

**The New Job**  
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Ask any group of people how many of them have changed jobs in the last three years and the results will be impressive. If that group is also asked to contemplate the next three years, the number grows significantly. In the last twenty plus years we have become a nation of job changers. Whether it is due to downsizing, rightsizing, restructuring (or the current popular euphemism); the advent of new technology that keeps reinventing the marketplace; the evolution to a service driven economy; or some other social phenomenon, the fact remains that the industrial role model of the thirty year employee receiving his or her gold watch at retirement is a thing of the past. It is now predicted that people entering the workplace today will not only be changing jobs throughout their working life, but will also be changing careers several times over.

This leads to people having to deal with “The New Job” over and over again. A number of years ago I wrote an article that dealt with my observations of the four phases that “The New Job” progresses through to just become “The Job”. The reaction I got from people who read the article was interesting. Comments like “You must have been thinking of me when you wrote this” and “How did you know” popped up too many times to be coincidence. As I have shared the article a number of times over the years, or just described the four phases of “The New Job”, I have gotten many smiles and nodding of heads. While it is far from a scientific study, it has provided a simple validation that maybe there is something to this.

The first phase is the Novelty Phase. Everything is new and exciting, it's like Christmas morning with all the packages wrapped neatly under the tree. We revert to that seven-year-old ready to tear into it. You may hate your alarm clock with a passion, but the first day on the job you're up before the alarm sounds. People plan their routes to work with the precision of a Swiss watchmaker plying his trade. They think of alternates and plan for every contingency short of Armageddon. Since most times “The New Job” starts on a Monday, countless dry runs have been made over many a preceding weekend.

Upon getting to the ultimate destination, there is a delight in finding a parking place in the same area code as the office building. Everybody is smiling and happy. The vending machine not only has your favorite munchies, but there are three rows of them. The free coffee is gourmet blend, the copier actually works, and then somebody takes you to someplace nice for lunch - and they buy! It really is like Christmas morning, and it lasts about as long.

The next phase is the Wonderment Phase, which lasts a few days or weeks. It's again like Christmas morning when it's discovered that batteries were not

included, more than some assembly is required, and the talking doll won't shut up and it only speaks Chinese. The initial luster begins to strip away and reality starts to sink in. There are committees, reports, meetings, assignments, expectations, and relationships. Things are happening at a rapid pace. It's like going through a maze with something new at each turn. Remember going through the Fun House ride at the amusement park as a kid? You're enjoying the ride, but a little hesitant about what's coming next.

What's coming next is the Bewilderment Phase. When I initially wrote this article I also referred to the Bewilderment Phase in a little more vulgar manner. But in the age of political correctness, let's just call it the "Oh, Ka Ka Poo Poo" Phase. For many people "Oh, Ka Ka Poo Poo" becomes the usual way they begin both thoughts and phrases.

People both in and out of the organization expect you to know the answers, provide the information, and solve the problems. This was the stuff you were hired to do, isn't it? This is what dazzled them during the interview, and now it's time to produce!

Remember back when you were a child in school and didn't read the assigned chapter for homework. Of course who was then called on in class to answer a battery of questions even the author of the book couldn't handle? Remember the funny feeling in the pit of your stomach? Does that describe how your little tummy feels now during the workday?

The Bewilderment Phase is like jogging in quicksand. The effort is there but there is no progress being made. In fact the harder you work, the worse it gets – you're drowning! There is a mad search of the bookshelf to find a copy of The Peter Principle (people get promoted to their level of incompetence and then stay there). When it's found, you start reading it looking for similarities. People begin to question why they made the change in the first place; maybe the old job wasn't all that bad after all. They become very introspective and start talking to themselves, which evolves into muttering aimlessly. Work piles up on what was once a clean desk. It's not a pretty sight. Everything is totally out of sync.

It's not difficult to spot people in the Bewilderment Phase. They have the same look on their faces that first appeared on the cover of Life Magazine during World War II - the thousand yard stare of the Marine after weeks of jungle combat.

Then when it appears that all hope is gone, something happens. It doesn't happen in a massive rush, but begins as a trickle. It's the Enlightenment Phase. It takes the longest of the four phases to get through, and it can and usually occurs in a fragmented manner.

In a meeting someone asks a question, and you respond without having to think about the answer. And the answer is right on the money. A sensitive political situation develops and you work through it with diplomatic skills that would

humble the State Department. People start to ask your opinions on a variety of subjects, and marvel at your insight and knowledge. There are more things completed on your to do list than still to be done. There is a bounce to your step and a smile on your face. You're not quite ready to do the Gene Kelly dance scene in *Singing in the Rain*, but you're feeling pretty darn good.

The decision to take the new job is no longer met with a regular banging of your head against the wall. It is at this point that the "New Job" fades into the sunset. From now on it's the "Job".

While the four phases of the "New Job" are interesting and hopefully amusing, we need to apply the "So What?" factor to really gain some benefit. "So what do I gain from knowing about the four phases, and how can I use that knowledge?" We can use it in our own careers and to help our organizations address how new employees can better assimilate to new surroundings and a new job.

In our own careers we need to understand that there will be a transition, and it may not be smooth. The "New Job" is all about change, and change ain't always pretty. The realization that the four phases exist, and there is an Enlightenment Phase is important. The realization you are not alone, or someone else has also been on this journey is often all that is needed.

Most people who change jobs have done so with the benefit of a network. In fact most career counselors advocate networking as a critical element (if not the critical element) of a career search. Don't forget your network after landing the "New Job". When mired in the Bewilderment Phase it's nice to be able to call someone and ask advice on how to handle a situation or ask if they have seen the same thing before. Don't reinvent the wheel. If someone else has "been there, done that" - use it!

The network is also there for moral support in getting through the transition. Again in the midst of the Bewilderment Phase it is kind of difficult (not to mention career limiting) to walk into your boss's office and say something like ... "I just want you to know that I am very frustrated and am really questioning my competency because I just don't seem to be catching on, I think I made a mistake in accepting this job". You can however say that to someone in your network with whom you have a long-standing relationship and have developed a trust. Often just being able to talk through it with someone is all that is needed. In the "New Job" we begin to develop a new network relative to that company and its business operations. Add that network to your existing one and it creates a larger and even stronger network. While developing your new internal and external network, it may take time to know who to go to for what, or who to trust, or who are the influencers or decision makers. Use your existing network to help fill in the voids while developing that new part of your total network.

Another thing that can be done when in the Bewilderment Phase, or as preparation to avoid it, is to do a little self-assessment. As Human Resource professionals we are pretty good at looking at performance problems in others. Take that skill and direct it back at yourself. First of all identify the real problem or issue, and determine if it is really important. Is your big concern that you keep forgetting Wednesday is the day everyone goes out for pizza and you keep bringing your brown bag lunch? What happens? "I just put it in the refrigerator and eat it the next day." Then don't sweat the small stuff and get on with life.

If the nature of the problem is significant enough determine its root cause. Is that root cause something external to you? Is there a problem with how things are done or explained, or the systems and procedures used? Do you have all the tools to be successful? Once the root cause is identified develop an action plan to address it. Who do you need to work with, what resources do you need, how can you convince others to accept and endorse your ideas, how can you measure success, etc.?

The root cause may be internal. You may not have the skills that are required. Remember to use what I refer to as the Clint Eastwood School of Management approach. If Dirty Harry pointed his .44 magnum between your eyes and said "Go ahead make my day...can you really do it?" If the answer is no, there is a skill deficiency. Then figure out how to get the skill that is needed. Maybe it involves reading a manual or book, taking a seminar, college or technical course, or reaching out to people in your network to tap their skills and experience. If the answer is "yes" there is no skill deficiency. You then need to develop another course of action or just commit yourself to staying the course and making it work. The important thing in this process is to be honest with yourself. If the problem is with you, admit it and accept it and move forward to correct it.

As Human Resource professionals we can use an understanding of the four phases of the "New Job" to help our respective organizations succeed. Ask any senior executive what is the most challenging issue facing their company in the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and they will in one voice reply – getting and keeping talent.

The first six to twelve months a person is employed are the most critical for turnover. These are the first six to twelve months of what – the "New Job". In which of the four phases of the "New Job" are the seeds for turnover sown? Maybe some are sown in the Wonderment Phase, but primarily it's in the Bewilderment Phase. Granted some people jump from job to job for money, but I believe there needs to be some reason for people to want to leave. Happy people are less inclined to leave for the unknown than is someone with issues or problems (real or perceived).

Understanding the Bewilderment Phase is the first step to analyzing the reasons for turnover. Using this knowledge we can better structure our exit interviews.

When does most turnover occur, what is happening to the person at that stage, what doesn't happen that they are expecting, etc.? Better yet we can help our managers look for the signs of the Bewilderment Phase in their employees and look for them ourselves. The Bewilderment Phase manifests itself behaviorally. We know from basic people skills that when you acknowledge behavior change with someone they will tend to open up and talk. "You look a little down today, what's up?" "You seem distracted and quiet, are you ok?" "It seems like there is something bothering you, is everything ok?" The reason for this is that you have taken enough interest to address their feelings as a person and to reach out to their soul. "I want to be a person, and not a number". It's basic, but it works. This act of intervention can make the difference between retention and turnover. The earlier a problem is identified the greater the opportunity for resolution.

Sometimes just talking with a person about the four phases of the "New Job" is enough. The person who has hit the Bewilderment Phase needs to know there is an Enlightenment Phase. When that happens, you can see the look of someone who has mentally circled the wagons for the last battle suddenly seeing the cavalry riding over the hill to the rescue.

The "New Job" is all about change. Our knowledge of the four phases of the "New Job" helps us be in control of that change, and not the other way around. The more we know individually and professionally the better, and quicker, it becomes the "Job". And by being in control we can develop the "Job" to meet our own objectives for a "Career".