

Run 'You & Co' as a business

Whatever type of job you hold, in today's times you have to run 'You & Co' as a business. Whether you feel secure as a senior executive (this not always an oxymoron), a middle manager climbing the shaky rungs of a corporate ladder, a SMB owner-manager, a partner in a professional services firm, or a freelance consultant, all the evidence points to the importance of doing your job as though you are in business for yourself.



As William Bridges so aptly put in his great book *JobShift*, "Today the idea that *You've got to look after your own career prospects, nobody else is going to* has to be taken a step further, *You had better be not only taking care of your own future, but also looking after yourself as though you were self-employed.*" Writing in 1994, Bridges emphasised his own analysis with a blunt statement by an out-placement consultant: "You have to see yourself as a business".

This post reminds us why the need to look after yourself as though you were self-employed is now omnipresent in the workplace and, if you are *not* doing so already, where and how to begin running your career as your own business.

Look after yourself as though you were self-employed

Earlier this year the New York Times published *What Hollywood Can Teach Us About the Future of Work*, a fabulous article showing why 'More of us will see our working lives structured around short-term, project-based teams rather than long-term, open-ended jobs.' There are many reasons for this trend that has been happening for more than 20 years. It is now reaching a tipping point with more than 40% of all jobs forecast to be essentially freelance, like all the people on a Hollywood set, by 2020.

The idea of looking after yourself as though you were self-employed applies to all of us who work, irrespective of the nature of our work or the status of our employment. It applies because thinking and acting this way gives you self-confidence, obliges you to be self-reliant, and creates opportunities for mobility. These opportunities may be vicarious, i.e. up in your current organisation or promotion into another organisation. Or they may be literal, through development and growth as a self-employed person – whether in a tech start-up, a conventional SMB, or as a consultant.

We all know that change is the new normal. I believe we should all think of change as welcome, not to be denied or resisted. Change refreshes, stimulates, and brings vitality and opportunity, like the seasons of the year. Change is often unexpected, so you must be prepared; it's too late to start when change is happening to you. Adjusting to change is insufficient; you can and should make the changes happen. Learn to take charge, just like a self-employed person. Run 'You & Co' as your business, using William Bridges' words.

Begin by thinking like a marketer

Savvy marketers know that spotting under-served markets or unmet needs are usually the most promising places to find their biggest opportunities, especially if you do so before others. Organisationally, you may prefer to think in terms of 'things that need doing' or 'problems to be solved'. Consider your organisation as a market, i.e. a group of current and prospective customers who want to get their needs met.

William Bridges set out five clear steps for you to follow in his book *Creating You & Co.: How to Think Like the CEO of Your Career*. For your convenience, I have summarised them.

Step 1: Start by analysing yourself to identify what distinctive knowledge and skills you have *and* what you feel passionate about (remember the *hedgehog principle!*). Get an objective, close friend to help and keep

you honest. Consider what you really want (what truly motivates you), your abilities (what you do very well), what activities suit you best (your temperament), and your assets (the combination of your particular qualifications, skills and experience). Having taken stock of yourself, proceed to Step 2.

Step 2: This involves a ‘market survey’: Who are your ideal internal or external ‘customers’ (your sweet spot)? What un-met or partially met needs do they have? Perhaps you can see needs of theirs that they don’t fully realise they have (i.e. their needs are latent)? You may know some groups of customers better than they know themselves (by virtue of your special knowledge). Other groups you may need to study and get a good deal closer to. The more clearly you can define an under-served market, the better it’s going to be for you, i.e. the fewer competitors you’ll have.

Step 3: Now match 2 with 1. That is, find the spot where the needs of the market mesh with your skills and interests. When you find this match it should feel like two pieces of machinery fitting together as they were designed and made to do; they fit and go ‘clunk’! Your ‘product’ (defined in Step 1) is a near perfect solution for unmet needs in the marketplace (identified in Step 2). This match may be you as an employee with experience in leading geographically dispersed mid-sized businesses, being appointed the first external CEO in a professional services firm that until now has rotated practising partners through a CEO position on a part-time basis. Or it could be your promotion from a functional to an enterprise leadership position. Or it could be you setting up as contract CEO/adviser to two or three small businesses on a retainer plus profit share basis.

Step 4: Whatever the outcome of Step 3, if you are successful you will see yourself ‘selling a product to meet a need’ rather than merely ‘doing a job’. You are in business for yourself; and I don’t mean selfishly. Rather you are striving to achieve KPIs that get you and your customers to where you and they want to go. You have reached a mindset that tells you see yourself as a business, like an actor, scriptwriter or gaffer on a Hollywood set making a great movie. Making a mark. Making money. Having fun.

Step 5: Once you have mastered the mindset difference between ‘doing a job’ and ‘running yourself as your own business’, you are ready to write your strategic plan. Where is ‘You & Co.’ headed? What milestones will tell you you’re on the right path? What outcomes will give you the satisfaction and motivation to continue? What new and/or extra resources do you need (training, support, networks, personal brand, etc.)?

Mindset shift

Following these five steps will take you from being an (increasingly insecure) employee who does a (very good) job to being an independent provider of a product to one or more customers. Whether you remain an employee is *not* the point. The mindset shift is *the* point.

You are your own ‘employer’. Whatever type of job you hold, today you have to see yourself as a business.

Further sources

If you want to delve into other aspects of this topic read:

- + **You are no longer a person; you are a brand**, one of my posts, and
- + **Dare. Ditch. Do.** by William Arruda and Deb Dib.