

Bring Order to the New Instability

The workplace without jobs is a place of opportunity. Workers who adopt a vendor attitude to the new marketplaces can break out of the limitations of jobs and work on a variety of tasks. They can design work that fits their desires and talents.

But with the freedom and opportunity of the new workplace come instability and a loss of security. The workplace is no longer a stable environment with clear boundaries of responsibilities, an ever-present network of support, and solid security for the future.

Today, responsibilities and workloads shift with the opportunities of the moment. Colleagues come and go with each new project. The future (Where will you be working? What will you be doing?) is and will always be a question mark.

Battling the insecurity and instability of the new workplace is a psychological challenge. You can meet

this challenge by bringing order to the chaotic turbulence around you.

Think about the connect-the-dots diagrams in children's magazines. At first they look like chaotic collections of dots. Once the dots are connected, the chaos disappears.

Several steps will help you connect the dots:

1. Cut continuous change down to size. To do this, take all of the changes occurring around you and cluster them under umbrellas of personal meaning. Some umbrellas might be "my composite career," "rebuilding my support system," or "reprioritizing my activities."

This last umbrella is key. Simply prioritizing activities often helps connect the dots.

2. Prepare your assumptions and your attitudes for constant change. Are your assumptions and attitudes making things more difficult for you? Are they helping you?

To cope with the changes:

- *Reject unrealistic expectations.*

For example, do you expect that changes will not affect your long-term situations? Or that things will eventually "settle down?"

- *Take steps to help you foresee changes.* Read trade journals, or attend professional meetings.

- *Prepare alternative scenarios* for the potential challenges ahead.

- *Prepare contacts* who can help you launch a personal business-development effort.

3. Contain changes within new, unchanging frames of meaning.

Even amid the greatest turmoil, you carry with you unchanging frames of meaning. These frames of meaning will help you bring order to chaos. Examples include:

- *Integrity and identity.* Remain the same person no matter what happens around you. (The term "integrity" is the opposite of disintegration, not honesty.)

- *The life journey.* Don't reject the path you have chosen because of changes. Use changes positively as lessons, not negatively as hurdles.

- *The dream.* As with the life journey, don't reject your dreams.

- *The craft.* Organizations may change but your craft remains. Place your loyalty with what you do and not for whom you are doing it.

- *Reality.* Some people accept that change, chaos, and turmoil are the realities of life. The order of organizations or career paths are fragile surface elements. ☆

Don't Face Change with Old Rules

Hanging on to these old rules will hold you back:

- **Don't leave a job when good jobs are so hard to get.** We're not advocating throwing away jobs. But keep in mind that even your current good job will eventually be temporary.

- **You can't leave a job when you have responsibilities** (i.e., people to support). This is a variance of the first old rule. Again, be responsible by foreseeing the future when your good job might disappear.

- **You need good qualifications to get good jobs.** Forget diplomas and recommendations. Instead show real desire, the ability to get the job done, the right temperament, and other assets the job requires.

- **Don't try to change careers after forty.** In a marketplace, vendors get paid what they can show they are worth. Age becomes irrelevant.

- **Get in the "right" business.** Who knows what the right business will be in the future? Do what you like to do and what you can do.

- **It doesn't matter what you want. It's what "they" want that counts.** Employers don't have the power, customers do. Find the tasks and lifestyle you enjoy, then seek out customers for what you have to offer. And forget trying to please employers.

Islands of Order

If your work environment is one of great turmoil, try to keep your home life stable and orderly. Or vice-versa.

Or perhaps you just need a park bench where you can escape to at lunchtime. What's important is to have that island of order to which you can retreat, recuperate, and gain a perspective on the changes happening around you. ☆