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Career Corner

The End of Certainty

How quickly and tragically our world can change. Earlier I chose the “end of certainty” as the subject for this article aimed at the WITI readers. At that time, I was referring to the seemingly rapid decline of career opportunities in technology related fields. My focus was the necessity to use this unexpected crisis as a time to search creatively first for meaning and then for money in our work life.

The indescribable vicious attack on America pales out our individual concerns. However, it does signify the end of certainty for all of us on a far more global scale than we ever pictured in our worst nightmare. The automatic security we took for granted ended abruptly and without forewarning. True, the World Future Society Conferences each year has issued sharp warnings of terror attacks. It all seemed so distant so we heard but did not act. We clinged to our comfort cover of certainty and past expectations.

As I stood mesmerized before the TV screen, I like many of you, asked myself “What can I do to help?” What action can I take to make a real impact? Finding no ready answer, I resolved that at this time I can use every ounce of my experience, knowledge, strength, creativity and energy to excel in working with my clients in career crisis.

So now back to my original message of the “end of certainty” in technology careers. Professionals are facing the new reality that technical training, work experience and expertise are no longer an automatic magic key to a financially rewarding and satisfying career. Opportunities seem to have disappeared for no reason.

For the three decades I have worked with clients in career chaos when their industries faced a similar “end of certainty.” I personally experienced it in the early 70’s. A few short years earlier I had read that if a woman got a PhD she could become president of a university. The reality in the 70’s was that one out of nine PhD’s could get a college teaching job. Male PhD’s were driving taxis and painting houses. I realized that with a PhD and a dime I could get a cup of coffee.

I watched as chaos hit the banking industry. I interviewed the president of Republic Bank in Dallas in the mid 80’s. He said the banking world, as he knew it, was ending. It seemed unbelievable since the imposing Republic Bank sign in the Dallas skyline was the symbol of our financial success. It is long gone.

The collapse of the S & L’s and the real estate industry in the 80’s are yet another example of this “end of certainty.” Currently, the healthcare field is suffering from major tumultuous disorder. The legal profession has also changed dramatically. At least 25% of my client base for years has been lawyers facing the reality that law is not what they expected or valued.

These fields are now joined by telecommunications and technology industries.

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As I have said in books, articles and speeches: If your career field has not experienced major change and chaos, it will! So a major question of our age is: "How do you and I deal with the 'loss of certainty' in our national and professional lives?"

First, realize that chaotic times can breed creativity and ingenuity. Our nation, unique to the world three centuries ago and even now grew from what was labeled anarchy and pandemonium. There are countless other signs of creativity and renewal springing from chaos. Healthcare, in reality "sick" care in the past, is rapidly evolving into "preventive" medicine. Also, alternative approaches are also beginning to make grant strides in the legal field in spite of the active resistance of individual attorneys and state legal associations. The proliferation of "do-it-yourself" material is helping consumers reclaim the legal systems from high priced lawyers. Called *pro se* meaning "on one's own behalf," it will greatly reduce the cost routine legal matters.

So what does all this have to do with your current career problems in technology? First, it demonstrates that chaos, after the first initial shock and distress, can generate renewal and rebuild a better system. Second, self directed and individual responsibility for our careers is an absolute must for all of us. Independent minded baby boomers, generation X'ers, their younger "twenty something" siblings and even my "silent generation" must gain and maintain control of our careers. No longer can we count on conventional wisdom and an automatic escalator to take us to our career destination! This is the time for us to determine our "success criteria" and take action to achieve these "glass balls." Gaining creative career control is the major wave of the future in our work-life.

Helen Harkness, Ph.D., a pioneer in the development and implementation of career management programs, founded Career Design Associates, Inc. (CDA) in 1978 after a career as a college professor and administrator. She has provided career change direction to over 6,000 individuals and worked towards improving retention for numerous organizations through her career enhancement programs. A futurist, consultant, researcher and speaker, she has authored two books, ***The Career Chase: Taking Creative Control in a Chaotic Age***, and ***Don't Stop the Career Clock: Rejecting the Myths of Aging for a New Way to Work in the 21st Century***. The consistent theme in her work with adults is "***Freedom is Knowing Your Options***". If after searching CDA website www.career-design.com or reading one of Dr. Harkness' books, and you are interested in CDA services, contact CDA at options@career-design.com for a 45 minute session at no charge.

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