

LEVERAGE™



NEWS AND IDEAS FOR THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNER

We Are All Self-Employed

BY CLIFF HAKIM



In today's world, we are given one guarantee: We will eventually lose or leave our jobs, no matter how good our performance. No

one is exempt from the tidal waves of global change affecting every industry or the personal will to grow that leads us to seek new opportunities. In the past, we could afford dependence—working “for” an organization. Today, though, we must work “with” our organization, independently and interdependently, to continually enhance our abilities and our contributions to the whole. To do so, we must develop a “self-employed” attitude.

Having a self-employed attitude while working for an organization means believing, thinking, and acting independently—knowing yourself—and acting interdependently—collaborating with and contributing to others. When combined, these actions help you grow personally and add value to your organization and customers. You embrace the healthy tension inherent in attending to your own needs *and* serving others.

Each of us—staff, manager, executive—must possess a self-employed attitude if we want to thrive in today's world. An “employed” attitude—someone else will take care of me—no longer is an option. And taking personal responsibility for our own work lives lets us become more of who we are. As Margaret

Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers write in *A Simpler Way* (Berrett-Koehler, 1996), “We ourselves engage in change only as we discover that we might be more of who we are by becoming something different.” To be fully alive, we must grow through personal development—embracing our spirit, skills, values, and aptitudes—and through contribution to a larger whole.

Thriving While Surviving

People also want to be connected to their work as they and their organizations continue to change. After all, healthy work is important for both individual fulfillment and organizational sustainability. It is not enough for individuals or businesses to merely *survive*; we must *thrive*. In a world where transition is constant, we must ask ourselves the following questions—and take the time to find the answers: How do I create more meaningful work as I, my organization, and the world continue to change? What do I want? What do I bring to my organization? In answering these questions, keep in mind that thriving is about the little things you can do to make your work more robust, such as sharing a new idea with your coworkers, or asking someone else to share his or her ideas.

A self-employed attitude can be a win-win proposition, leading to personal growth as well as contributing to the organization as a whole. For example, a vice president at a management consultancy felt that his leadership position was not only misaligned with the firm's evolving needs, but also a poor match for his own talents and capabilities. His desire to thrive helped him rediscov-

er his strengths in the areas of business development and acquisition. In addition, he realized that the firm sorely needed these capabilities in order to compete in a crowded market. As a result, he created a new job description and business development plan. The “win” for the organization was the retention of a key player, but with a new focus that better suited the company's growth. On a personal level, the vice president felt more fulfilled and purposeful in his work.

How to Change

My hope is that you will adopt a “self-employed” attitude, not through fear and doubt, but through a spirit of promise and expectation. A self-employed attitude should not be a reaction to downsizing and the like, but a way of life suited to your personal growth and to our world of inspirational, voracious change (see “Leverage Points” on p. 3).

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor E. Frankl says, “[E]ach man is questioned by life . . . to life he can only respond by being responsible.” Each of us has to take responsibility for our own well-being, and for the well-being of our coworkers and our organizations. Ultimately, the purpose of a self-employed attitude is to make a difference in your life, so that you can go beyond yourself to make a difference in the lives of others. ▀

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