

Follow-up

JANE DURANT

MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH PEOPLE SINCE 1987

Jumping Off

There was a time when most of us worked for someone else and that was the way life was. In the past few years, we have seen, read about or have come to know of people who have been down-sized, right-sized or relocated, have discovered new talents, learned new skills, even become consultants. In some cases individuals have gone out on their own, setting up their own small businesses with the usual expected successes and failures from setting out on uncharted waters.

Many people these days speak and write about the future of the job. In his most recent book, *Job Shift*, William Bridges offers a guide to charting one's career in the new "post-job" workplace. Other writers, including Nuala Beck in her book, *Shifting Gears*, echo a similar theme with a Canadian slant. Everywhere we look, some of the ways we knew in the old days simply are not working out the same as they used to.

The gurus confirm this growing trend—a pioneering spirit not seen since the last century. With information being part of the currency of the time, businesses will never be the same again. The need to oversee what the workers are doing is (fortunately) becoming a way of the past.

Having said that, there is always the do or diers who believe that this too shall



pass. For example, it is far from obvious that the union movement as a whole has come to terms about how we will do union business when the group is dispersed—even working out of our own home offices. How do you adapt the traditional confrontational tactic of a picket line in those circumstances? Hopefully, some of the other skill development areas considered important these days like communicating effect-

ively, resolving differences and reaching consensus will play their part in assisting unions and management to move gracefully into the impending future.

One of the major changes we are seeing is the shift from resource-based wealth to knowledge-based wealth. Singapore is often used as an example of this trend. The country is tiny, has almost no raw materials other than its highly-educated population. The emphasis has been put on capitalizing on the knowledge between people's ears. Interestingly, Dr. Edward de Bono's "Lateral Thinking" and, in particular, Six Thinking Hats® is widely used in Singapore as a way to improve the quality of thinking. Some of you familiar with the Hats know the power that this type of process can produce.¹

Until April 1994, I was the only member of our immediate family who had been out on my own, self-employed, an entrepreneur. The others were all working as employees of large and well-known organizations. They were in management positions and had a wonderful selection of golden perks and other

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¹To find out more on Dr. de Bono's work, please call Jane at (604) 872-7761. Jane has been personally certified by Dr. de Bono to be one of his Six Thinking Hats® trainers.

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handcuffs ... Over that summer, three of the four members “gave up” or were pushed and joined the ranks of self-employed entrepreneurs. We now have one sole surviving “employee”—he’s the one with the “regular pay cheque.”

There are several other entrepreneurs around us. There’s Janice, who turns my words into *Follow-up*; Ingrid, who draws the cartoons; Brenda, my accountant—I’m sure you also know several of these types of people.

But self-employment is only one of several options and not the one for

everyone. What is happening is that jobs in traditional sectors are disappearing and the people who are affected cannot automatically slot themselves into the sectors where the new “knowledge/information” jobs are.

There may be also an age dilemma here—not for me, of course ... Currently, I work with two private sector organizations where those of us over fifty can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

A possible implication is that it may be increasingly difficult for “older” displaced workers from traditional indust-

ries to find working opportunities within these types of organizations. Even if they are young in heart and, most importantly, in mind, will they have the other skills required to be successful in the post-job age? If they grew up in the traditional hierarchical organization, they will also need to learn to once again kindle their initiative, relate across groups, be part of a team and embrace education and learning as a way of life.

Is the water in the pool ready for when you jump?