

CareerSmart Advisor™

Strategies & Solutions for Your Career Success

A Note From Dave

If you're currently in transition seeking that next great opportunity, the last thing you want to imagine yourself doing a year from now is the same thing — seeking that next great job. Simply put, you want to land and stay there for a while.



I recently read a [blog post](#) by Mark James, a career executive recruiter and executive coach who also hosts ExecuNet networking events in the San Diego and Irvine areas, that addressed just that.

In *How to Make the Right Decision Every Time*, James talks about what to consider when deciding to accept or reject a job offer. James suggests job seekers separate their decision into four parts: people, challenge balance and worth. The first factor, which seems obvious, is the “People Likeability Factor” and importance of that working both ways.

A new job must also provide a challenge so you're not bored. Without the “Role Challenge Factor,” you'll be back in the job market soon, predicts James. The “Work and Life Balance Factor” is also important because “we do not live to work; we work to live” and creating that balance is crucial for both career and personal success. The final part is the “Worth Contribution Factor,” which involves whether the company can pay you (through salary and other benefits) what you're worth.

James' post might not make it easier to make a decision, but it's definitely helpful to have a checklist to help with the due diligence required to make the right choice.

Sincerely,

Dave

Dave Opton
ExecuNet Founder & CEO
www.execunet.com/davesblog

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THE NUMBERS

KEY EXECUTIVE MARKETPLACE INDICATORS

- 90% | about how many \$200K+ positions are not openly posted
- 82% | executives who would return a recruiter's call to build a relationship
- 46% | corporate HR leaders concerned about talent stagnation in their organization
- 12% | decrease in total executive compensation in 2009

Career-Enhancing Programs

July-September 2010

Hosted by Dave Opton, founder and CEO, ExecuNet

INCLUDED IN YOUR EXECUNET MEMBERSHIP

7/16 — Six-Figure Hotline

Dave Opton

Join Dave Opton, CEO and founder of ExecuNet, for an interactive discussion about executive career issues that are important to you.

7/29 — Looking for a Job When You Have a Job

Tony Beshara

Looking for a new job when you already have one can be a challenge. Discover how to effectively manage both responsibilities as you continue to work toward achieving your career goals.

7/16 — Market Your Potential, Not Your Past

Karen Armon

Build a career that works for you, regardless of what happens to you, by understanding your economic potential and preparing for the significant employment trends.

9/2 — Winning Interviews: Converse, Connect, Convince

Judy Rosemarin

Learn how to become an effective interviewer. Discover tips that will help put both you and the interviewer at ease, and gain the confidence you need to move the process along.

7/28 — Six-Figure Hotline

Dave Opton

Join Dave Opton, CEO and founder of ExecuNet, for an interactive discussion about executive career issues that are important to you.

Tips for Working Through a C-Level Job Search

Now Available On Demand Linda Dominguez

Learn how to create a plan for your job search success, including techniques on how to build an effective search campaign and tips on how to uncover opportunities in the unpublished job market and through networking.

Networking Meetings in Your Area

July/August 2010

Hosted by ExecuNet Facilitators

7/12 — **Detroit** — Mark Cory

7/12 — **Boston** — Marg Balcom

7/13 — **Greensboro** — John O'Connor

7/13 — **Phoenix** — Fred Coon

7/14 — **Orlando** — Catherine Coates & Mike Murray

7/14 — **Seattle Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Susan Stringer

7/14 — **Cleveland Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Rick Taylor

7/15 — **Palo Alto** — Bobbie LaPointe

7/15 — **Vienna/Tysons Corner, VA** — Peter McCarthy

7/15 — **Columbia-Maryland** — Ed Loucks

7/15 — **Indianapolis** — Romona Camarata

7/15 — **Minneapolis** — John Wetzel & Barbara Adams

7/15 — **Palo Alto Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Bobbie LaPorte

7/15 — **Louisville** — Thom Crimans & Cathy Fyock

7/15 — **Pittsburgh/Cranberry Township** — Tina Winner

7/15 — **Houston** — Yolanda Brown

7/19 — **Boston Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Marg Balcom

7/20 — **Lexington** — Thom Crimans & Cathy Fyock

7/20 — **Vienna/Tysons Corner, VA Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Peter McCarthy

7/20 — **Seattle** — Susan Stringer

7/20 — **Cleveland** — Rick Taylor

7/21 — **Irvine (Orange County)** — Mark James

7/21 — **Charlotte** — Merton Marsh & Michael Hall

7/21 — **Portland** — Jean Walker

7/21 — **Raleigh/Durham** — Stuart Levine

7/22 — **Atlanta Sr. Executive Roundtable** — J. Patrick Haly

7/22 — **Columbus** — Janine Moon

7/23 — **White Plains** — Linsey Levine

7/29 — **Dallas** — Bob Hueglin

7/30 — **St. Louis** — Ken Coleman & Randy Hove

8/3 — **Ft. Lauderdale** — Jeannette Kraar

8/3 — **Greensboro** — John O'Connor

8/3 — **Miami** — Jeannette Kraar

8/4 — **Chicago** — Gail Sussman Miller

8/4 — **Philadelphia** — Mitch Wienick & Ed Kelleher

8/4 — **Cincinnati** — Jennifer McClure

8/4 — **Philadelphia Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Mitch Wienick & Ed Kelleher

8/5 — **Sarasota** — Susan Mell

8/5 — **Southern Wisconsin** — Clara Hurd Nydam

8/5 — **San Diego/Carlsbad** — Mark James

8/10 — **Phoenix** — Fred Coon

Reserve your space! Call Member Services at 800-637-3126 or visit ExecuNet.com

Executive Summary

Reinvent Your Career

Is your career in need of a reinvention? To uncover whether it truly is time for a change, you need to ask yourself several questions about your current situation. In her recent program for ExecuNet members, *Reinvent Your Career*, career coach Jean Erickson Walker, suggests conducting a career temperature check in which you ask if you're happy or unsatisfied with your current job, if you're facing a layoff, considering early retirement or unemployed. "The destination for everyone is to find the sense of wholeness [in his or her career]," says Walker.

"As you look toward the future, begin with the past," says Walker, regarding the first step an executive needs to take: a self-assessment. To conduct the self-assessment, executives need to explore six areas:

- Mission, values
- Talents, interests, skills
- Likes and dislikes
- Criteria for job satisfaction
- Expertise/experience
- Brand image

Executives also need to assess their market potential. Answering the following questions can help determine where they fit into the current marketplace: Are you personally marketable?; Are you field or industry bound?; Are you in demand?; Are your credentials current? It's also important to determine the blocks to your marketability, adds Walker.

Refocus with Your Present Company

Among your choices are to refocus your career within your current company. Make the most of the experience so it can help you when you're ready to move on. "Build alliances with people who make it possible for you to succeed," advises Walker.

If you decide the best career move is for you to remain with your organization, Walker suggests having an honest talk with your boss, with a clear direction and goal in mind. "People who support you have to believe there's a benefit to them,

Reinventing Your Career

Presented by Jean Erickson Walker and available on demand

Most executives are challenged today to determine what the next step in their career should be. They don't know what type of career opportunity to seek next, and some are unsure if they should remain with their current employer or seek a position with a new employer. Executives are also trying to determine if the time is right to enter entrepreneurship, or if perhaps the natural next step for them is to formally end their career through retirement.

In this program, career coach Jean Erickson Walker outlines the ways in which executives can position themselves for future changes that will positively impact all facets of their lives.

Walker can help executives, like you, plan the next stop on their career ladder by explaining how you can:

- Assess why you are restless and establish the right decision for you.
- Identify your market potential and where to apply your unique set of talents and skills.
- See the variety of options that may be right for you.
- Take the immediate steps you need to begin your journey.
- Implement your plan through personal branding and meaningful connections.

not just the organization," she says.

Still, one of the easiest ways [to move forward] is to get your boss promoted, adds Walker. It's also important to remain visible. One way in which to accomplish this is to request additional duties that will get you noticed. At the same time, understand and be able to identify the danger signs that illustrate your job is in jeopardy: When you become invisible, you're reassigned from regular tasks to projects, and your boss becomes polite.

When it's Time to Move On

When you decide the time is right, the next question to answer is whether the next step should be toward an organization within or outside of your current career field. Executives need to determine if the current field presents enough challenges and opportunities for them, and if they still enjoy working in this area. When considering a change in career fields, executives also need to explore possible opportunities as well and determine if (and how well) their skills are transferable. They also need to know what will make them a strong candidate in a new field.

To help take these next steps, Walker suggests that executives work with a coach and update their résumés. Refreshing a professional/personal network, becoming more visible, creating an advisory board, and researching the marketplace are also

key activities executives should conduct as they embark on a transition.

Becoming an Entrepreneur

Another option executives can explore is becoming their own boss. Walker notes how the path to entrepreneurship can entail starting a business, buying a business, becoming a consultant or performing contract/project work. Walker says that entrepreneurs spend 25 percent of their time doing their actual work, 25 percent doing the business of the business and 50 percent of their time is spent on marketing and sales activities.

When Retirement is the Answer

Executives need to fully explore retirement before deciding if they truly want to end their careers. Walker suggests asking the following questions:

- What role does your career play in your life?
- How long do you expect to live?
- What other interests do you have?
- Do you anticipate maintaining the same style of living?
- What is your energy level?
- Do you have specific life plans?

Overall, when determining your next career move, Walker reminds executives that "it's up to you to make those steps forward," says Walker. ■

Controlling Your Personal Brand Amidst Uncontrollable Corporate Brands

By Marji McClure

When most people hear company names like Goldman Sachs, Bear Stearns and Enron, their thoughts are anything but positive. For executives who once worked for companies with less-than-stellar reputations, including the names of these organizations on their résumés can tarnish their own personal leadership brand.

Even executives whose companies didn't appear on the national news — and may only be known on a local scale — can face a similar challenge. Hundreds of bank failures, start-ups that didn't survive the recession, and consulting practices that just couldn't compete, represent many smaller company brands that can also be very damaging to an executive's reputation.

Creating and maintaining a strong personal leadership brand is crucial for executive success. But for an increasing number of executives, their own reputations are blemished because of their employment by organizations with less-than-stellar brand names. As more companies continue to be added to a list that includes such well-known names as, most recently, Toyota and BP, the number of executives facing this branding challenge while in job search will likely just continue to increase.

"This has become a much more prevalent issue given the economic environment over the past few years," says Rick Balsiger, president of Balsiger Partners LLC, a California-based executive search, brand integration and organizational design consultancy. "The problem has certainly been exacerbated by the extreme negative backlash from politicians, stockholders and taxpayers who are forced to subsidize cleaning up the mess. In today's world of instant media, it is very difficult to avoid being hit by the negative fallout."

Yet, it's a problem that is actually recession-proof. "I knew people who had

worked at Enron. It was hard for them to find a job even in good times," says Peter Firestein, a New York-based corporate reputation consultant and author of *Crisis of Character — Building Corporate Reputation in the Age of Skepticism*.

Addressing the Issue

Executives may not realize that a tarnished company name can have such an effect on them personally when they embark on a job search. "This is a very real issue and can indeed impact how others, including hiring executives or recruiters, view the perceived quality of the candidate," says Balsiger. "What makes this more challenging is the fact that because the supply of great, well-qualified candidates exceeds the demand, companies and recruiters have many options. They don't have to take the risk or settle for someone who may be

a difficult 'sell' within the organization."

Still, executives shouldn't deliberately try to hide their association with one of these companies. It's highly likely a hiring manager and/or recruiter will conduct online research about a candidate and will learn about the relationship anyway. That lack of transparency on the part of the executive could eliminate him from consideration for the position — even before an interview.

"Most people understand that it takes more than one person to cause a company to fail, and will not hold one person responsible for the demise of an entire organization," notes Jennifer Scott, founder of a Connecticut-based recruitment consulting practice.

While working for a company with a poor reputation can serve as a negative differentiator for executives in the job

[Continued on page 5](#)

Adapting Your Résumé to Highlight Your Own Brand

Résumés can be designed to highlight some pieces of information more than others. Typically, company names receive a prominent place on the résumé. But they don't have to. "If you have a concern that a company you have worked for has a negative image, you may choose a design that strategically places the visual emphasis on your job title and your many accomplishments in that position, while the company name is placed on the résumé in a way that de-emphasizes it," says Michelle Dumas, an ExecuNet résumé writer and executive director of Distinctive Career Services LLC. "Although the company name is still on the résumé if the reader looks for it, their attention will be drawn first to all of the positives — so that the ultimate impact of the company name is significantly diminished."

Still, it's acceptable to not mention a company name, and instead replace the name with a general description. Dumas offers this example: instead of "XYZ Corp," list the company as a "world leader in insurance and financial services."

A key component to the résumé is a recommendations page in which executives can provide information that showcases how they are perceived as a leader (regardless of their affiliation with a tarnished company). "These aren't references, but statements from peers, supervisors, subordinates or even key suppliers or partners that can help vouch for our experience, leadership, integrity and credibility as a leader," says Balsiger. "Third-party endorsements can help diffuse the company affiliation issue and turn the attention to background, experience, leadership and accomplishments."

While executives may want to be proactive and address their affiliations with embarrassing company names within their résumés, it's more effective to wait until the interview stage to discuss such relationships. Adding a written explanation "calls attention to the potential negative — in this case, a company with a tarnished brand — and the explanation is often perceived as taking a defensive tone," says Dumas. "Worse, it could be a false assumption that the recipient will perceive the company name as a negative, and your explanation turns what would have been a neutral factor into a negative."

Personal Brand

Continued from page 4

market, it doesn't have to be an obstacle between those executives and a new job opportunity.

"Despite the difficulty of the situation, I believe we will gain far more respect by addressing it candidly and honestly up-front because it will come up anyway," says Balsiger. "To me, being evasive or avoiding the issue will only raise questions about what else we may be hiding or concealing. If this is a deal-breaker for a company or recruiter, it will be a deal-breaker whether we tell them or it comes up later."

Firestein suggests embracing the experience instead. It can actually serve as a positive differentiator between an executive and others competing for the same job. "You can tell prospective employers how you navigated your way through the situation. If you've gone through an experience with a company that's done something to give it a bad reputation, you bring something to that conversation that is unusual and you leverage it. It's all about storytelling and having the right story to tell. It's an extra opportunity to define yourself."

Let Your Personal Brand Shine Through

Since executives can't control corporate brand and their images, it's important they focus their attention on what they can control — their own personal leadership brand. By showcasing their skills and what they have accomplished (regardless of their employers), they can shift attention away from the tainted companies and toward the competencies that are ultimately the most important to hiring organizations.

"Sometimes it's easy to forget that people are always watching us. They are looking for clues that reflect our leadership style, how we have navigated through difficult times, even insights into our personality," explains Balsiger. "And for them, how we handle this challenge can be very predictive of how we will handle other challenges in the future."

"To disconnect from a negative

Expert Resources:

- Rick Balsiger, Balsiger Partners LLC (BalsigerPartners.com)
- Meghan M. Biro, TalentCulture LLC (TalentCulture.com/founder/)
- Michelle Dumas, Distinctive Career Services LLC (DistinctiveDocuments.com)
- Peter Firestein, Global Strategic Communications Inc. (FiresteinCo.com)
- Jennifer Scott, HireEffect (HireEffect.com)

brand image, make sure your actions are separate from the organization's, while striving to make them reflect positively on that organization," adds Meghan M. Biro, principal of Massachusetts-based TalentCulture LLC. Show how you were able to be successful in that unsuccessful environment. Focus your attention on explaining the experience you gained and the accomplishments you achieved.

“

To disconnect from a negative brand image, make sure your actions are separate from the organization's, while striving to make them reflect positively on that organization

”

The challenge to overcome a tarnished company brand can vary, depending on whether an executive wants to transition to a new company within the same industry or to transition to a completely new industry. "If you want to remain in the same industry, say things that are smart and sensitive to context, speak and write in influential forums, network with people who represent companies with better reputations, and elevate the discussion away from your company's flaws to larger issues in the industry with which you have had success," says Biro.

It is more difficult to transition to a different industry. "Hiring managers may view your personal brand and the tarnished company brand as the same thing; they have no benchmark to

measure against," Biro adds. "The strategy here is to focus your brand on categories of achievement that are portable — leadership style, ability to hit revenue and growth goals, strength in establishing and maintaining positive employee relationships, and your reputation as an effective executive."

During interviews, it's vital to emphasize your personal career victories. Let those highlights frame the interview, and be ready to discuss your experience with the tarnished companies; but don't make that the prominent focus of the discussion.

Create a Brand Maintenance Program

Regardless of when you're seeking a new job opportunity, you need to constantly build and maintain your own brand, and be able to showcase how you succeeded in less-than-perfect environments.

One way is to build a personal record that highlights what happened, your relationship to it, what you did (and didn't do) when working for a company with a negative history. "Keep a journal on paper, so you can remember. You have to build a record you can talk about. You can reconstruct a story afterward," says Firestein.

At the same time, executives should research a potential employer's story to try to ensure they don't begin an affiliation with an organization that already has a poor reputation.

"Reputation management starts long before an individual reaches the executive ranks," says Biro. "It's a responsibility every careerist must take seriously, on and off the job. Some reputation management happens during the job selection process; it's critical to screen a company's reputation when one is on the job hunt. Nevertheless, it's not always possible to avoid blemishes on one's résumé, either from one of the frequent public disclosures about a company's operations, or simply choosing to work for a company that has problems." ■

From the Roundtables

Consulting a Company in Crisis

ExecuNet's Roundtables are an online community area where members can meet and help one another network their way into their next assignment or share information and experiences. [Access the Roundtables under "Make Connections" on the ExecuNet member homepage.] In this excerpt from a recent Consulting Roundtable conversation, members discuss advice they, as consultants, would give to companies in the midst of a crisis. [Some content has been edited.]

ExecuNet Meeting Facilitator Karen

Armon: The British Petroleum oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is impacting communities and businesses from the Florida panhandle to the Texas coast.

Obviously, BP is calling upon experts around the world, including consultants, scientists, governmental agencies and even the general public to solve the problem.

As a consultant, how could BP better use local and international consultants to help in the crisis? What would be your pitch to decision-makers at BP? In the future, when companies face crises of this magnitude, how can consultants/professional service firms help them be more prepared?

ExecuNet member IM: The things that have become obvious in the current efforts to resolve the problem and minimize its impact are the lack of problem solving, problem prevention and contingency planning skills within the current decision-makers. The one thing that BP and involved agencies can immediately do is call on a group of problem solving experts, not politicians, to drive the efforts. Although I have met very few really good problem solving people in my 30-year career, there should be enough who can come in and ask the right questions of the industry experts to draw out quality solutions.

A consultant that is well-versed in the science, not the art of root cause analysis and the development of contingency actions, is what's needed.

My pitch would be to bring in one of these experts, PEAK International, to coordinate the above effort. The first order of business should be to get a clear definition of the science behind the leak and then proceed to identify solutions

that would be consistent with the constraints of the science.

I would change the premise of the last part of the question to "what can companies do now to prepare for future crises?" The answer to this is to immediately update all of their problem prevention and contingency planning strategies and procedures. I cannot emphasize enough, the time to address a crisis such as this is now, before it happens.

ExecuNet member JM: BP needs consultants to tell them the truth "without fear or favor." A consultant can uniquely do that because he or she would not have a vested interest in their career path at BP. They need consultants in public relations across the board, and in technological issues.

Consultants can be the squeaky wheel, saying the unpopular things and making "bold" suggestions. Frankly, every company culture should have a place for these types of people in order to innovate and remain competitive in a changing world!

ExecuNet member FF: Concurrent to root cause analysis, determine how to pull in the "best and the brightest" who have are still in school to solve this problem, not just those currently working. Build a competition of sorts for universities to build multi-dimensional teams. Involve engineers, scientists, and marine biologists. Engage someone like Google to leverage their internal communications platforms and help set up a highly interactive and dynamic environment for the students to work with. They will be comfortable with and will be able to operate well in an interactive and dynamic, real-time manner.

The consultants can help set up, organize, analyze and extract information

during the process. They could help identify themes and identify individuals who seem to be "on to something." They could then look at pulling in resources across universities if individual university teams are not sufficient. There may also be ways to open components of the university data to others. Leverage this as a communications tool.

ExecuNet member TB: I'd begin by not pitching them a need for science/technology experts. I doubt they need reminding.

They already have plenty of the best in the company. After all, they pay high, and that's why they are so successful at oil extraction. I doubt they currently lack offers from external experts.

I think that BP probably already knows it is in mitigation mode and not containment mode, and that means heavy duty risk management. So, they should consider bolstering their risk management resources with consultants from the different risk disciplines — PR, environment, technology, finance, etc. And since it's clear to any rational thinker that their shoddy risk management is what brought them to this mess, then publicly bringing onboard new, independent risk managers would publicly acknowledge an obvious area of corporate weakness that, in turn, would be a positive step along a long, hard road toward re-branding their reputation. I'd also counsel that the board remain alive to the potential for future talent amongst the risk consultants. The current risk management team is badly damaged goods and will have to be replaced or extensively restructured. However, for now, the team's knowledge of BP systems is vital and they must be retained.

Finally, bring on board a strong PR consultancy. The choice will be difficult. It cannot be one associated with political "spin" or entertainment "hype." The public perception of the oil industry is only marginally more negative than their opinions about politics and their disdain for the entertainment media. ■

Your Career Advisor

Rethinking Your Company's Next Move

By **Kenneth H. Marks**

Is your company taking advantage of market churn and chaos to refresh its growth strategy? Regardless of company size, stage or industry, everyone has felt some impact from the recent years' economic turmoil.

For many, it has been devastating — requiring them to significantly shrink their business, lay off employees, close facilities and hunker down, hoping that the business cycle works its way to the up-swing. And for some, it was worse yet, forced to file for bankruptcy and liquidate. For others, the impact has been more of a mild distraction, causing worry and distress in markets and niches that have otherwise continued to flourish. To take an optimistic view, the exciting part of a crisis like we have experienced in the last two years is the ability to easily affect change.

Think about it. When business is good, the company is profitable and customers are happy, it is difficult to spur improvements, reinvent what's inevitably going to be obsolete or make bold moves. The risk of rocking the boat or the inertia to stay the course when things are working can be difficult to overcome. But when crisis hits, everyone — employees, suppliers, customer, lenders and shareholders — expects action. This can create an environment enabling leaders to make strategic moves and strengthen their company's market position to compete in the next wave of economic growth or to shore-up their position in the event of a double-dip.

Review the Direction

What is your company doing differently to take advantage of the opportunity to change? What strategic move has your team embraced? Start the process by reviewing the direction of the business.

1. Clarify the goals and objectives of the shareholders.
2. Revisit the company's strategic plan with a fresh set of eyes and consider the basic growth strategies that are used to navigate the ramp and emergence of

industries or to avoid being squeezed-out when a market contracts.

3. Identify the “secret sauce” of the company, and how the business needs to be competitively positioned and differentiated.
4. Focus on activities and strategies to sustain or move the business into a leading position to grow value and provide for even greater long-term success.

Once the direction of the company is clear, management can develop the strategy to meet the future desired state. This should result in initiatives that will move the company forward.

Develop the Strategy

A common question is “how do we think about growth strategies?” From a big-picture perspective, there are two fundamental approaches — organic (internal) and external. While the two intersect and overlap at times, and both can involve investment, we can separate them for discussion.

1. **Organic Strategies:** Involve leveraging the strength of the existing business and building from within. For example, this approach could mean accelerating penetration in existing markets through new sales initiatives. It could also mean developing new products/services, geographically expanding, or finding new distribution or delivery channels.
2. **External Strategies:** Tend to involve other companies and investment outside of the current business. With one or more numerous strategic aims, a common external growth strategy is the acquisition of another company to quickly capture customers, add capabilities, or access new technologies. Sometimes the same objectives can be achieved with less risk and similar benefits by entering into strategic partnerships or joint ventures.

Understanding the Options

Companies in a defensive posture may consider merging with a competitor to

gain cost efficiencies or shed weaknesses while gaining complementary strengths. Keep in mind that combining two poor performing companies doesn't necessarily make a better company; we suspect there is evidence to the contrary.

An interesting dynamic is playing out in many industries now — good companies with bad balance sheets need capital and can't get it. They are being forced to sell or trade at distressed levels. Some of these good companies over-leveraged themselves, and others are in a precarious position because of portfolio rationalization by their current investors. Either way, this is creating a buying opportunity for stronger players to strengthen their position or access new markets with much less risk.

Strategy must be coupled with solid operating execution. All the plans in the world don't matter if the business can't do what it commits to with the resources it can harness. Consider increasing the operating tempo of the company and challenge performance expectations. In good times, many companies reach a level of operating performance that is okay, but not stellar, and the team settles in. It is all too easy not to drive the extra mile required to excel when there is no external pressure or the situation isn't critical.

With the increased level of unemployment and flux in the labor markets, the opportunity may exist to upgrade talent and augment the team to assure a strong foundation to build on. Execution starts with having the right team.

Lastly, don't be afraid to trim the losers or weak players. That is, trim the products, services, customers, suppliers and employees draining the organization or distracting the company from focusing on the value-creating forward-looking business. ■

Kenneth H. Marks is managing partner of High Rock Partners. He is the lead author of the Handbook of Financing Growth. Marks can be contacted at khmarks@HighRockPartners.com

Insider Insight

Six Guidelines for Resolving Intergenerational Conflict

By **Larry Johnson**
and **Meagan Johnson**

For the first time in history, there are five generations working side by side: the Traditional Generation (born pre-1945), Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), Generation X (born 1965-1980), Generation Y (1981-1995), and the Linkster Generation (born after 1995). Since conflicts often arise in a multigenerational environment, it's helpful to have some understanding of the differences between employees of distinct generations.

Each generation has been influenced by the major historical events, social trends, and cultural phenomena of their time, shaping their ideas about everything from expectations and perceptions about what the working environment will provide and how they should behave as employees, to company loyalty and work ethic.

Here are some guidelines for resolving intergenerational conflict:

Look at the Generational Factor

Is this conflict generational, or is there something else going on? For example, Traditionals and Baby Boomers don't like to be micromanaged, while Gen Yers and Linksters crave specific, detailed instructions about how to do things and are used to hovering authorities. There is almost always a generational component

to conflict; recognizing this offers new ways to resolve it.

Consider the Generational Values at Stake

Each generation is protecting a distinct set of values, and conflict may threaten these values. For example, Baby Boomers value teamwork, cooperation, and buy-in, while Gen Xers prefer to make a unilateral decision and move on — preferably solo.

Air Different Perceptions

When employees of two or more generations are involved in a workplace conflict, they can learn a great deal by sharing their perceptions. For instance, a Traditional may find a Gen Yer's lack of formality and manners offensive, while a Gen Yer may feel dissed when this older employee fails to respect her opinions and input. Have each party use "I" statements to avoid potentially negative confrontations.

Find an Appropriate Fix

You can't change people's life experience. But you can work with the set of workplace attitudes and expectations that come from it. So, for instance, if you have a knowledgeable Boomer who is frustrated by a Gen Yer's lack of experience coupled with his sense of entitlement, turn the Boomer into a mentor.

Find Commonality and Complements

When we study generations, some common and complementary characteristics emerge — and these can be exploited when dealing with conflict between them. For instance, Traditionals and Gen Y employees both tend to value security and stability. Traditionals and Boomers tend to resist change — but both crave training and development. Gen X and Gen Y employees place a high value on workplace flexibility and work-life balance.

Learn from Each Other

Each generation has valuable lessons to teach the next. For example, Traditionals and Boomers have a wealth of knowledge and tricks of the trade that younger workers need. Gen X employees are widely known for their fairness and mediation abilities. Gen Y workers are technology wizards. And Linksters hold clues to future workplace, marketing and business trends. ■

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