



Douglas B. Richardson

Book Review

Make the Right Career Move: 28 Critical Insights and Strategies to Land Your Dream Job by **Rachelle J. Canter, PhD.**

Reviewed by Douglas B. Richardson

The proof of the pudding is in the eating: while writing this review, I was visiting a friend, a successful attorney who had recently “retired” after a distinguished, rewarding and remunerative career as a labor lawyer, mediator, litigator and law firm manager. In the early hours of the morning I found him with his nose buried in the self-assessment worksheets Shelley Canter includes in *Make the Right Career Move: 28 Critical Insights and Strategies to Land Your Dream Job*. “This is great,” he said. “Can you leave the book here with me?”

When it comes to choosing and developing a career, non-lawyers tend to think that those who have self-selected into the legal profession have lucked into a nice linear, stable career path. Yet those of us who work primarily with lawyers know that they confront the same career angst, uncertainty, indecision and lack of direction as non-lawyers.

They too suffer from the “Chinese Menu Syndrome” in which they are confronted with scores of choices and alternatives, many of which may sound attractive. It’s ironic that people who are trained in strategic thinking, situational diagnosis, sophisticated analysis and rational decision-making perform so poorly when trying to chart paths for their own lives and when trying to execute their own career plans. *What can I do? What should I do? What will make me happy? What’s the difference between a job and a career? Where will my initial choices take me? Will I be locked in? Will I be missing something? What will earn me respect? What will earn me love? What will align with my fundamental values, goals and dreams?*

As with my “retired” friend, the situation is compounded for the baby boomer generation, many of whom are transitioning out of their present career settings and identities, and try-

ing frantically to figure out what to do with the extra two decades of productive life that modern medical science has enabled.

Whether they have loved their first career life, tolerated it or loathed it, boomer lawyers face inevitable, big changes — changes in status, in power, in function, in self-concept. A lot of them, more comfortable with the devil they know than the devil they don’t, cling white-knuckled to their desks, begging the executive committee not to stick them outside the igloo to freeze. Others suck it in, vow to embrace change...and promptly descend into career analysis-paralysis. Moreover, many lawyers *confuse what they are capable of doing with what they are temperamentally suited to do*. Getting lawyers to take a hard look at the emotional dimensions of career satisfaction is tough given a highly-competitive mindset that avoids confronting “touchy-feely” issues like values, relationships, needs and personal vulnerabilities.

By and large, lawyers also are lousy self-marketers, overemphasizing the importance of subject-matter expertise and limping along in the rapport-building and relationship-cultivation departments. They tend to define themselves with what they have in common with other lawyers, rather than in terms of the attributes that distinguish them from job-market competitors who are similarly credentialed.

Enter Shelley Canter, with a practical, savvy toolkit that effectively combats that deer-in-the-headlights feeling. While not designed exclusively for lawyers, Shelley’s book draws on a number of lawyer-specific examples and takes an approach perfect for those schooled in lawyer-think: *Think and Do*. It combines a comprehensible theoretical framework with practical, hands-on steps to translate abstract concepts into practical action priorities.

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Different people are going to use this book differently. Those struggling to define their career directions and goals will focus on the “Right Career Move” part of the title; those navigating a competitive job market or conducting a job search will gravitate to the “Land Your Dream Job” part. Shelley covers both perspectives — career reappraisal and job search technique — in a logical progression of steps that moves smoothly from the “whys” to the “whats” to the “hows.”

Shelley clearly understands that without a practical roadmap, many people can’t describe *explicitly* things they know about themselves *implicitly* (the classic “I can’t define it, but I know it when I see it” issue). She also knows that a powerful way to chart future direction is to take a hard look at past pathways — to deconstruct and inventory the values, aptitudes, and strengths that already have sought and fought expression in one’s work life.

In a series of short, direct, candid chapters, Shelley, an experienced executive coach and career consultant, guides the reader through a logical series of practical, step-by-step inquiries that translate our vague, amorphous meta-questions into concrete, manageable answers we can use as the basis for practical career planning.

In effect, Shelley guides the reader through a classic product development and marketing cycle — with the reader as the product. The first five chapters help define the “features, benefits and differentiators” of one’s own unique “brand” — what you’ve done, what you’re expert at, what characteristics have shaped prior successes and accomplishments.

Equally important, they also help explore one’s motivational drivers — the hot buttons (and the turn-offs) that shape attractive goals and career objectives at each career stage (this book is as relevant for fledgling Gen

X or Gen Y lawyers as for those further along in their careers). The self-inventorying exercises go beyond simply helping the reader list marketable skills and knowledge; the eminently practical worksheets also focus on looking at what kinds or work will provide deep and lasting personal satisfaction.

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In helping the reader define appropriate employment at each career stage, Shelley’s approach helps the reader to target attractive and realistic employment roles and settings. In other words, having defined the product, the reader proceeds to identify the market. In what she calls “Stage Two: Preparing the Tools to Find the Right Job,” Shelley helps the reader market that product to the desired market sector or niche. The book tightly pulls together the fundamentals of resume preparation and effective interview skills, while debunking many of the myths and misconceptions that pass for conventional wisdom in the job search game.

Finally, Shelley explores the high points of conducting an effective job search or career transition, helping the reader develop a personal game plan, track progress and optimize the potential of the Internet. A series of appendices include worksheets, templates, research guides and practical hints. Good stuff.

I confess to one minor quibble with Shelley’s nomenclature — her expansive use of the word “job” to describe

all manner and modes of employment. In my years as a career consultant, I thought it important to distinguish between *jobs* and *roles*. I thought of a job as a particular employment position, defined by others irrespective of the unique characteristics of individual job seekers — a round hole into which one fit...or didn’t. I thought of a *role* as an employment opportunity *defined and shaped by an individual’s unique strengths and characteristics* (as in, “We could really use someone like you”). The conventional job market focuses on jobs — the positions described in ads, monster-board listing and head-hunting position descriptions.

Career-shifters and people with offbeat career histories find tough sledding in the conventional job market because they appear to present productivity and motivational risks to the employer. On the other hand, a role is bound to be a great fit, because it’s built around the conjunction of a unique opportunity and a unique person. Once they leave their traditional legal roles, a lot of boomers are going to be looking for exciting new *roles*. And a career is not just a string of jobs; ideally, it’s a sequence of roles that build on one another and generate ever-greater leverage for still more unique and rewarding roles.

But a rose by any other name smells just as sweet. In fact, Shelley’s excellent book really is a *role-builder’s* field manual, urging the reader to identify his or her unique characteristics and to consider where and how those traits will find richest expression. Author Marshal Goldsmith says, “Instead of hiring a career coach — buy this book.” Whether or not you use a career coach, I certainly recommend that you buy this book. ♦

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