

## If you keep on going the way you are, you will miss the road to your future

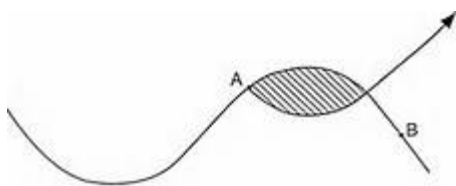
Margaret Beaton 22 September 2013

The thought that 'you will miss the road to your future' is taken from Charles Handy's great book *The Empty Raincoat*.

Among the many gems in *The Empty Raincoat*, Handy explores one of the paradoxes of being successful. What helped you to get to where you are today is most unlikely to be what will keep you there in the future, let alone drive you to greater heights.

Central to how and why this paradox applies to all you is his famous sigmoid curve. This curve (in the original diagram used by Charles Handy) shows time, i.e. your life, moving from left to right mapped against your level of achievement on the vertical axis.

### The road to your future



Source: Handy (1994, p. 51)

On the left your work career starts, often experimentally or in a faltering way, hence the initial dip. Then as you get into a groove your performance and job satisfaction rise over the years – until you start approaching the zenith.

The top of the first curve is the time when you have maxed out in your current role. When the ingredients of your success are no longer as relevant to your work situation. When these ingredients reflect reasons for past success, not future.

This happens to all of us. And to products. And organisations. Indeed nations. Luckily, as Handy puts it, there is life and success beyond the first curve.

### When to start working on your second curve

If you want to avoid the inevitable decline associated with clinging to curve one, then the time to start planning your career move into curve two is at point 'A' – and not when you are over the top and into decline at point 'B'. You're much more likely to have the necessary energy and resources at 'A' that will have dwindled by the time you reach 'B'. When you are staring into the abyss.

Starting off into your new life-career stage will, like the first time around, be fraught with uncertainty, trial and some error – hence the initial dip during the hatched period of time. These struggles are necessary for ultimate success as you strive to find the path to your next peak. And as you transition from the old way to the new and establish your second curve. This is a time for creativity; it can't be rushed. It will be uncomfortable as you forsake the known and exchange its security for the challenges and excitement of the future.

To change in this way requires **foresight and courage**. You will need encouragement from those close to you and the support of your current organisation and peers to help you manage uncertainty and **fear**. Succession planning is the key to a happy and smooth transition.

## The road to your future is getting shorter

The digital economy had not been invented when Handy wrote The Empty Raincoat in 1994, just 20 years ago. His prescience is born out by the rate of change we experience today. The road to your future is getting shorter as new organisations form and new types of job are created. The accelerating rate of change is shrinking everyone's sigmoid curve.

Very few of the most common jobs for young people today existed 10 years ago. The same is true for mature individuals, as I wrote for example in an earlier post *New economy jobs for older lawyers*. This phenomenon applies to all of us in all jobs and in all organisations.

## Do you need to begin now?

If you can't see your current role unfolding positively over the next five to 10 years it's time to prepare for your second curve now. Here's how:

- + Set your mind to the fact that you're at point 'A' on your curve. This is a notional point in your life-career; it is several years before you reach your peak.
- + Plan for your re-invention and make sure you steer your career decisions with **no regrets**.
- + Prepare yourself for living with ambiguity in the next few years as you move into your next curve. It's all up from there.

If you enjoyed reading this post you may also find these insightful:

- + **Are you ready, willing and able to change?**
- + **Could this be you?**

And for a brilliant synopsis of Handy's masterpiece you need go no further than this **review** by Jan Fabry.

*This post was written by Dr Margaret Beaton, a director of Beaton Executive Coaching and Beaton Research + Consulting. You can also find Margaret on LinkedIn.*