

INTRODUCTION



I have met professionals wanting to create quantum shifts in their careers but have found that they often lack a language to articulate their striving; and a system to make it happen. To my surprise, I also found that the more *successful* the professional, the more he needs these, because success creates both the options and the confidence to embark into unknown but potentially exciting territories.

Michael Martin Hammer, one of the founders of the management theory of Business Process Re-engineering believes that one cannot create 'what could be' until one understands 'what is'. I endorse his view that a lack of understanding about the most fundamental career building factors is the first hurdle in creating a career.

In Part I of this book, we spend time understanding the **five great myths in career building** and the implicit assumptions on which they live. This will give you both an energetic, fresh way of looking at your own career 'as is' and the desire to figure out newer and more scientific paths to envision and realize the 'what could be'.

In Part II, we shall explore a new, fascinating career building model that I have created, one I call Enlight. Enlight is the world's first systematized articulation of how one can build one's career to achieve one's dreams and potential in a myth-free way. And because life cannot be fragmented and compartmentalized from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m., you will also learn how to simultaneously synthesize and integrate your vital relationships, family life, inner life and joy. Welcome to the journey.

Before we discuss the myths

The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie – deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth, persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic. Belief in myths allows the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.

John F. Kennedy

Career is normally understood as a course of successive job situations. It is an occupation in which one may remain and advance. One can have a corporate career or a musical career, but most frequently career involves a working existence: the series of jobs or positions by which one earns one's bread.

The term 'career' is also understood as a sequential and developmental process which spans the entire working

life of the individual and includes the methods and means of realizing one's potential in achieving life goals. In other words, career building involves making choices – deliberate or implied – that impact outcomes in work life and which together lead towards achievement of career objectives.

If career building ages may be named, one may name three ages: the Fate Age, the Qualification Age and the Corporate Age. The Fate Age lasted till about 1900. In relatively static societies, many professionals would often inherit a single lifelong position (a place or role) in the work force, and the concept of an *unfolding* career had little or no meaning. Such periods of relative tranquility in the continuation of an accepted career marked the years of the Fate Age. Whatever was given to my parents became my fate for the rest of my life. If my father was a carpenter, I too would become one. It was the natural, unquestioned, norm. I might, at best, become more successful or proficient in the art or sometimes might even end up becoming an embarrassment for my father! If my father was an actor, I too would join the entertainment industry. If he was a soldier, or if he was in business, I would similarly emulate him. In the same vein, sons of the middle class educated elite tried to match their fathers' scholastic achievements as well as they could. While government employees ensured that their sons too were bequeathed with that same prized security that came with being in the government's employment. Fate, in short, virtually

decided careers if one were a male; women however, were courteously exempt from any such onerous choices.

With the spread of modern education, and especially after the paradigm-shifting social innovation of the textbook, choosing a profession got delinked from one's family profession. The Qualification Age had arrived. The idea was to get yourself the greatest possible academic qualification, insuring you of the very best that life has to offer. The most sought after qualifications, at the start of this period in our history were that of an engineer and a doctor. With rapid advances in science, innovations in technology and increase in global trade and commerce, qualifications in management and information technology were added to the possibilities. However, even in this era, a career was made once a person acquired one of any of these degrees. The elite in the professions were the ones who went to the most renowned colleges. For instance, IIT and IIM graduates were considered clearly superior to those who went to other colleges. However, the fundamental assumption was the same: that once a prestigious qualification was acquired, one's career has been taken care of forever!

As a fallout, books that detailed vocational options for students arriving at educational milestones like matriculation, higher secondary, and graduation, proliferated. Career counselling in this age was nothing

but vocational guidance. Once a vocation was chosen, the chosen career was there to be built.

We were in the Qualification Age till about the 90s, but we still believe that career is all about choosing the first job. Even when we observe professionals choosing careers removed from their qualifications – finance professionals working in human resources, or corporate professionals directing movies – we still vigorously debate about the choice of an educational course, as though our entire life hung on that choice. This is one of the myths of career building.

After the Qualification Age, the third age of career building may be said to have dawned – the Corporate Age. Many companies today show a road map on their web sites showing different designations or roles that a new professional might go through if he grows in that organisation. Not surprisingly, this is called the career road map, implying that everyone who wishes to build his or her career could or should follow the default road map. Career road maps are determined by the organization's internal dynamics, and not by what professionals want in their careers. A professional who cannot meet the demands of the organization is obviously considered as a misfit and deemed a failure. This has spawned a new variation of career development, which can be loosely called executive or leadership development.

Advice on Career Building

Despite the evolution of career concepts in the different ages, scientific literature on career building is practically absent. Self-help books are the most widely patronized source of information. Most of the self-help books written by authors like Dale Carnegie, Stephen Covey, Anthony Robbins, etc., contain advice on how to succeed in life, not just work life. These self-help books mostly deal with challenges faced by a professional, including relationships, finding one's purpose, understanding oneself better, enabling better decision-making, and explaining aims, goals and objectives. These books are rather useful to help one deal with problems that one faces from time to time in one's life – the loss of a job, divorce, the death of a loved one, and a variety of other emotional upsets and stressors. The advice is obviously generic, and may or may not be related to work life.

Another popular source of career building inspiration and tips are present in the biographies of superachievers. Especially, biographies of business achievers such as Sachero Honda of Honda, Akio Morita of Sony, Tom Watson of IBM, Larry Ellison of Oracle, or Ricardo Semler of SEMCO show glimpses of how much one can accomplish in one's work life. As this advice has emerged out of the experience of these leaders, most of the advice is subjective and contextual. However, in the absence of scholarly literature on career building, individuals hungry

for success have devoured this success literature in their search for strategies and formulae to help them refashion their careers.

Despite a lack of advice on work life, whatever little is available on career building has been extracted from the self-help books. Earlier the focus of these self-help books was on the virtues of thrift and industriousness, and building character. These then slowly changed and became therapeutic. Therapeutic implied that the one conferring with the book had a problem that needed fixing. This created a stigma. Today, the trend seems to have shifted: self-improvement has become less like therapy and more like physical training – stigma-free, beneficial for anyone. ‘It’s a lifestyle now,’ says Anthony Robbins, a motivational speaker. ‘It’s gone from being the thing somebody did when they have a problem to the thing you do if you’re a peak performer.’

Today, publishing self-improvement books alone is a US \$ 600 million-a-year industry worldwide. A market study conducted by the research firm Market Data Enterprises in 2003 shows that the annual turnover of the self-improvement industry is a whopping US \$ 3.0 billion a year in the US alone. Motivational seminars, CDs, special training sessions, books and e-learning make significant contributions to the total turnover. Aided by mega-marketing and a growing acceptance in the mainstream, authors like Stephen Covey, Anthony Robbins and John

Gray are amassing fortunes that rival those of Hollywood moguls. As the simple world of lasting marriages, sequential career paths and comforting religious beliefs got replaced by dysfunction and doubt, people have sought a new compass. Unknown to them, these self-help books have become the largest source of advice on life in general.

Myths of Career Building

However, some of the advice has spilled into the area of career building, such as advice about setting career goals or the advice to learn from mistakes. Some of the advice is indirect, others are direct. Some are appropriate in parts; some are irrelevant. The advice is seldom challenged, and consequently some of the unchallenged prescriptions have become ‘rules and maxims’ that unknowingly impact our career decisions and actions. In other words, they have become universally prevalent ‘beliefs’, or ‘myths’.

We need to unravel these myths because myths are like implicit models – a framework of built-in beliefs, assumptions and rules – that we use to take action, or compel us to arrive at conclusions. Myths such as – ‘Identify the success factors of your career’ – compel professionals to look for those success factors and try to build them into their work-lives lifelong. Or the implicit model – ‘Amass information to take better career decisions’ – compels students and their parents to scour

for information to make the right choice of course even as the student clears the ninth grade in school. Or, on an altogether different but tragic track, bachelors remain as confirmed bachelors because they never have enough information to marry.

As human beings blessed with a discerning mind, our choices are governed either by explicit or implicit models. Pragmatists may rebel against the idea of having an explicit model to take career actions, proclaiming that they do not need models to lead their lives. But as Keynes writes, 'A practical man is a prisoner of some defunct theorists'. If we do not have explicit models, we are driven by implicit models. Governed by implicit models, a practical man takes actions either to gain short-term benefits, or to avoid immediate pain. Later he wonders why he is not happy, or not successful, or why he has not realized his awesome potential.

Uncovering implicit models is therefore the first step in building one's career. We shall therefore first spend time in deconstructing them, identifying some root assumptions and finding which ones are useful. Only after we can unlearn the baggage that we are carrying in our heads, can we digest anything new in career building.

Since there are more than two thousand self-help books published globally every year, it is impossible to cover all the myths exhaustively. When I reviewed the most popular

books on career development, we found that each self-help book author names a factor differently. For instance, Stephen Covey's mantra of 'Begin with end in mind' is conceptually similar to Napoleon Hill's 'Define chief aim'. This enables one to club myths into one category, and evaluate that category.

I have discovered five popular myths that govern the actions of professionals while taking career actions and decisions. The next five chapters will explore these five myths that govern your career actions and decisions significantly.

Demystifying them will not only help you to understand the dynamics of a myth but will also help you to understand the realistic limitations of the myth. While on the one hand it will help you to use the myth wherever relevant, on the other hand it will enable you to ask more relevant questions that the myth has not shed light on.

In every myth we shall understand its current usage. We shall then demystify the myth and later understand how it is useful in parts. Later at the end of the chapter, we shall understand how successful people have debunked them.

In Chapter 6, Part I, I shall summarize the structural flaws in the five myths of career building and the necessity of having a framework of building a career.

Chapter 1

Myth 1: Set Career Goals

Setting goals and working on them has been a formula for career success, used by all professionals. The goals can either be related to an achievement or it may be a monetary goal. Another way to find a goal is to find the true purpose of your life. However, most of the methods of setting goals are useful for unskilled professionals – found mostly in the sports and entertainment professions. Multiskilled professionals working in corporates find it difficult or impossible to use this myth.

Chapter 2

Myth 2: Plan and Prepare for Achieving Goals

After goal setting, this is probably the most popular strategy for career building. Popular ways to plan and prepare to achieve career goals include: using a positive self-belief, the power of creative visualization, and do-or-die will power. Another potent advice that one often gets is to make informed decisions.

Nowadays, there is also the proclivity to seek mentors. Mentors are usually senior professionals from the same industry, often within the same organisation, sometimes trained in basic psychological concepts. They offer the wisdom gained from years of experience to enable professionals to guide their career. As they work in the same organisation, their advice is mostly organisation-

specific. In many situations, external executive coaches are the biggest source of advisors, especially in western countries.

Chapter 3

Myth 3: Learn from Mistakes

As mistakes are inevitable, professionals are advised to be optimistic in the face of failures, and learn from them. Another advice is to course-correct all the time, implying that any reasonably intelligent person should use failure as a feedback and accordingly course-correct. However, due to certain unique characteristics of career events, course-correction is not only difficult, but impossible as well.

Chapter 4

Myth 4: Identify Success Factors, Understand Yourself, and Bridge the Gap

A favourite amusement of professionals is to try to know what it takes to succeed in one's career. Each self-help writer discovers different factors to explain the possibilities, as he has seen it. It is an endless list of factors. Once a professional understands what it takes to succeed, it becomes imperative to understand oneself to know what factors one possesses. Then to fill the perceived gaps becomes an imperative for career building. These professionals become lifelong learners.

Chapter 5

Myth 5: Learn to Use Relating, Teaming and Networking Skills

That superior technical knowledge, or raw intelligence alone do not bring career success is now a given, but in earlier times, the idea that success was composed of many elements was only just starting to be researched. In claiming that people and social skills – the skills of relating, teaming and networking – could make all the difference, Myth 5 effectively popularized the idea of emotional intelligence, decades before it was established as a fact in academic psychology.