

## Charting Your Career

*Do you ever feel lost in pushing your career where you want it to go? Actually, we all have a map and a compass to guide us in charting the pathway to our destination, and then to help us navigate toward it. The only problem is, most of us don't recognize the map or the compass and get ourselves stuck.*

Why is it that some people reach their career aspirations and others don't? Of course, each person's situation is unique and some aspects of career advancement appear to be out of one's personal control. Yet, many aspects of career management *are* within an individual's boundaries but are not recognized as such.

Few recognize that our careers tend to follow a set sequence of phases, a meta-pattern. Each phase of this pattern has its distinct behaviors that will drive our progress. However, if we mismatch our behavior to the phase, we will likely get stuck. The pattern stays constant so that with knowledge and fluency of the behaviors we are able to navigate successfully through the various phases toward our aspirations.



So what is the meta-pattern? To get the idea of it, think of two kids on a teeter totter. As one pushes against the ground forcing his end up, the other kid goes down. The two ends compensate each other causing an alternating up-and-down motion. So too the meta-pattern of our career operates on the basis of polarity.

One end is what I call "R-Valent." "R" stands for "relational." Valence means a pull or attraction. It's the part of the pattern which holds the complete picture of our career aspirations, helps us unite with a group in which we can pursue our aspirations, seeks to keep our long-term well-being secure, and generally responds in a conservative manner. It honors duty to the group or organization. Seeing our retirement account grow and considering carefully the consequences of possible changes would be characteristic of the R-Valent end of the pole.

The R-Valent phase also helps us refocus our aspirations after we have had some kind of disruption or disappointment on our planned journey. It's what pulls us out of a down period or a mid-career crisis with new understanding of how we want to spend the rest of our working career.

The other end is what I call "D-Valent." "D" means "differentiation." It's the end of the polarity that gives us our uniqueness and identity. It's the pattern that sparks new ideas, helps us as we originally choose our profession and then pushes us to excel and differentiate ourselves from our peers. It's our competitive, ambitious side, the part that says "ME!" It what makes us stick to our tasks in hard times and energizes our push to be recognized and to progress up the ladder.

As we mature into our path, the D-Valent end of the polarity seeks stability and order in the professional life we have created. It likes rules, standards and certainty. Systems of knowledge and systems of laws come from the D-Valent efforts of people over time.

We vacillate back and forth between the ends of the polarity within the context of our work environment and our maturing career path just as the kids go up and down on the ends of the teeter-totter. The vacillation is what puts the energy and interest in our lives as we experience smaller mini-patterns within the overall meta-pattern.

Each phase or end of the polarity has behaviors that are appropriate to it, and that's where the problems come in for most of us. In our upbringing few of us learned to recognize the meta-pattern, nor did we learn the full repertoire of behaviors that help us successfully navigate it. We get stuck and don't know why.

A couple of examples will illustrate. A leader who had spent his entire career in the US took a position in Asia. His dominant-assertive energy pattern worked well in the US where his career was in the D-Valent end of the polarity. In Asia his career had swung to the R-Valent end of the polarity, but his behavior didn't change to match it. Now his assertiveness gave him real problems.

Here's another example. A highly successful psychotherapist relied on his empathy and deep listening to provide a context for his patients to improve. His career and behavior were at the R-Valent end of the polarity. When promoted to head of the counseling agency and phasing to the D-Valent pole, he lacked the assertive behaviors needed to keep the agency on a successful track.

Both assertiveness and empathy are valuable behaviors, but need to be utilized in the right phase of the pattern. Being stuck in a mode of behavior mismatched to the phase was career-limiting for both of these individuals.

Ultimately what gets us to our destination is our fluency in shifting behaviors to match the terrain between where we are and where we're headed. Just as the kids on the teeter totter generate more energy by rhythmically and quickly pushing from either end, so we fuel our career progress by pushing with the right kind of behaviors at either pole of the meta-pattern.

However, there is a difference between the teeter totter and the meta-pattern. The kids on the ends of the teeter totter go up and down, up and down, up and down. When we recognize the full meta-pattern phases and see the inherent polar balance wherever we may be in the pattern at any particular point in time, *then* we get a bonus.

*At that point of conscious awareness of the balance of polarities, our trajectory through the phases moves up one quantum of certainty, intensity, and clarity.*

It's like getting \$200 each time we pass GO.

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