

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Inertia

By Douglas E. Welch

Repeat after me: I will stop waiting for other people to help me out of my career problems and address them myself, every day, in every way possible. That was easy, wasn't it? I am sure you are wondering just what I am talking about, though. What I am describing is the way many high-tech careerists, myself included, allow the world, the computer industry and the marketplace to push them around from job to job, instead of "taking the bull by the horns" and directing their own career. It is a simple fact of life that it is much easier to let fate dictate your job choices, but it is no way to develop the career and the life you want.

If/Then

Throughout my personal and professional life, I often hear the same refrain from people: "I am just hanging out in this job until my friend/relative/partner gets financing for their new venture/becomes CEO/opens their new gallery, etc." You can fill in the blanks in a thousand different ways, but what they are really saying is, "Don't make me think about what I have to do to enhance my career, just make it happen." Perhaps it is because of the industry we are in, but we begin thinking in if/then constructs, as if the world could be distilled down to simple code.

The truth is, none of us are lazy people. I am reasonably certain that all of you want more out of your career and your life, and know what needs to be done to achieve it. It is just too easy to succumb to inertia. Building a career is tiring and sometimes frustrating work. Sitting around waiting for that special phone call or e-mail is so much easier.

Unfortunately, it is also a pipe dream. While your network of contacts is certainly important, most of your network will simply lack the necessary connections to get you your next job. No matter how much we might wish it were true, each job, each step of our career, depends on our own initiative and drive. Sure, there might be people who can lend a helping hand here and there, but it is up to

us to break the hold of inertia and keep moving forward.

Juggle

The most important step in breaking the hold of career inertia is pure volume. You need to start as many balls in the air as you can, then you need to forget about them. You need to have so many projects, phone calls, and e-mails in process that you don't dwell on any one issue. I learned this lesson when I started writing. If you have only one article or book proposal that you are shopping around, you begin to focus on it entirely, to the detriment of everything else. Then, when the rejection letter arrives, it can feel like a crushing blow because you don't have any other projects to which you can turn.

If you have a host of possible projects in the works, one rejection holds less importance because it is simply one project of many. Your entire sense of success or failure isn't tied up in that one project. You simply move on to the next project, and the next and the next. Then you bundle up the rejected project and send it out to the next person who might be interested. This helps to focus on the many possible successes, rather than one individual failure.

You can apply this idea to your next job search, an attempt to start your own business or even dating. It makes sense in so many areas of your life. Your goal is to constantly be on the lookout for new opportunities without betting everything on any particular one. This allows you to maintain perspective about your career and your life, and avoid the inertia trap.

Getting your career rolling can be extremely difficult when things aren't turning out like you wish. I can guarantee you, though, that simply taking one step, then another, then another, can build the momentum you need. Taking action is always the surest way to ease your mind and get you thinking. These are two surefire ways to keep building your high-tech career.

Book of the week: Visionary Business, by Marc Allen. □

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