

## CLOCKING OFF

Have you ever wondered what happened to longer service awards? Time was when they were prized possessions, tangible proof of loyalty, a lifelong commitment to one company and the reward for a job well done. I can remember my aunt being presented with her gold service watch from her employer, ICI, after completing 40 years of service. It was a momentous occasion, one that was filled with celebration, congratulations and accolades to her achievement. Her family was undoubtedly proud, certain in the knowledge that she had earned her reward and retirement. Yet such 'commitment' and 'loyalty' to a company would be like career suicide today. Whereas years ago a career was built around finding a stable, well-paying job and seeing it through to the bitter end, career stability and success today have a complete new face.

According to the US labour department, today's workers will have 10 to 14 jobs before their 38<sup>th</sup> birthday - most will change jobs every two years. Most workers will not evaluate money as the number one motivator when considering prospective employers; instead they will look for work/life balance and enjoyment. As a result not only has the bottom fallen out of the retirement gold watch business but our whole understanding of what a successful career represents has been turned on its head!

Gone are jobs for life. Companies are under too much pressure to be lean and flexible – which means constantly changing shape, size and form through downsizing, retrenchments etc. As a result employees have taken the pro-active response and are constantly on the look out for new job possibilities. Like soothsayers and mystics they see the writing on the wall long before it appears.

Oddly, however, not everyone is reading the signs of change in the job market so accurately. When perusing CVs I still get comments like 'I think he's a job hopper,' 'looks unstable' and 'what's wrong with him if he keeps leaving his employer?' They clearly haven't worked out that job-hopping is more a norm now than an anomaly and makes perfect sense in today's context. In fact it can be a good thing, especially if it's a way of maintaining passion for your work. Frequent changes keep your learning-curve high and your challenges fresh. Wouldn't you rather be employing the person who is seeking more of a challenge and wants to innovate and contribute, as opposed to the one who bides his/her time, doing the same old stuff in the same old way because change scares the pants off them? The world is more dynamic, fluid and transformational than it has ever been – so it makes sense that people are as well. Job-hopping should be expected from young people because it takes time to find your personal fit in work. Clean shaven, fresh and eager graduates from university need to take time to sample what's out there in order to know where they are likely to best suit and where is likely to best suit them – the right profession, the right company, the right position. Frequent job-hopping, coupled with high performance allows you to build a professional network much faster than someone who stays in one position for a long period. And from the employer's point of view, whilst it's true that job-hopping may benefit the employee more than the employer, you can't afford to write the job-hopper off because in a market where you are having a hard time attracting young talent, it's normally the talented ones hopping. You just have to throw out a few carrots to make sure they hop your way.

The secret with job-hopping is to make sure that your CV always reflects that you made a significant contribution wherever you went. It's not about how long you were there, but rather what you achieved. You also need to be able to show natural progression. Moves should make sense. No one is interested that you had to move because you didn't get on with the managing director, have no attention span or that your projects failed. A good CV writer can make it clear you had some sort of success and that your level of success increased as did your level of responsibility with each new job. At the same time, I think employers need to take into consideration the length of time a person stays in each position – whether moving from one job to another is sporadic or constant. If a person stays at a couple of jobs for a reasonable period each (say 2- 3 years), then this is less to worry about than if the longest period the person stayed was 6 months – in that case a pattern may be emerging, what might be called the butterfly effect, flitting from one place to another without leaving much of a mark.

The new vision of stability is not a house, two kids and a pension. Young people can hardly afford to buy a house. Trying to get a foot in the property market is like trying to climb a ladder with one leg. One-child families are on the increase because couples just can't afford two and there are no more pensions. That's the reality.

Key values today are time and relationships, specifically enough time to forge and enjoy those relationships. Stability has come to mean knowing you can find work that is fun and allows you to accomplish those values, even if it's only for a finite period before moving on to the next choice and the next challenge. The stable people are those who can consistently manage to match themselves up with work they enjoy and that pays the bills. And if at any time they have need of a gold watch, they'll take themselves off to American Swiss and buy one.

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