money you make choices with. You decide whether to spend it, save it, or invest it. As with our discretionary income, the decisions we make with discretionary performance shape our future!

The discretionary part of performance is what we do after job requirements have been met. It’s the choice we make to add value, press through obstacles, and produce solutions. *Leaders long for the key that will unlock that kind of commitment from employees, and that is the key to becoming indispensable!*

Discretionary performance isn’t just about going the extra mile—you aren’t a workhorse, trudging along in your job. It’s not even about working harder. It’s about being more resilient and resourceful—connecting to the real priorities of the business you’re in. Discretionary performance sets you apart, and it makes your job more interesting.

THERE IS A MORE REWARDING WAY TO LIVE AND WORK!

Why do employees disengage? Why do they disconnect and hold the best pieces of themselves back? To answer those questions, let's flip them over and solve them in reverse. What do people need to be fully engaged at work?

For authentic engagement I think we need four things: perspective, leadership, resources, and capabilities. At the intersection of these elements we will find our high-performance zone. If any of these are weak or missing, we slip a gear or blow a tire. Careers don't move very well on flat tires and blown engines.

CREATE YOUR ZONE OF HIGH PERFORMANCE*



I am fascinated by the number of people who still are waiting for these pieces to magically appear! When the organizations they work for fail to provide them, they become disillusioned and somehow feel betrayed. This may be a good time for a public service announcement.

* Graphic by Mark Hennick, Plum Design; www.plumspot.com

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

We are all responsible for building, demonstrating, negotiating, and promoting high-performance factors at work!

Here's an interesting question: What would you do differently if you honestly believed these four elements were entirely up to you?

Let's take a closer look at each of them from that point of view, assuming they are a personal responsibility. They will not be delivered on a pretty platter, and they will not be included in your employee kit.

Develop and demonstrate perspective

Repeat after me (with feeling), "Performance isn't enough!"

Regardless of where we work, just knowing and doing our job won't create tangible, enduring value. We must understand the business and articulate how we personally impact it. We need to see and personally connect with the vision of the organization; we must understand how our work influences the bigger picture. All of this is known as alignment. When we are well aligned, we move better.

"Engagement happens when an organization gives a committed workforce 'line of sight,' a clear view of what they need to do to succeed in their daily jobs—the actions they take and choices they make—to help their organization achieve success."⁴

Something marvelous happens when we understand the strategy of the organization and connect with it. Our assignments have greater purpose, and we can articulate our impact. We are very clear about the difference we make, and others can see it too.

The question is: Do we see it? Is the connection clear?

To test the presence of perspective, I often use a "lifeline"

exercise in leadership workshops. It's a little edgy and a bit risky. (Honestly, that makes me love it even more.)

Leaders hold their breath just a bit as I randomly call an employee (who is at work) on a speakerphone. I ask this employee to tell me what they do for the organization. Almost always I hear job titles and tasks. Rarely—almost never—do I hear about purpose and strategy and connection.

That's important because when people don't make those connections, they perform differently. They are working out of context. They prioritize and decide differently; the work doesn't resonate at a personal level.

You may work for someone who is a great “connector.” These leaders know how to link every person in every position with the big picture. They carry the vision and push it through the veins of the organization. (If this describes your boss, send him a thank-you note or take her to lunch! That is real leadership. If that doesn't sound like the person you work for, alas, the connection really is up to you.)

You must search for opportunities to develop and demonstrate perspective. Here are six steps you can take to find the dots and draw the lines for yourself:

1. Become genuinely and insatiably curious about the strategy of the organization. Curiosity is compelling. Step out of your employee shoes for a moment; pretend you are an investor, a customer, a competitor, or a job candidate. Research the organization from those perspectives.

What does the strategy look like from the outside, looking in? What does this organization care about? What are the vision and the mission? What is the difference this company intends to make, and how

do they intend to make that happen? Beyond the walls of your department, what are the long-term goals and targets?

2. Practice making the connection. When you receive assignments and projects, think about how they impact organizational goals and priorities. How do your assignments affect time, money, or quality? What is the difference you will make by completing this task? How are you personally helping the organization step closer to its vision? How are you drawing upon your strengths and talents to make a real contribution?
3. Play the “So What, Who Cares” game. I love playing this game with live audiences. It is eye opening for sure. In my experience, most people struggle to articulate how they touch the big picture. They are comfortable talking about what they do on a daily basis, but they have trouble making the strategic connection.

Here’s how the game works: Choose one of your more routine tasks. We’ll use filing as a simple example. Are you ready?

Why do you file?

You might say, “So our records are organized.”

To that I’d respond, “So what, your records are impeccably organized. Who cares?”

Your answer might be, “Well...if we aren’t organized, we can’t locate important information.”

“OK. Big deal, you can locate really, really important information. SO WHAT! Big deal.” (By now

you may be a little exasperated. Play anyway. We are almost there.)

You could respond, “If we can’t locate important information, we can’t answer customer inquiries in a timely way.”

Now we may be getting somewhere! Here’s the connection: you are not mindlessly filing paper; you are making the organization more responsive and customer-centric!

I encourage you to talk about the work you do differently. Talk less about “the what” of it, and talk more about “the why” of it. When you do that, you are not only thinking about your work differently, *but you are also packaging it in perspective*. You make your value more obvious.

4. Ask and keep asking. If you can’t find the connection between what you are doing and the big picture, ask better questions. Invite clarity with questions like: What are the top priorities, and how do I personally affect them? I love questions like this because they eliminate expectation gaps. (It really is quite possible to work very hard on the wrong things! That may sound crazy, but it happens all the time.)

If you want to push the envelope, you might ask, “What could I do to have a greater impact on the bottom line and the big picture?” With this question you are asking for opportunities to grow in your role. You are assuming (and rightly so) that you can make a bigger difference right where you are.

5. Consult your mentor. Review your job description with a mentor. Discuss the impact of your job and how you can demonstrate greater perspective. This is especially important if you work for someone who is not good at making the connections or helping you find them.
6. Create context! What do you love working on? What comes naturally to you—like breathing? Challenge yourself to incorporate more of that into your current role. This is another great opportunity to seek wise counsel. Bring a list of your responsibilities and an inventory of your strengths. Like puzzle pieces, lay them out on the table and look for new ways to connect who you are with what you do.

Demonstrate personal leadership

Right now, as you read these words, you may be working in a leadership vacuum. If that is true, you aren't receiving the direction, coaching, feedback, and support you need to be satisfied and successful. That is extremely frustrating, but the real danger is in waiting for leadership to suddenly materialize. Trust me when I say, "It won't."

I cannot tell you the number of times I've heard these words at the conclusion of a workshop or conference: "Oh, my boss really should have been here. He is the one who needed to hear this message!" Another variation (usually accompanied by a heavy sigh and rolling of the eyes) is, "This kind of thing really needs to come from the top. If management doesn't buy in first, all of these good ideas won't take off. I can't get off the ground with my action plan if my manager isn't on board."

To this I usually respond with a heavy sigh of my own and a public service announcement.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Our personal effectiveness cannot depend on the effectiveness of another human being or an organization.

The truth is that organizations can be very dysfunctional places. Our challenge is to be effective even when the people around (or above) us are not. Certainly, implementing new ideas is more challenging when we work with or for people who are not reaching for improvement or are open to change. If that becomes our excuse, we've lost the battle. Even worse, we've become part of the problem.

Hopefully you work for strong leaders with amazing vision that empower and equip you for success. If you don't, you are not excused from the table. You must fill that leadership vacuum. That's called personal leadership, and it looks like initiative, proactivity, and accountability. Personal leadership is modeling the right behaviors, walking in complete integrity, and owning your "stuff."

One way of managing a leadership gap is to clearly define it—specifically, what is missing and how that is impacting your ability to get results. These definitions will help you separate what is frustrating from what is mission critical.

Marcia found this "defining" exercise very helpful.

I work for someone who is generally considered a weak leader; it really helped to isolate and prioritize the issues. Some things were just annoying. For example, my boss isn't good at giving recognition or acknowledging my work. That makes it more important for me to be self-motivated. I know the marketing message is up to me; I've found ways to reward myself and to make my results more obvious within the organization.

Other issues were derailing! The lack of leadership was literally blocking my progress. Our group lacked direction, and priorities were not clear. My manager is not strategically skilled, and that means I must be! I've concentrated on my own strategic agility, and I've learned to manage up. I ask the strategic questions, and I negotiate for the decisions and priorities that support the strategy.

Through this process of bridging the leadership gap, Marcia has grown tremendously. "It's actually been a very positive experience for me. The leadership vacuum pointed me right back to my own skills and capabilities. I stopped critiquing my leader and became a greater resource to him."

You may need to minimize a leadership gap with surrogates. Find your mentors and surround yourself with people who are empowered and have strong vision. I'll even underscore that last comment with this: *the weaker your leader is, the more important mentoring becomes.*

Manage your capabilities like the assets they are

Think strategically about your skills and capabilities, because what makes you successful today will not ensure your future success. You've probably heard some version of the saying, "What brought you here won't take you one step further." I'd add a little something to that. What brought you here won't keep you here! The workplace is constantly changing. That means what is expected from the workforce—from you—will also change.

We all have core competencies, which are the skills we own—our strengths. They are a natural part of how we work. With focus and practice, these abilities have become part of your "DNA." You may not even notice these strengths as such. For you, these abilities are like breathing; you don't have to think about them at all.

You also have skills you are working on. While you don't completely own them, they are emerging. With practice, these capabilities will shift to the strengths column of your life and work. The key here is to be more intentional in managing your development. You may need to negotiate for opportunities to explore and demonstrate the skills you want to own.

Finally, we have areas needing attention and development. These aren't just weaknesses or flaws in temperament! Quite often they are the result of new requirements and expectations. As we reach for more, more will be expected.

In chapter 18 of my book *Ready, Set... Grow!* you will find a balance sheet exercise or skills inventory. This audit asks you to acknowledge your strengths, emerging capabilities, and areas needing development. You are an asset to the organization; as you manage your skills, you increase your value. I encourage you to complete the inventory and review it frequently!⁵

A skills inventory helps you recognize how you are growing and developing. It answers these questions: What are you learning, and how are you making your new skills more visible? What do you need to learn to become a greater resource? How are you making yourself top of mind for the right projects, assignments, and opportunities?

You can explore this concept more strategically by thinking about your job in fast-forward. Imagine your job five years from today:

1. Who are your customers?
2. What does the technology look like?
3. Who are your competitors?
4. What is different about your role?
5. What is expected from you?

You can also reach back in time. What questions do you wish you had asked yourself five years ago? Ask those questions now! Here are three examples from my own collection:

1. What will be most important to my customers?
2. What channels will I use to reach my customers?
3. How can I increase my capacity—my ability to deliver greater value to more people?

These questions are as relevant now as the first time I asked them. The answers change from year to year, but the questions have never failed to show me something new.

Managing your capabilities will certainly require a personal investment. Your investment may be time, energy, money, and almost certainly your comfort zone.

I get a little crazy when women who are carrying the latest designer bag and wearing amazing shoes tell me they can't afford a book, a coach, or a course! I love bags and shoes too, and there is nothing wrong with looking fabulous with all the right gear.

We need to invest in ourselves too—from the inside out. Beyond what your employer offers and provides in terms of training and development, you are worth a personal investment, and frankly, you can't manage capabilities without making one.

Negotiate for the resources you need

We must negotiate for the resources we need to be successful. Resources include success factors like time, money, information, tools—even people. Here's an example of negotiating for information as a tool for success.

The majority of employees I meet in conferences tell me they have a performance review scheduled once a year. This is information about performance—your performance! We wait patiently

(and sometimes with great dread) for another person to tell us how we are doing. Worse than that, they are telling us how we “did” when it is too late to “do” anything about it. Let’s look at how ridiculous that really is using football as an analogy.

What if football players didn’t know what the score was until after the game was over? Imagine the game for a moment if only the coaches and referees knew the score. How would that change the dynamics of the game? How would it impact the players’ performance?

The same thing can happen to us when we don’t have access to the information we need to monitor our performance. When measurements aren’t clear and agreed upon, when progress isn’t visible—we don’t know if we are winning or losing the performance game.

In this example, information or feedback is a success tool. Like any other resource, we may need to negotiate for what we need and manage it. Megan would wholeheartedly agree.

“For the longest time, I operated on the no-news-is-good-news theory,” she told me. “That changed with a disappointing performance appraisal. Apparently no news wasn’t good at all! My boss was just saving his feedback for that very special day. I promised myself that would never happen again, and I keep my word by asking for feedback on a regular basis.”

Remember, when it comes to feedback, people give us what they have, not necessarily what we need. In my book *Ready, Set... Grow!* you will find the story of Connie, who changed the scope of her performance conversations by coaching her coach.⁶ Like Megan, Connie learned that feedback was not something her boss was comfortable (or good at) giving. Connie negotiated for the feedback she needed by asking her boss specific, performance-oriented questions in real time. She uses questions to negotiate for the information she needs.

I encourage you to stop right now and think about what you need to be more successful in your current role. You may discover some of what you need is well within your control or at the very least your influence. An example of that might be more productive working relationships. Perhaps your efforts are blocked today by conflict and resistance. You certainly don't control how others behave, but you do control your approaches and responses. You initiate this "negotiation" by fine-tuning your communications and inviting your business partners to "play nicely."

Sometimes what you need isn't up to you; you have to ask for it. This might include stretch assignments, support, or even authority.

Recently a young woman in a mentoring program at work told me she was not able to complete her action plan because the team was shorthanded and her boss could not allow her to attend the required training. I asked her how she intended to negotiate for the time resources needed. Her face went blank.

It hadn't dawned on her to think about options and alternatives and to partner with her boss to create a solution. Even though her boss had recommended her for the program, when he told her she couldn't go, she simply accepted his decision, assuming she wouldn't be able to honor her commitment. She didn't see this as a negotiation, so she didn't treat it like one.

I hope these examples will help you identify your needs and plan to negotiate for them. (Remember, everything is negotiable!) If you aren't sure how to ask for what you need, consider the counsel of a mentor. Bring your "wish list" and work with your mentor to develop a negotiation strategy.

THE FOUR ELEMENTS ARE LIKE WHEELS ON A CAR—YOU NEED ALL OF THEM

These elements are connected; they work together. Like wheels on car, if you are missing one of them, you are in for a really rough ride! Imagine your car riding on two or three wheels! If any are weak or absent from your work experience, the others will be impaired.

If I don't have perspective, for example, I will struggle to be resourceful! How can I solve problems and be innovative if I don't understand the vision?

The point to all of this is really about our own power and responsibility. We can't wait for the organizations we work for to be brilliant, leaders to lead, and visions to inspire us! We must find ways to get connected and fully engage! When you look at really successful people in any job, you will find they have taken personal responsibility for that.

Here's the secret: you are self-employed, a private contractor, and a free agent! (We all are, and when we get that straight in our minds, marvelous things will begin to happen.) Many employees are passively waiting for their employer to develop them or for opportunities to present themselves. Flip it over!

You are a package of skills, capabilities, experiences, and results. Regardless of where you work or whom you work for, this package is what you "sell." It is the product you bring to market. It is your promise to deliver.

Your product has more than one version too! The original version is 1.0. As you add experience and understanding, and as you gain unique insight and even wisdom, you have a new version to offer. Frequent updating is recommended!

Consider our character Zoe for a moment. She was certainly lacking perspective! She saw her job as mindless and repetitious and unimportant. That frame most certainly impacted her ability

to demonstrate leadership, and it obstructed her view of capabilities and resources. She whizzed past more than one moving sign without adjusting her course. Zoe lacks a strategy for her future; she is traveling without a map or a compass and with very little sense of direction.

GET YOUR MOVE ON!

Set aside time this week to evaluate your high-performance zone. In what ways are you relying on others to supply what you need to be successful? What can you do to enlarge the zone and release a new version of you?

Pray for wisdom and vision! That is a prayer God loves to answer.

Zoe spent the next two days wandering around her apartment in a shocked stupor. She needed to find a job—any job—very soon, but she didn't even know where to begin. She had finally succeeded in finding a sorry-looking copy of her résumé. It hadn't been updated since she'd been hired. (She'd thrown it together for her interview and hadn't needed it afterward.) "That was fair," she had reasoned with herself. "People with jobs don't need résumés."

The third morning of her "unplanned hiatus" found Zoe drinking very strong coffee and surfing the newspaper and Internet for jobs. She felt her confidence fading and her eyes crossing. This was overwhelming. Other than part-time jobs in school, she'd only had one real job, and she had been introduced to that position by a family friend. "I didn't even have to look for

that job," she mused. "It just sort of appeared out of nowhere."

That was an interesting thought, and she spent the next few minutes realizing that is exactly where her last job has taken her. Absolutely NOWHERE.

She hadn't told her parents about the death of her job and was cleverly avoiding calls from Madeline, her best friend. Come to think of it, she hadn't told anyone. It was humiliating. Just how do you explain losing a "loser job"? Mother would worry, and Madeline would lecture—Maddy knew everything about everything. She didn't have the energy for that.

Around noon, panic arrived, and she spent the thirty minutes picking at her lunch and entertaining horrific thoughts of living on the street with Minnie, her cat. (On cue the selfish creature sauntered through the kitchen, apparently unaffected by their impending doom.)

After a miserable lunch date with panic, the mail arrived. There was just one envelope. The note was brief—handwritten on elegant, personalized stationery.

Zoe,

You are at a crossroads, and you have more options than you might imagine. Call me if you are interested in making the very most of this moment.

Alena

Alena!

Zoe was astonished to hear from her. Alena was a marketing executive at the firm—a very powerful woman. Zoe had worked with Alena on several projects.

The projects were important, but Zoe's role had been mostly organizing meeting rooms, copying handouts, and bundling "mission critical" presentations. Why was Alena contacting her now?

A sarcastic voice whispered in her ear, "Maybe she needs a fresh cup of coffee."

No. That wasn't fair. Alena had always been very kind. "She noticed me. She talked to me and asked my opinion about things," she scolded herself aloud. "And I absolutely will call her!"

Zoe did make the call, and a day later she was sitting in a quiet corner of a coffeehouse waiting for Alena to arrive. The invitation for coffee was both a relief and a stress. Alena was always so confident and graceful. Just thinking about that made Zoe feel lumpish in the oversized chair.

The chair actually seemed to be swallowing her. She shifted awkwardly, nearly spilling her coffee. As she was mentally "shrinking" another full size, Alena appeared. Gaping up at her, Zoe could only imagine how ridiculous she must look at this very moment. If she noticed Zoe's predicament, Alena did not show it. When she smiled and said, "I am so glad you called," Zoe believed her.

They talked for a few minutes before Alena refocused the conversation with the awkward question Zoe had been bracing herself for: "How are you, Zoe?"

She had rehearsed the answer to this! The speech was supposed to sound something like, "I am doing well. Thank you. I'm taking a little time off to sort through my prospects." But in that moment with Alena looking her directly in the eye, she couldn't pull it off.

The teleprompter in her head went blank, and Zoe simply said, "I'm completely stunned and a little lost."

Alena smiled then—a broad, beautiful smile. "Well, then, we better get started. What are your plans at this point?"

Zoe winced as she thought, "Plans (as in plural, meaning more than one)? Are you kidding me! I don't have plans; I have panic attacks." Instead Zoe gathered herself and said, "I'm looking for a new position."

"What kind of work are you looking for?" Alena asked.

Zoe wanted to say, "The kind that pays the bills." Instead she mumbled some cliché about finding a challenging position with opportunities to advance.

Alena smiled. "What does that mean exactly?"

Her bluff had been called. Zoe felt herself sinking lower in this bottomless pit of a chair. "Honestly, Alena, I don't know what it means. It's just one of those handy little phrases. I've just been looking for openings I might be qualified for."

An image of the game babies play flashed in her head, and she saw herself as a giant square peg trying to slide into a round hole. No matter how she pulled and tugged, she did not fit.

Thankfully Alena rescued her just then. "There is nothing wrong with surveying the landscape. It works best if you have some idea of where you would like to end up—what you would love to do and become."

Zoe was getting frustrated now. "I'd love to dream about a dream job, but honestly I just need work. I just want to *become* employed."

"I understand," Alena reassured her. "As you search for a job, maybe a dream will find you. The best jobs

are often found by word-of-mouth. Building your professional network will be an important part of your search. There's a women's networking event on Thursday. It will be a good opportunity for you to meet women from many different organizations. I'd like you to come as my guest."

Zoe had never attended a networking event, and she wasn't exactly sure how one goes about "building a professional network." Even so, she found herself nodding and agreeing to go. It certainly couldn't hurt.

They had finished their coffees, and Zoe could feel the meeting was coming to an end. Alena reached for her bag. "It's nice to be in touch, and I'd like to help if I can. Between now and Thursday, I encourage you to consider three questions: One, what is the real value you bring to an organization? Two, what is unique and special about you? Three, what is the most important lesson you have learned in the last ninety days?"

Alena opened the door and held it for Zoe. As she walked through it, Zoe had a question of her own. "Why are you doing this? I mean, why are you helping me? I know how busy you are and this," Zoe pointed to herself, "is a big project!"

Alena smiled. "Soon, I suspect you will answer that question for yourself. See you on Thursday, my friend."

Zoe watched her "friend" go. Nothing had been settled at all, but she felt a calm settle over her. Something had happened here. She wasn't entirely sure what it was, but she felt entirely different. She drove home thinking about the three questions.