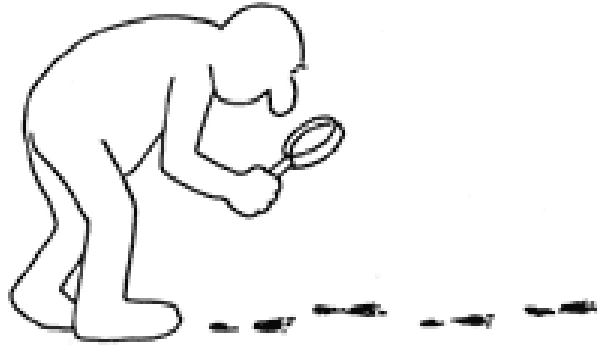

**BREATHING LIFE
INTO
YOUR CAREER**

STUART GLASS CONSULTING
EXECUTIVE RESOURCING ◊ CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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BREATHING LIFE INTO YOUR CAREER



By Stuart Glass

IN THE BEGINNING . . .

For those who don't know me, I am an ex-corporate banker, racing driver and ocean racer who has accumulated seven adult children, played competitive squash 38 years, and raises funds for charity by cycling in strange lands and in even stranger clothes. In my spare time, I have gained a reputation since 1985 as a search consultant and team builder in Institutional Investment. I also occasionally help people to have more enjoyable and fruitful careers. Why? Because:

- **“People are my passion”** – *which is why I do what I do.*
- **“People spend more time planning their holidays than their careers.”** *Because holidays are more fun, people often need help with career development.*
- **“80% of the UK working population is unfulfilled when leaving work each day”** *Author and commentator on workplace issues, Canon Rev David Prior*
- **“76% of the UK working population, given the chance, would do something different.”** *BBC programme, February 2004*
- **“We are programmed to climb the ladder of success. But is the ladder against the right wall?”** *Charles Handy, Author, Thinker, Economist and Management Guru*

So, if you think now might be a good time to review your career and consider your options, read on – I'm going to share with you some ways that can help you improve your career satisfaction and prospects.

IMPROVING YOUR CAREER SATISFACTION AND PROSPECTS

There are three questions that need to be answered:

1. What job would you really love to do?
2. What do you have to offer?
3. Which company would you like to work for?

It is vital to get *all three* answered properly – if you don't get all 'three ducks in a row', the result is likely to be (further) unfulfilment.

1. What would you really love to do?

Consider an example. A good friend in the investment industry, for whom I have acted as mentor, was unhappy in his job. The role seemed wrong, he was not 'in synch' with his boss, and he was tired and demoralised.

Over a six-month period, he looked at numerous options. One was to opt out altogether, which we agreed would be a huge waste of his talent. With another, he called me and said there was an opportunity of earning \$5 million in three years. We met that day and talked through the proposition. I asked him about the owner of the business, to whom he would report directly. Were his values the same as the owner's? Did he like, respect and trust his prospective boss? Money apart, would there be a continuing opportunity to learn and develop intellectually? Or would it be about as attractive as being sealed in a room with someone who writes greetings cards messages? And so on. My friend realised quickly that if you took away the lure of big money, the rest looked pretty unattractive.

Instead, I asked him to identify the person he most liked, trusted and respected in the industry – apart from me, obviously. Today, he contentedly works for that person, is highly valued and is rewarded accordingly.

From this story, two lessons emerge:

- Working for someone you like, trust and respect may be more important than barrow-loads of money.
- If your job does not allow you to use your talent, you will not release your potential and achieve job satisfaction, let alone have fun.

2. What do you have to offer?

The usual answer is: “It’s in my CV.” Sadly, almost all CVs state what you have done, not what you can do, and are shamelessly subjective. What a potential employer is interested in is your *Value Proposition*.

Many people are expert at presenting to a prospective client or customer the merits, or *Value Proposition*, of their organisation – products, performance, people, philosophy, process, etc. But can you do the same for yourself? Imagine you have 30 seconds to sell yourself to a prospective employer – what would you say? What are your Unique Selling Points (USPs)? What do you have to offer? What is *your* Value Proposition?

When I meet people to talk about an opportunity, I always try to drill down into their experience, to unearth their USPs. Usually these emerge when people talk about their notable achievements.

Let me provide an example. A friend from church was being made redundant. His employer, a product design consultancy, was short of work and he was facing the prospect of having to go it alone. He showed me a one-page flyer for his new business. It was so crammed with everything that he could do that it was difficult to read and understand; it was a ‘turn-off’ – a bit like the 8 page CVs I sometimes receive! However, there were some pictures of products on the flyer. So I asked him if they were his designs – which they were – and what was so good about them.

It was at this point we discovered how he should promote himself. As we went through each design, he explained how his creativity had substantially reduced production costs or increased sales. We had arrived at the essence of his Value Proposition: *In a competitive market, his skill could drive down costs and increase revenues – and he could prove it from case studies.*

So what is your Value Proposition? Have you worked out what you have to offer? Are you in the right job with your current employer? If not, ask your boss if you can change your role? If you can’t, you will have to move.

3. Which company would you like to work for?

If you have to move on, the choice is to 'go it alone' or find a new employer. For most, it is the latter.

I remember well one very able chap who knew exactly what he wanted to do and drew up a short list of five potential employers. The vital questions for him were:

- Will the organisation be around in five years time?
- To whom will I report?
- Will they have a job that will play to my strengths?

He already had contacts in all but one of the five and I had a relationship with the fifth. The one he joined was my client because they gave him the opportunity to do what he was good at – where he had expertise and plenty of opportunity to add value.

But there are two important questions he did not ask.

a) What are the character and values of the organisation?

It is vital to research and understand the culture of the organisation you target. A bad fit with your choice of employer can lead to misery - a mistake. **Cultural fit is crucial to a successful job.**

I firmly believe **a Company's Corporate Culture is dependent on the values of its leadership.** It is vital to look closely at the personality, character and reputation of the man or woman at the top. Does s/he lead by 'control and command' (putting fear into his subordinates), or does s/he lead by enabling and encouraging 'his/her' people.

Some years back at an industry conference, the head of one of my clients made a speech that was intended to represent not only the views of his own company but also those of his competitors.

The following morning, I was having a quiet breakfast, reading my Bible, when he came up behind me and asked whether he could join me. I knew something was on his mind and asked what it was. He wanted to know, honestly, how he had done the previous afternoon. He was

concerned that he had properly represented the interests of the whole community of which his firm was a part, not just his firm.

The point I am making is that he genuinely cared. I worked with his company for 14 years until he moved on and I can assure you that his values, especially the care and commitment he gives to colleagues and clients alike, permeated the whole business. It was a great place to work – both fun and friendly.

b) Does the company have a worthy purpose?

In the New Ways (charity) Spring 2002 Newsletter, there was an introduction from the editor, who also happened to be the Head of a global investment organisation's European operation. He quoted the great educator, Helen Keller*, who said: *“Many persons have the wrong idea of what constitutes true happiness. It is not attained through self gratification, but by fidelity to a worthy purpose.”*

(* see <http://www.hki.org/about/helenkeller.html>)

For all of us, surely the purpose of the company – what it does and why – is vital? After all, most of us like to believe that what we spend most of their waking hours doing is worthwhile.

Summary – When reviewing your career situation:

- **Work out what you would really love to do?**

Question your own assumptions. For example, ask yourself what you would do if you had just been told you had just five years left to live but had been given £20 million by way of compensation. Identify and consider the options. For expert professional help, go on a *“Whatever Next . . . ?”* AwayDay – see Annex E. I first went on an AwayDay in 2001, and in 2003 trained as an Associate.

- **Develop your Value Proposition and be clear how you will present it.**

Identify your true talents – what a potential employer will see as the real benefits of employing you – and be able to present honest examples to illustrate them.

- **Decide what sort of organisation you really want to work for.**

Pay proper regard to corporate leadership, purpose, culture and values.²

² See Annex B – What do we mean by Values?

WHAT ARE EMPLOYERS LOOKING FOR?

What *do* potential employers want from you? Two needs they all have are:

- ⇒ They need you to find out from them what they and their customers want. As no two employers are the same, getting to know the individual needs of each prospective employer beforehand is vital if you are to make an effective ‘pitch’.
- ⇒ They need relevant and accurate information about your Value Proposition. They don’t want to be bombarded with ‘blah’; they want effective communication of the whole truth and an understanding of their needs – *they want to know what you can do for them.*

PAY AND BENEFITS

1. *“People want bonuses way beyond what the market can bear – now and in the future”*

Quote from a Chief Executive, November 2002

Pay and Benefits should be directly proportionate to your contribution to the business that employs you.

If we are paid what we are worth but no more, then we are fair value; and, politics apart, as long as we continue to give value, we should have work. But if we seek more than we are worth, or fail to give value, sooner or later we will be classified as ‘cost-cutting candidates’.

2. *“In managing incentives in bear markets, primary factors for retaining talented people will be fun and life balance.”* *Quote from another Chief Executive, November 2002*

According to Scott Adams’ cynical cartoon character, Dilbert, *“We work to have enough money to enjoy the time we have when we aren’t working.”*

Contribution is not just a case of making or saving money. It is to do with your participative output to clients, colleagues and the company as a whole – and having fun and good fellowship.

And on the issue of life balance, would you prefer to have 25 days paid holiday or 50 days paid holiday for 90% of your current pay? And if you had 50 days holiday, would you be more productive, enthusiastic and energetic? Think about it.

Surely the point is: **Having fun, being appreciated, and doing something well should all be part of the benefits of a job.**

CONCLUSION

Is Now the Time to Review and Assess your Career?

Since 9/11, our world has been beset by uncertainties. For all of us, there must be readiness to change. Sticking our heads in the sand will not prepare us for what lies ahead.

Is now the time to find a clearer purpose, what you really want to do, and discover your true vocation which plays to all your strengths, and go forward with fresh conviction?

One way or another, there is change ahead. **Are you prepared?**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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ANNEX A

“Unless my people have absolute integrity in their work and present the whole truth, they will be fired.”
Chief Executive of a leading investment organisation

CHARACTERISTICS I SEEK WHEN INTERVIEWING SENIOR PEOPLE

- Good technical understanding of products, processes and people, as well as the market in which the candidate is to operate
- The ability to ‘connect’ with people at all levels
- Effective communication skills, including *listening and learning*, especially with clients/customers and colleagues
- Energy, enthusiasm and integrity
- Sensitivity
- Evidence of performance and delivering value to clients/customers and colleagues
- Clear career purpose and direction
- Cultural fit
- Special / outstanding qualities – what makes the candidate special
- Issues a potential employer will need to address before he appoints the candidate

ANNEX B

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY VALUES?

Values are about attitudes, and what people actually do, not what they say they do.

Whether things are going well or badly, most people I know want to work in a caring, sharing community. They like and need encouragement, appreciation, support and friendship. In this environment, respect is fostered, people are valued for the contribution they willingly make, and they are encouraged to play to their strengths.

In great teams – soccer, rugby, cricket, basketball, whatever – talented people have complementary skills and strengths. The same applies to great organisations.

ANNEX C

THE UK WORK / MISERY STATISTIC

Although between 76% and 80% of UK employees are unhappy in their work, the percentage is lower amongst the 'well educated'. Nonetheless, I still meet many people who are unhappy in their jobs – and I have helped some of them.

Let me give you one example. There was a very bright, Oxbridge-educated City executive in her late 20s who was earning well into six figures, had a smart flat and car. She worked a 14 hour day, and often worked at weekends. Before she left for work each morning, she was physically sick. She was locked into a lifestyle that gave her money but no time for friends and relationships. She had reached the point where she thought there was no way out.

With help, she realised that being highly paid and having smart clothes, cars, etc did not bring happiness. Rather, she worked out what her values were and what was important in life. So, she sold up, paid off the mortgage and left the City. She has now built a new business outside the City with a friend, is earning substantially less than before but is doing something of value for the community at large, gains a great deal of satisfaction, and has time to enjoy life with family and friends.

ANNEX D

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF EXCELLENT COMPANIES

If we look at really excellent companies, where the people are fulfilled and have fun, there are some common characteristics:

- Clear and worthwhile purpose
- Inspiring, listening and learning leadership
- Talented, supportive, motivated and fulfilled employees
- Excellent products and services
- People play to their strengths
- Strong team ethos – based on positive, professional relationships from top to bottom in which all employees are participative, sharing knowledge and learning from each other
- Quality in depth
- Technical ability
- Enthusiasm and commitment
- Low staff turnover
- Benefits tailored to employees' contribution, personalities and life needs
- High morale
- Consistent profitability and growth

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“Whatever Next...?”

- ★ AN APPROACH ★ A PROCESS ★ A DAY IN THE COUNTRY ★ DISCOVERING THE PURPOSE ★
- ★ TELLING AND LISTENING TO PEOPLE’S STORIES ★ RESTORING HOPE ★ A COURSE ★
- ★ DISCOVERING THAT WE ARE FREE TO CHOOSE ★ A PROGRAMME ★ A BOOK ★
- ★ A NEW ATTITUDE TO LIFE ★ UNCOVERING CLUES ★ A NEW WAY OF THINKING ★

Context

“80% of the UK working population is miserable when leaving work”
Statistic quoted by author and commentator on workplace issues, Rev David Prior.

“76% of the UK working population, given the chance, would do something different.”
BBC programme, February 2004.

“We are programmed to climb the ladder of success. But is the ladder against the right wall?”
Charles Handy, Author, Thinker, Economist and Management Guru

Quotes

“ “Whatever Next...?” is about taking responsibility for your own life and making better choices.”
Jeremy Clare, Founder of “Whatever Next...?”

“ “Whatever Next...?” is trusting in the boat getting you there when you have no oars.”
Liz Farr, Trainer, Career Coach and Counsellor who helps the terminally ill.

“ “Whatever Next...?” is taking time out for oneself, to start discovering, with several others, what it is that one really wants to do in life, and beginning to realise that the seemingly impossible is actually attainable.”
Stuart Glass, Search Consultant, and occasional Mentor-Coach and “Whatever Next...?” Associate

“ A “Whatever Next...?” AwayDay is about learning to let go . . . being able to tell one’s story in safety . . . going through change . . . allowing things to happen . . . pointing to something new.
Harriet Grace, “Whatever Next...?” Associate

“I’m here (at a “Whatever Next...?” Away Day) to learn how to enable people to take a pause and find rest.” *Guy Rothwell, Teacher, Minister, Pastor, ex HR Director*

“ On a “Whatever Next...?” AwayDay, one discovers the value of a constructive break.”
Phil Murray, Founder of GAP Activity Projects for UK School Leavers.

“ “Whatever Next...?” is the best thing I’ve been on, bar none, and I’ve been on a few! It’s [now] part of what I now want to do.” *Tracey Bovingdon, CEO Strictly Education plc*

““Whatever Next...?” has given me the confidence to take control over my career (and my life), and I have been walking around with a smile on my face all day today.
Anon, UBS Investment Banking, in an email the day after a “Whatever Next...?” Day

“ “Whatever Next...?” gives you the opportunity to discover answers to your own questions.”
Jeremy Clare, Founder of “Whatever Next...?”