

CAREER CENTER

Pay It Forward...

Career Advice from an ASPA Member

Carl L. McCoy

A Career Strategy Thought . . .

A good wedding reception is one of my favorite social outings. It serves up an opportunity for me to see old friends and family members I haven't seen in a while, make new acquaintances, taste some good food, sip on a relaxing drink and cut the rug with a rocking DJ or band. Lately, another social function has been moving up fast on my list of favorite things to do—attending retirement receptions. That's right, retirement receptions. I have attended two since December and I have another one scheduled for next month.

Like wedding receptions, the retirement receptions I've attended are happy times. These particular retirees are friends I've made during my 23-plus years with the same employer. Our employer is a large public university. It's been a joy watching them conclude successful workplace journeys after 30 or more years with one organization.

Why all this talk about retirement receptions and happy retirees? This column is supposed to be an advice piece for students and new professionals. Well, the retirement receptions involving my friends who spent their entire career working for the same employer makes one wonder why individu-

als would stay so long with the same organization. Apparently, they found favorable career advancement opportunities, pay that was satisfactory, competitive employee benefits, agreeable work environments, productive colleagues and so on.

Nonetheless, the workplace has changed a lot since this group of freshly minted retirees began working. For example, instead of digging in for the long haul a lot of workers are now changing jobs like dirty shirts for various reasons.

According to a 2007 Spherion® Workplace Snapshot survey conducted by Harris Interactive® (www.spherion.com/press/releases/2007/snapshot-voluntary-job-change.jsp), 21 percent of U.S. workers made a voluntary job change in 2006, which was up slightly from 20 percent the previous year. By comparison, Spherion data from December 2005 showed that 37 percent of workers said they intended to seek a new job in 2006. This survey also revealed the two top reasons why workers voluntarily changed jobs, with 30 percent of workers stating growth and earnings potential and 23 percent citing time and flexibility as the reason.

If you are a new professional contemplating a job change, consider doing what many single-employer retirees have done in the past. Take a close look at career

satisfaction and advancement opportunities that may be available within your current organization before making your move to what appears to be a greener workplace pasture. Here are a few points to ponder:

- *Identify career ladder opportunities within your organization.* For example, if you're looking for a more responsible job with greater pay, review your organization's job list or visit the Human Resources Department to determine how your skills and experiences can lead to that promotional position.
- *Identify in-house staff development programs that will assist you in moving to the next level of your career.* My employer's Finance and Administration Division has a comprehensive, certificate-granting, staff development program that offers selected incumbents an opportunity to receive management/cross-training in various departments of the division.
- *Get familiar with current labor market salary data.* Since pay is often cited as one of the reasons workers voluntarily change jobs, determine if your organization's pay scale is market competitive. Use the Internet to view free U.S. Department of Labor salary surveys.
- *Compare your current employer's benefits package to other organizations.* If nothing

else, see how your basic benefits compare, i.e., retirement plan, health insurance, life insurance, long and short term disability, tax deferred savings plans, tuition reimbursement and paid days off.

- *Attend a retirement reception where the retiree spent her/his entire career with same the employer.* A little light just might come on. It's actually quite interesting to hear how someone started out as an entry level human resources generalist and finished up as a human resources director.

Thirty years with the same employer may seem like an eternity, but what you're looking for is out there. Final word, do what makes you happy, but remember this—that greener workplace pasture might be your current employer.

ASPA member Carl L. McCoy is a public service associate and project director with the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government. He is an active member of ASPA's Section on Personnel Administration and Labor Relations (SPALR) and the Conference of Minority Public Administrators (COMPA). He was recently appointed to a seat on ASPA's Capacity Steering Group. Email: mccoy@cviog.uga.edu

THE UN-COMFORT ZONE, *an occasional column by Robert Wilson*

Defeating the De-Motivator

Robert Wilson

The sweet strains of a Puccini aria cut through the Saturday night clatter of the busy Italian restaurant in New York City, but it wasn't coming from the aging voice of the Sicilian baritone who was hired to belt out favorites like Funiculi-Funicula. It was a soprano whose crystal clear voice filled the room. Within moments all the ambient noise came to a halt. Diners stopped eating and talking, busboys stopped clearing tables, the cooks even came out of the kitchen.

Singing on the tiny stage was the skinny moon-faced waitress from Ohio. The Sicilian heard she studied opera, so he invited her to join him, but what began as a duet ended in solo as he too was mesmerized by the beauty of her voice. When she finished, the place thundered in applause and I saw tears of gratitude glistening in her eyes. She had hit each note perfectly.

If only she had done that when she auditioned for the Metropolitan Opera.

But she choked, flinched, allowed a seed of doubt to creep into her consciousness and thus her voice.

She told me her story over a couple of beers after work. It was the fall of 1984, and I was a fellow waiter at the restaurant; just another struggling artist in the city that never sleeps. She explained that she got nervous during her audition and couldn't hit the high notes. She would get one more chance to audition, but she would have to wait an entire year.

I never found out if she made it; as a writer my art is portable and a few months later I moved to a city where they still have a bedtime. I suspect she did, because that night she received a proof—a vital beginning step.

Doubt is a silent killer. We transmit feelings of doubt to others through subtleties in our body language, facial expression and tone of voice. It is picked up subconsciously by those with whom we communicate. Worse than that, we communicate it to ourselves, and it seeps

into our performance. Doubt is the De-Motivator and all too often it prevents us from even trying.

We all suffer doubt occasionally, and its cure is always the same: proof. Proof that we are indeed talented enough to do what we set out to do. A proof doesn't need to be big to eliminate doubt. A series of little ones can be just as effective.

I keep a journal—a log—of accomplishments. Both small and large, because they all add up to reasons for believing in my abilities. It is especially important to log the little ones, because they are so easy to forget or overlook, and yet they carry tremendous weight when it comes to giving ourselves confidence.

You say, "I'm just starting out and have no accomplishments." That just means you're not looking in the right places. We all have successes, some of them may be found in different areas of your life. I often read in the *Wall Street Journal* about women, who after years as stay-at-home moms, return to the workforce in well-

paid management positions. They acquire these jobs by citing in their resumes the many skills and achievements they learned through their volunteer work. What talents are you racking up through your hobbies and leisure activities?

Sometimes proof comes to us by comparing ourselves to others. Simply ask yourself, "Out of all the people who have ever lived, how many have attained what I want?" The sheer numbers alone will often be all the proof you need.

When all else fails, fall back on faith. Some of the most successful people in the world had absolutely no proof that they could achieve their dreams. All they had was a strong desire and a belief in themselves. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step."

Robert Wilson is a popular motivational speaker. For more information see www.jumpstartyourmeeting.com. Email: robert@jumpstartyourmeeting.com

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