

Chapter 3

Career Satisfaction: The Elusive and Essential Ingredient of the Right Move

Secret: The right move is not necessarily “up.”

Career Satisfaction: Why It Matters

Career satisfaction is a critical but often overlooked ingredient of happiness and well-being. Defining the ideal job, exploring career options, and making the right decisions for your life begin here. If you are not happy with your work, you cannot have a truly successful career, no matter how hard you work or how much money you make.

For many executives whose career decisions have not been guided or influenced by considerations of career satisfaction and who find themselves dissatisfied with their success, the right move may be in any direction, not just up the ladder they no longer enjoy. The right job may entail a different kind of move; personal career satisfaction is essential to making that right move.

A great career is no accident. It's more than wishing, hoping, or serendipity. Whether seeking your 1st, 2nd, or 20th chance at an extraordinary career, it begins with priorities. Priorities provide a clear vision of what you want and where you are headed.

Many people have detailed lists of what they are looking for in a mate. Yet when asked to provide a similarly detailed list of the char-

acteristics of their ideal job, they rely on clichés. This is a mistake. Numerous studies show that a good fit between the person and the job leads to career satisfaction, stability, and success. Defining the causes and sources of career satisfaction will put you on the right path to attaining it.

For example, a list of ideal job essentials might include a company whose mission is to improve the health of customers; an opportunity to build a new division; an aggressive and clear strategic plan for the company; an explicit succession plan for becoming president; a commute of under one hour; no more than 25 percent travel; an action-oriented, nonbureaucratic environment; a team environment; and a management team filled with people with advanced degrees.

A litigator at a major San Francisco law firm is the rare person (and certainly the rare lawyer and litigator) who loves her work. She's not an aggressive sort who thrives on combat. She wears her adversarial role lightly but surely. When I asked why she enjoys her work, she replied, "I don't do it for the money."

Although she is well compensated and enjoys the financial rewards, it's not what motivates her. "On the bad days, there's not enough money to make up for it, and on the good days, the money is irrelevant." She has found work that satisfies her own needs and goals. Her satisfaction is a major factor in her success and happiness.