

What I Have Learned Along the Way: Tales from the Front

By

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“What a Long Strange Trip it’s Been”

(Grateful Dead Song)

Welcome to My Musings

My intent is to write what I have learned about people, behavior, bosses, the world of work, and organizations during my career. By reading these stories about my observations, I hope to provide some wisdom that you can use in your professional development. I will share what I have learned working in organizations as diverse as the US Army and US Air Force Reserves (serving as an enlisted man), United States Postal Service, an insurance company, publishing companies, a Big Ten University, and a technical society.

Most likely your work experience is different from mine and you will not agree with all my observations and advice. That’s because what I am sharing will be my subjective opinions YMMV-- your mileage may vary.

For the most part, my career has been in the publishing business. The other jobs were “steppingstones” that led me to publishing. Nevertheless, I learned a great deal in each work situation by simply *paying attention*. If you gain nothing else from these musings, I hope you come away with the knowledge that there is something to learn in EVERY situation. So, even if you are underemployed, just starting out, hate your current job, etc., look for the skills you can learn from being where you are and think about how those will help you in your future. It may not seem like it sometimes, but there is always something marketable to learn.

Caveats

I’m not writing a scholarly article with empirical evidence validating my observations. You will not find any citations or, for that matter, too many links to more information. What you will read is my unvarnished advice about what I have learned during my career and recommendations that you may find useful in managing your career.

What Motivated Me

“You have touched many people in countless ways, Jack. That is the best gift any person could offer another — the willingness to be connected and offer support. God knows that everything that gets accomplished in any organization is because of its people. Surprising how so many people get to the top because of technical skills rather than people skills.” (A Friend and Mentee of Mine)

The genesis of this series of musings started with my recent mentoring of three friends, each accomplished in their fields. Each mentee-friend is slightly different than the other in terms of age, gender, and career path. One is a computer systems engineer in his mid- 30s, one is a writer and editor in her 40s and the last mentee is a trade association executive in her 50s. Each is a bright, accomplished professional.

One day, I asked myself, "What 'wisdom' am I sharing with these three friends? What would be useful for my readers based on our conversations?" The answers started to evolve over time and are the subject of these essays.

Some Topics I Will Cover

I will write about topics where I have experience or where I possess some special insights that may benefit you. I will share some techniques that have helped me to navigate my career successfully. Some of the topics are:

- Pay Attention
- Keep Notes and Journals
- Avoid the Gossip Trap
- Network
- Welcome Newcomers
- Give Encouragement
- Power in the Workplace
- Office Politics
- A Slight Cynical Bias
- Self-Awareness
- Micromanaging
- Participative Management

Knowing that your time is limited, I will keep these short and post a new essay to my website periodically.

Thanks to Liz Novak for her review and edits and Bev Kolz for her editing of this essay.

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