

# CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

---

## Between Naiveté and Cynicism

---

By Douglas E. Welch

---

In today's world, it might seem best to be a cold-hearted cynic about everything you do, but especially about your career. While it might feel like you need to protect yourself from any variety of abuse, the truth is, if you succumb to cynicism, you will be blocking yourself off from opportunities that could be the dream of your high-tech career. While you certainly don't want to be naïve about your career choices, you do want to remain open to new ideas and projects.

### The Extremes

Too many people these days are living at the extreme ends of the cynic/naïve scale. More and more, I encounter people who have been devastated by layoffs, company disloyalty and even outright sabotage of their careers by co-workers. This has left them unable or unwilling to trust anyone or anything. They have lost the ability to dream.

While I can certainly understand these feelings, such cynicism only breeds a stale life, cut off from new ideas and new opportunities. By denying themselves the ability to dream, these people have doomed themselves to a drab and dreary life with nothing to look forward to, nothing to work toward.

Conversely, some people are so naïve as to defy description. They deeply believe every piece of advertising copy, every glitzy project plan—and then find themselves in a deep depression when the reality does not match the dream. They may believe that their manager, director and VP care about their career and well-being above all else. Then the layoffs start and they spend days struck dumb in amazement over how such a thing could happen.

### A Balance

Your goal should be to find some sense of balance between these extremes. You want to be cynical enough to weed out the bad, immoral or illegal opportunities, while still remaining naïve enough to listen openly and honestly to the ideas being presented. Failing on either side leaves you open to ill effects to your life and your career.

One of the methods I use to establish this balance is to listen to each opportunity as it is presented, without interrupting or attempting to judge its worth in the moment. Sometimes you can tell that an idea is unworkable right off the bat, but take the time to listen and see if there is something of value hidden inside.

Try to feel some of the excitement the presenter feels. Try to understand why this project is important to them and why they feel it is important to others. This doesn't mean you reach for your checkbook, or immediately agree to resign your current position to join them, only that you listen. You are being open to the idea without being "sucked in" totally. You are being naïve enough to listen and dream a little about how good the project could be, but cynical enough to do the research before jumping into the deep end.

After a bit of time has passed, you can begin to look critically at the project, proposal or job offer. You begin to weigh the pros and cons in an unemotional, critical fashion. Perhaps you know about other failures in the area, or have personal or business issues with the others involved. Now is the time to discover any reservations you might have.

### Having a Plan

If you decide to join a particular company or project, there are still some important things to consider. You need to constantly reevaluate the opportunity and your place within it. Good ideas can go bad. You need to continue the work of balancing between the extremes even as you move forward.

More important, you should always carry two scenarios in your head. What would you do if the project or job was a wild success, and what would you do if it was a complete failure? Much of the stress normally involved in these two scenarios can be mitigated by a little forethought.

Somewhere between the extremes of cynicism and naïveté lies the course of your high-tech career. Listen openly, but evaluate critically. Protect yourself and your career without blocking the opportunities that can lead you to your dream. □

---

*Douglas E. Welch is a freelance writer from Van Nuys, California, and can be reached by e-mail at [douglas@welchwrite.com](mailto:douglas@welchwrite.com) or on the Web at [www.welchwrite.com](http://www.welchwrite.com).*