



Career vs. Job

by Garold L. Markle

One of my favorite questions to ask an auditorium full of employees is, "How many of you have a career?" The hands usually go up rather slowly. Audience members glance around the room at colleagues to determine whether or not they should self-identify. Isn't it a bit ironic, however, that anyone who works has a career, even those who don't actively pursue them.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *career* as an individual's "course or progress through life." The etymology of the term comes from the 16th century French word *carriere* which meant "road" or "racecourse." In contrast, Wikipedia defines a *job* more simply as "a regular activity performed in exchange for payment."

A career is a job with time-based context. It has a sense of both history and direction. A good career is one that has depth, meaning and purpose as well as a compelling future. It features work that aids in your growth and development and helps you become a better human being. It defines you more than burdens you. A successful career personifies not just the way you make your living, but rather, who you really are.

In a recent HBO Special, comedian Chris Rock spoke about the difference between a career and a job. "With a career," he said, "there is never enough time. With a job, there is always too much time." How true. And how unfortunate for those stuck in what they consider jobs.



Rock's observation certainly makes sense, but I'm not sure it goes far enough to fully differentiate these two life experiences. More importantly, those of us involved in getting work done through others might want to explore the dichotomy a bit further. ***On first, and I think final blush, business owners, managers and supervisors benefit from attracting, retaining and developing career-focused employees.***

I realize that many reading this column think that you're at a decided disadvantage in the career-creation contest. Your business may not be particularly glamorous. A great portion of the work you need done features activity that appears far from intrinsically rewarding. It may involve repetition, manual labor, dirt and grime. I think it's possible, however, to elevate almost any conversation about job to one focused on career, if we gain a more accurate understanding of the two perspectives and learn to connect with the human spirit of the people doing the work.

Take Hector, our window washer. It's hard to believe in this day and age that a man in his sixties could work six to seven days a week, eight to ten hours a day cleaning windows, but he does. Rain or shine, summer or winter, Hector climbs up and down ladders all day long. It's hard, physical work. It's also more than a little dangerous. And yet the thing about Hector is that he is always smiling. He loves to talk to his customers and get to know their stories. He has serviced many families in our neighborhood for more than two decades and knows all about their ups and downs, successes and failures. And we're only one of several large communities that Hector serves.

Hector has an interesting business model. He doesn't advertise. He doesn't even ask for referrals. He simply gets them. It's hard not to tell others about his excellent work, positive outlook and fair prices. He returns year after year to the same houses and has a waiting list several weeks in advance.

I talked with Hector about his feelings toward the future and he admits that he'll have to one day quit. He's not looking forward to it, however. He loves his customers and likes staying busy. He takes great pride in each and every window he cleans and knows that his quality of work will be all but impossible to replicate. Hector's job is to wash windows. His career is to treat his customers to a fresh perspective on the outside world.

*"A job is not a career. I think I started out with a job. It turned into a career and changed my life."
- Barbara Walters*

My father had more than a 30-year career in the automotive industry. For the first twenty or so, it was a pretty awesome experience. His work as a business manager with General Motors defined him, fulfilled him and gave him sustenance well beyond the market-competitive pay and benefits provided. In the last seven to ten years, however, it became a job. A shift in leadership and corporate culture left him in an endurance contest with only one overriding objective – retirement.

I'm extremely grateful that my father realized his dream of fully funding his pension plan. I'm even more grateful that the series of jobs he endured paved the way for him to focus on his ultimate career



objective – to read every important book ever written. He’s worked full time on this quixotic quest steadily for more than twenty years now. Happily for him, he still has a few publications to go.

“Whether we call it a job or a career, work is more than just something we do. It is a part of who we are.” - Anita Hill

In one key respect, I’ve never aspired to be like my father. I don’t yearn for retirement. Just as importantly, as I watched him go through those final years of torture, I made a vow that I’d never remain in a position that depleted my soul. So when my nine year career at Exxon began to display characteristics of a job, I made a break. I did it again four years later and then twice more before settling into a situation where I have experienced almost unlimited opportunity for growth.

Don’t get me wrong. The last thing in the world I’m suggesting is that you should follow my personal path – leave a comfortable executive level position and start your own company. Rather, my suggestion is that you find your own. If that involves starting your own business, so be it. For most, however, it means making sure that the work you do in the job you currently hold somehow fits in context of a larger life plan. If you’re in a future audience where I ask my favorite question, I want you to be able to raise your hand quickly and high.

So, how do you make sure that your career doesn’t dead end in a job? Consider taking some of the actions below:

- 1) **Do a Happiness Check.** Are you happy? Growing? Becoming? Or are you just treading water as you focus on paying the rent? Is someone who works for you doing the same? If the answer is affirmative to either of the last two questions, it’s time to make a change.
- 2) **Get a Career Coach.** If your organization practices [Catalytic Coaching](#), you’re one big step ahead of the game. The process places your direct manager in the critical role of coach and all you have to do is complete the forms and follow the steps. If your organization doesn’t employ a career-focused counseling system, or if you can’t safely confide in your reporting manager, consider hiring an executive coach. I’m attached to a pretty large network of career coaches, so please [email me](#), if you’d like a personal referral.
- 3) **Begin with the End in Mind.** Force yourself to look in the mirror, think deeply and answer truthfully some fundamental destination questions, like: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Let’s be adult about this, however. If you want to be an astronaut, you’ll probably have to start with engineering school and relocate to Florida.
- 4) **Find Your Special Purpose.** Search for work that is centered on the intersection between your unique talents and activities that inspire you. Marcus Buckingham’s [Stand Out Assessment](#) and the Gallup Organization’s [Clifton Strengthsfinder Index](#) are two excellent tools that might aid you in this target tailoring quest.



ENERGAGE
Energize, Engage, Empower

489 Highland Crossing • Suite 204 • East Ellijay, GA 30540
770.321.0537 (Office) • 706.635.8064 (Fax)
www.energage.com (Website)

- 5) **Strategize.** If your current job is no longer contributing to the meaningful advancement of your career, construct a plan to get you moving again. Take half-steps, if necessary. If you're currently an accountant for a manufacturing company and your dream is to be the PR Manager for a professional baseball team, consider moving to PR in your current company or taking a job in accounting for the ball club. After you've proven yourself in the new area or organization, you can take step number two.
- 6) **Execute!** Get to work and make it so. Remember that any job that fails to move you forward on your ultimate career path is just a form of procrastination.



Garold Markle is a widely traveled speaker, consultant and executive coach. He is CEO of Energage, Inc. and author of *Catalytic Coaching: The End of the Performance Review* as well as the training CD: *Salary Talk--How to Discuss Pay so Employees Feel They're Treated Fairly*. For more of Gary's teachings, go to Energage.com or email him at gmarkle@energage.com. This article was first published in **Catalytic Connections** in April 2012.