

Options

we all have them

It's amazing, when you start talking to people, to learn how many of them live their lives as if it was dictated to them.

By Dr Joan Marques

They go through the motions without really thinking if they enjoy what they're doing. If you would ask them about their work life, many would say things like, "A job is a job, and that's never fun..."

Fortunately, that picture has started to change in the past few years. But not for as many working people as it should. There are still too many people who dread their daily activities, and still too few who ensure that their job is more than just a means of paying the bills. There are also too few people who see themselves as individuals who are more than just the title they hold on the job. I have heard more often than once that people have been programmed by 'the system' to live 'that way.' I assume that 'the system' stands for society, and 'that way' for going through the motions without giving it much thought. For thinking would cause questioning, and questioning might lead to change.

Changing perceptions

As a professor in business and management related courses in higher education, and a consultant who has had the opportunity to experience multiple work environments in multiple countries, I feel blessed with the advantage of having acquired sufficient comparison material, and with that, a lot of food for thought. I can see how different societies have developed their own unwritten standards and rules to which their members adhere. Oftentimes this adherence happens without a second thought. In some societies, for instance, the entrepreneurial spirit is encouraged early on, while in others people are trained to envision a career in management at a major corporation. For each of these societies, the picture that is painted as the final goal represents the dominant perception of 'success.'

This, then, means that changing one's perceptions regarding work and the available options one has, will require a shift in one's ideas about success. Take, for instance, the US society where the majority of people have learned that success equals becoming a manager in a major corporation. How many of these aspiring managers really think about drastic alternatives when problems arise at work? How many of them consider starting their own venture, or doing something in an entirely different field than the one they were initially prepared for?

Many members of the workforce, without realising it, consider it 'loss of face' if they change career directions, especially when they're still in midlife. Some plainly refuse to entertain that option, because they have an extremely hard time imagining





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an alteration of professional direction. They have adopted the mindset of their current career as a pertinent given and do not allow themselves to expand their views outside of that mental boundary. The result is that many of them end up frustrated in a work environment that makes them unhappy for one reason or another, but that they nevertheless hold on to, simply because they refuse to enlarge their horizons. If these individuals would ever get laid off, they would prefer to remain unemployed, and thus financially squirming, instead of exploring drastic alternatives.

Many people seem to have an aversion to revolutionary steps in their lives. In fact, the entire word 'revolution' has been given a wrongfully negative connotation in the past few decades. So, many people don't want to be revolutionaries. They want to stay as close to their comfort zone as possible. A comfort zone, in career perspectives, could be seen as the area for which a person was initially trained.

Change is healthy

Yet, I have seen many people, which I consider highly successful, who have changed careers more than once. One of my previous professors literally lived revolutionarily. In his younger years, he was a high-ranked military officer. At some point he went back to school and obtained a PhD. After his retirement from the service, he became a professor in leadership, which is how I met him. Yet, at that time, he was preparing himself for his third and probably last career: becoming a pastor of a small congregation in Northern California. The various careers that

this man held had not only broadened his perspectives mentally, but also geographically, as they led him to various states in the US as well as some countries outside. Needless to say, this man had a very open approach toward change in his life. In one of his interesting life reflections he revealed that the changes in his careers never went fearlessly. Change is always somewhat intimidating. You can always ask yourself a million questions if you actually want to stay where you are. You can continue wondering if you will not regret giving up something that at least brought some security in your life. But that's exactly where most working people make a crucial mental mistake, because security is an illusion. Employers, now more than ever, will only keep employees as long as they have a use for them. Loyalty has become an obsolete term. And while there is an emerging trend toward workplace spirituality, it cannot be expected from employers who have to compete in a fast-changing global market, to hold on to workers that they don't need anymore.

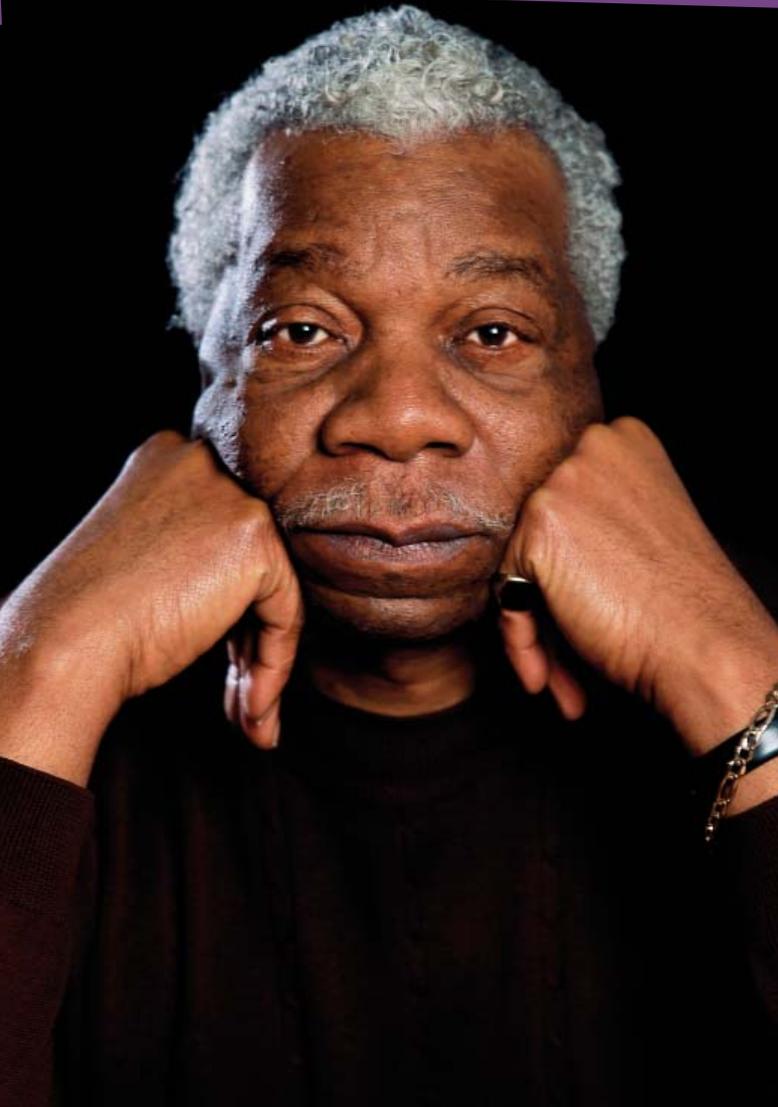
Keep your options open

So, what is the ultimate message in this article? Consider your options. All of them. Even those that seem ridiculous at first sight. A career change is not the end of the world. You are not your current title or position. You're much more. Your employer is not the ultimate source of security. You are not a bad person if you try to reinvent yourself. On the contrary! You are a bad person if you don't! Not trying to reinvent yourself will get you sidetracked and will leave you behind when all others have moved on.

Try to adopt new mindsets. Start with seeing yourself as an independent source that works with your employer instead of for him or her, because that will help you shift your perspective from victimised to equal. Next, start exploring your inner feelings about your work. Do you like it, or are you just there because of 'security'? If you agree with the last part, consider what you would really like to do, and then evaluate how you can actualise that. Even if you don't apply the changes right away, it is never wasted when you mentally start preparing yourself for a leap. It will leave you less perplexed when your current employer breaks the news to you that your job has been outsourced, or that your department has become obsolete.

Learn. Think. Practice. Listen. Read. Talk to people. Look around! The world is a fascinating place, and the options are there in legions, if only you are willing to see them. Get rid of the blinders that you acquired up till now. It's time for a paradigm shift: nothing is embarrassing, as long as you can live with it, and as long as our earth and its inhabitants are not getting harmed by it. Life is too short to hold on to unrewarding practices. Your work should be fun and not just a job. Think of Confucius' advice: "If you love what you do, you never work a day in your life." Start living that. Now.

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About the Author

Joan Marques is author of *The Awakened Leader: One Simple Leadership Style that Works Every Time, Everywhere*, and co-author of *Spirituality in the Workplace: What it Is; Why it Matters, How to Make it Work for You*. Visit her at www.joanmarques.com.



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