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Bringing Work to Life

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Welcome

Welcome to the latest issue of Bringing Work to Life. We explored the following topics in issues over the past twelve months (all newsletters are available at www.elsdon.com/newsletters.htm):

- The promise of affiliation (November 2005)
- Nothing business, it's just personal (October 2005)
- Who are you? (September 2005)
- Leadership roles (August 2005)
- Leadership courage (July 2005)
- The real scoop (June 2005)
- Listening to the organization (May 2005)
- A kinder, gentler place (April 2005)
- Accelerating into your new position (March 2005)
- Workforce leadership (February 2005)
- Searching for success (January 2005)
- Ethics and leadership (Year End 2004)

This month we look at how to best contribute in our work with “Bringing Our Best to Work.”

Bringing Our Best to Work

It was a privilege recently to be in a State Department of Human Services (DHS) office with counselors and their clients. For here was caring and compassion, personal gifts given and received with grace. Those gifts included the ability to connect with another person, to navigate the complexity of much detailed policy, and to make rapid decisions while juggling competing demands.

Ron Elsdon, Ph.D., is founder of *Elsdon Organizational Renewal*, which focuses on supporting organizations enhance effectiveness through revitalized workforce relationships and leadership practices. Prior to establishing his practice, Ron held senior leadership positions at diverse organizations. Ron is also co-founder of New Beginnings Career and College Guidance, which provides caring and personalized help to individuals and families in career guidance, coaching and college planning.

Ron is author of *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization* (2003), a book describing leadership approaches to integrate the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization for the benefit of both. Ron holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in Chemical Engineering, an M.A. from John F. Kennedy University in Career Development and a first class honors degree from Leeds University in Chemical Engineering. With his co-author he was awarded the Walker Prize by the Human Resource Planning Society for the paper that best advances state-of-the-art thinking or practices in human resources.

What gifts do we need to bring to our work situations to succeed and contribute? Let's examine some pointers. Having explored, in previous newsletters, building clarity about what we stand for (September 2005), who we are (October 2005), and roles we need to master (August 2005) we now turn our attention to the capabilities and attributes that will be important in our work. Some of these attributes will apply in many settings; others will be specific to our particular work situation. To gain a perspective on this let's look at how some others see key capability needs in a number of different areas.

- The Management Research Group (MRG) in analyzing a sample of over 15,000 people who have taken their 360 degree feedback instrument identified key behavioral sets or attributes, from a list of 22, that are most important in defining leadership effectiveness. The top attributes turned out to be the ability to take a long range, broad approach to problems, issues and decisions, in other words to be strategic; the ability to effectively exert influence and provide guidance; and the ability to communicate well, to be persuasive, and to generate excitement. We see interpersonal attributes and conceptual skills as central to effective leadership behaviors in this study. Given the relatively low emphasis on interpersonal vs. technical/functional knowledge in many education curricula it is perhaps not surprising to see the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM) estimate that about 40% of senior managers hired from outside an organization fail within their first 18 months in their new position. Managers in many cases do not have the requisite strategic and interpersonal skills needed to survive, never mind succeed.
- In examining causes of leadership failure, the Lominger group identified 19 career stallers and stoppers that can block progress. More than half of these items are directly linked to personal attributes and interpersonal skills such as inability to adapt to differences, arrogance, lack of ethics and values, insensitivity to others. A minority of the items are about technical/functional knowledge. Inability to take a strategic position is also a key element. Again we see the importance of strategic thinking coupled with strong interpersonal skills to effectively engage others.
- Goleman and his co-authors of *Primal Leadership* examine the behaviors of effective leaders. Not surprisingly we see similar findings about the importance of interpersonal skills. Four primary components are shown to be central to effective leadership:
 - Self-awareness
 - Self-management
 - Social awareness
 - Relationship management

Each component contains a range of interpersonal attributes, for example, adaptability, empathy and inspirational leadership. And they apply in various settings from the for-profit to the public sectors.

- Work by Ulrich and his colleagues at the University of Michigan has led to the definition and prioritization of five competence domains and 17 related competencies central to effective HR leadership. The two primary domains, that are most critical, are strategic contribution and personal credibility. Key strategic contribution competencies are culture

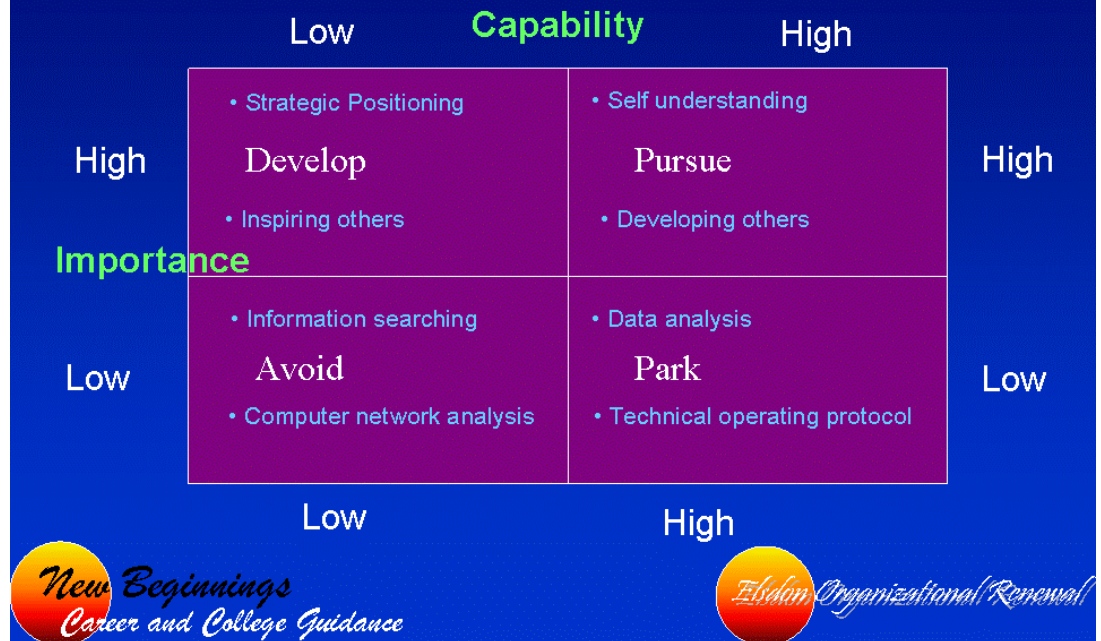
management and managing rapid change, whereas for personal credibility key competencies are achieving results and building effective relationships. Transactional HR activities are not a primary differentiator of effective HR leaders. Again we see the importance of the strategic aspect coupled with interpersonal skills.

- The graduate management admissions survey of 1,000 employers cited in The Vault MBA Career Bible, identifies communication/interpersonal skills, ability to perform and cultural fit with the company as the items recruiters consider the most critical in hiring (identified by 45% or more of the recruiters). All other factors including quantitative/knowledge/technical skills, MBA concentration and the reputation of the school are considered important by less than 25% of recruiters. This was echoed in a recent Wall Street Journal survey of recruiters that showed communication and interpersonal skills first on a list of 20 attributes. These skills were considered very important by 88% of recruiters. A further reminder that technical knowledge takes on value and meaning only when delivered in such a way that it is clear and engaging to others.

So in varying situations from MBAs entering the corporate world, through leadership practiced in a variety of for profit and not-for-profit settings to effective Human Resource leadership we see similar emerging themes. A blend of strategic capability and strong interpersonal skills are essential to individual success. These core elements, when coupled with the needs of a particular position, lay the foundation for contributing in our work.

Let's examine, by example, how we might use these ideas in practice. Emily seeks to move from a technical, supervisory role into a position with broader management responsibility, including profit and loss responsibility. She recently completed a six-month rotational assignment in a strategic planning capacity. She is now considering what attributes may be needed for the new broader management role and how they compare with those used in her current role. The following importance/capability grid is one way to look at this. It shows examples of Emily's attributes in the context of the potential new position.

Attributes: Importance and Capability



The two dimensions of this grid show importance from low to high on the vertical scale and capability from low to high on the horizontal scale. The attributes in the lower left quadrant, which are neither important in the new position nor of interest to Emily, can be avoided. Emily identified information searching and computer network analysis from her technical background. The attributes in the upper left quadrant of high importance and low capability are development opportunities. Strategic positioning and inspiring others fit into this quadrant. The lower right quadrant of low importance but high capability contains attributes that can be parked. They may or may not be important in the longer term, they are not critical in Emily’s potential next position. Data analysis and technical operating protocol fit here. The upper right quadrant contains attributes that are both important and are strengths. These are attributes for Emily to build on in her potential new role, self understanding and developing others fit here.

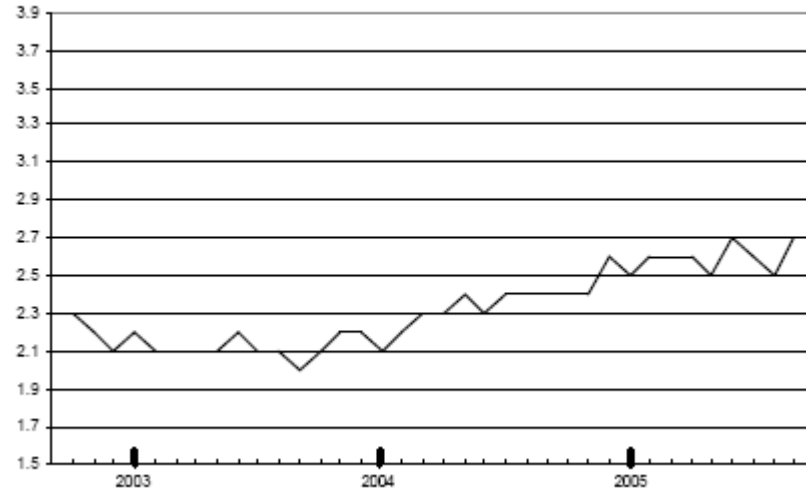
We can each create a similar matrix for ourselves as we reflect on paths we choose to take. In doing this we have an opportunity and a responsibility to honor what we stand for. In the words of Joan Chittister “Courage is coming to realize that what does and does not happen in the world does so because of what you and I fail to say – not when silence is right, but when we fear the cost to ourselves of speaking out.” Just as those DHS counselors display courage every day so can we, as we build, develop and contribute our gifts.

The Employment Scene

Since early 2004 the job openings rate (number of job openings as a % of total employment and job openings) has steadily increased, as shown in the following figure, although at 2.7% it is still well below the 3.3% level in early 2001 (not

shown). At the end of September 2005 there were 3.7 million job openings in the U.S.

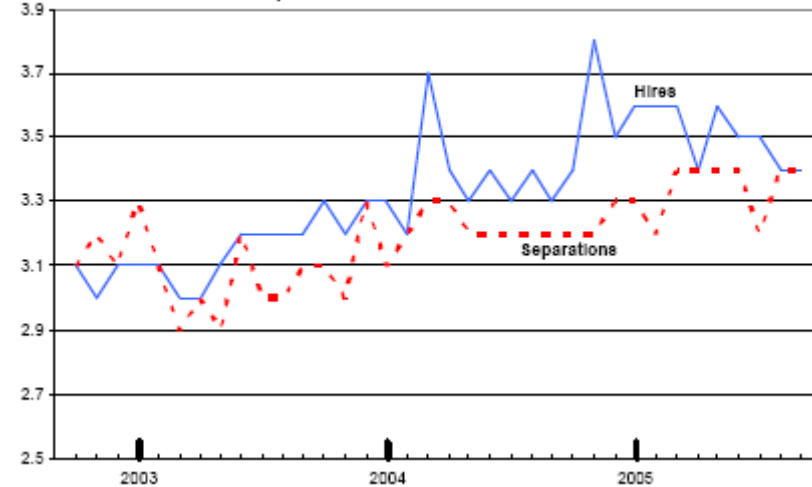
Chart 1. Job openings rate, seasonally adjusted, Percent October 2002 - September 2005



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Job Openings and Labor Turnover: September 2005, Release, November 8, 2005

This is driven by a hiring rate that has exceeded the separation rate (both voluntary and involuntary separations) for most months since early 2004 as shown in the following figure.

Chart 2. Hires and separations rates, seasonally adjusted, Percent October 2002 - September 2005



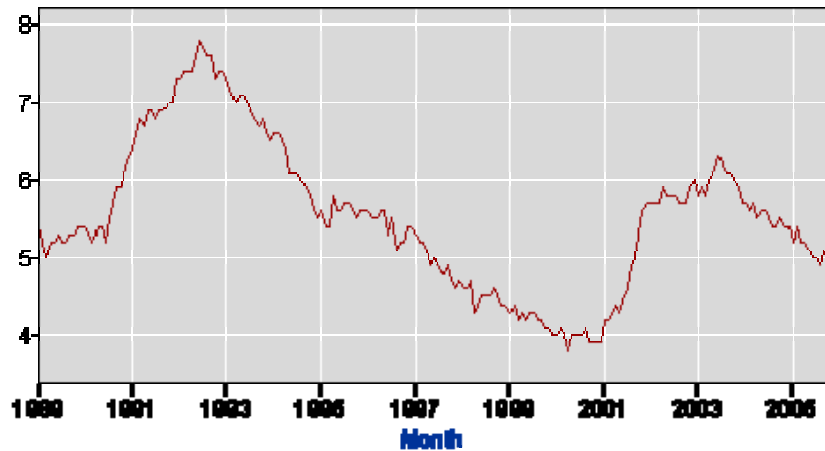
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Job Openings and Labor Turnover: September 2005, Release, November 8, 2005

However, for only the second time since early 2004, the hiring and separation rates were equal in September 2005 at 3.4%. August and September 2005 numbers will have been affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Our prayers go to all those who have suffered from these hurricanes. Voluntary separations (other than retirement)

were 2.0%, involuntary separations were 1.3% with other separations (retirement) at 0.2%. Over the past 12 months hires have averaged 4.7 million per month, 0.3 million more than separations.

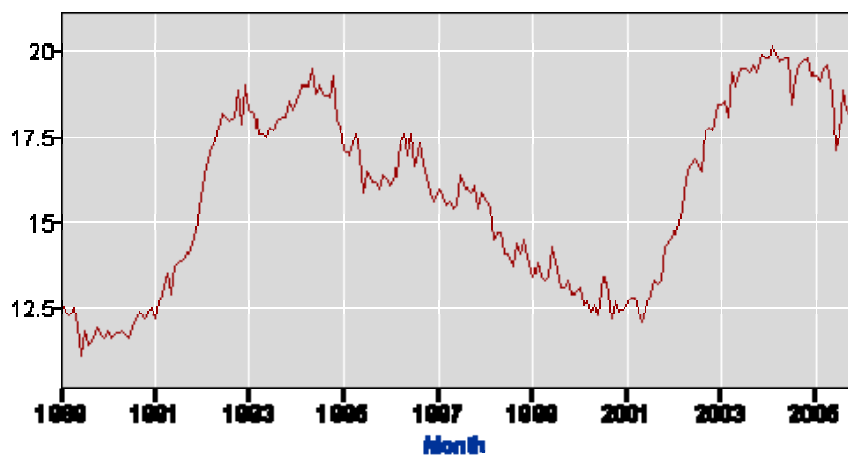
The unemployment rate in the U.S. increased only slightly in September, due to hurricane after effects and settled to 5.0% in October. The longer term trend is shown in the following figure:

U.S. unemployment rate (%), Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.



The unemployment rate has continued to decline from its most recent peak of 6.3% in June 2003. In addition the average number of weeks people are unemployed has begun to decline as shown in the following figure, although it is still at a comparatively high level:

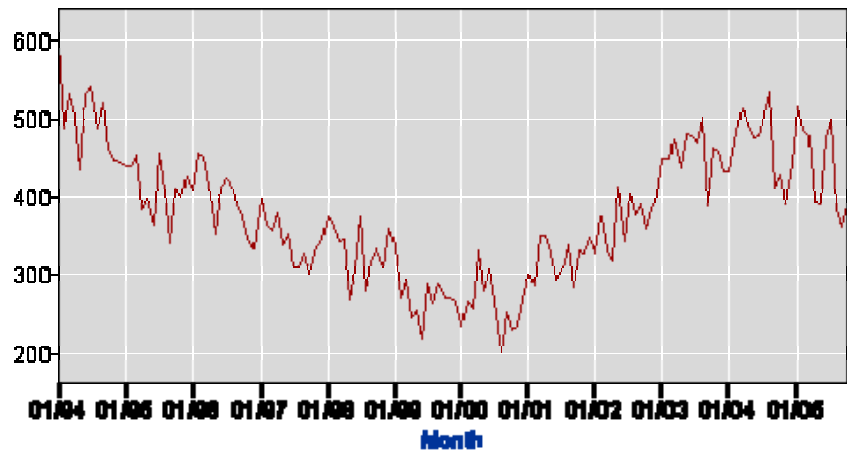
Average weeks unemployed. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.



While the number of people who believe no job is available remains elevated there is evidence of a drop as shown in the following figure:

Persons who believe no job is available in the U.S. (in thousands). Source: Bureau

of Labor Statistics.



On a regional level we see continued evidence of recovery in the high tech sector as unemployment rates continue to drop in San Jose and nearby communities, the technology hub of Silicon Valley. The unemployment rate fell to 5.2% in September, well below the peak of 9.3% in January and June 2003. This is shown in the following figure:

San Jose unemployment rate (%), Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.



As we look at these figures we need to continue to question the nature of the employment relationship we are hiring people into and how we can improve it.

Quote

“A Native American tale tells of the elder who was talking to a disciple about tragedy. The elder said, ‘I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving, compassionate one.’ The disciple asked, ‘But which wolf will win the fight in your heart?’ And the holy one answered, ‘It depends on which one I feed.’”

From Joan Chittister's book *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope*. 2003.

Upcoming Elsdon Organizational Renewal (EOR) Events and Recent Mentions

Upcoming Events

- Workshops for the UC Berkeley Haas School of Business/Columbia University MBA program, Berkeley
 - December 1, "Progressing in Your Organization"
 - December 8, "Accelerating into Your New Position"
- Presentation for UC Berkeley Haas alumni association, Berkeley
 - January 10, "Progressing in Your Organization"
- Workshop for UCLA Alumni and UCLA Anderson School of Management Baby Boomer Career Conference, Los Angeles
 - January 28, "Career Fitness in Turbulent Times: Maintaining Job Search Readiness"
 - http://www.seasonedpro.com/ucla_boomer_saturday_details.asp#bo_23

Recent Mentions

- Reviews of "Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization." Ron Elsdon. Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT (2003)
 - Harvard Business School
 - [HBS Working Knowledge: Organizations](#)
 - Global Diversity Institute
 - [Global Diversity Institute - The Journal of Diversity Praxis](#)
 - Journal of Asian Economics
 - [ScienceDirect - Journal of Asian Economics : Ron Elsdon, Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization, Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT \(2003\) 280 pp. \(hardcover\), ISBN 1-56720-436-8, \\$49.95.](#)
- "Building a Strong Workforce Through Affiliation." Chapter 26 in "On Staffing: Advice and Perspectives from HR Leaders." Eds. Nicholas Burkholder et al, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken NJ (2004)
 - <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0471410691,descCd-tableOfContents.html>
- The Alliance of Chief Executives
 - [Alliance of CEOs - Ron Elsdon](#)

- “Integrating Into Your New Position.”
 - Article in September 1, 2005 issue of Career Tips and Tactics from executiveagent.com
 - [Executive Career Strategies at ExecutiveAgent.com](#)
- “Reaching for Our Deep Gladness”
 - Article in May, 2005 NCDA Career Convergence Magazine
 - <http://209.235.208.145/cgi-bin/WebSuite/tcsAssnWebSuite.pl?Action=DisplayNewsDetails&RecordID=625&Sections=6&IncludeDropped=&AssnID=NCDA&DBCCode=130285>
- Review of MBTI Step II workshop
 - CCDA News, April 2005
 - [California Career Development Association - Articles](#)
- Recent mention in article on cost of turnover
 - East Bay Business Times, April 2005
 - [Turnover costs exceed employers' estimates - 2005-04-25](#)
- “Worklife Survival: Finding a Fit”
 - Article for HR West, February 2005 (Northern California Human Resource Association)
 - <http://www.nchra.org/StaticContent/Download/EXT0205007.pdf>
- Recent interview in the education field “Affiliation as a Unifying Principle in Education”
 - Career Pro News
 - [Affiliation and Education](#)
- Review of ICDC Global Issues Forum
 - CCDA, January 2005
 - [California Career Development Association - Articles](#)

About EOR: Our Value Contribution

We enhance your workforce, leadership and organization by:

- Using proprietary approaches to understand workforce and leadership challenges
- Creating tailored action plans and solutions to strengthen workforce and leadership practices
- Building individual capabilities and contributions

We enable you to focus on external results and building value, confident that your

organization and leadership are operating at peak effectiveness.

Our Mission

To support your organization by enhancing performance, productivity and effectiveness through revitalized workforce relationships and leadership practices.

Our Approach and Values

We tailor our engagements to the needs of each organization with a process designed to surface critical issues, identify root causes, build effective solutions, monitor progress and implement.

With a scope that ranges from system and organizational interventions to work with individuals, our focus is on the heart of the relationship among the individual, the organization and the community. We believe that organizational and community prosperity are built on enabling each person to fulfill his or her potential.

Our Services

We work with individuals and groups in your organization to drive performance and development for both the short and long term. As a result people will choose to work in your organization and will prosper there.

We bring solutions when you need to:

- Reverse declining revenues and performance
- Revitalize your workforce
- Stem the loss of key talent
- Redirect your organization to new areas
- Stop losing customers or market share
- Penetrate new markets
- Combat aggressive competitors
- Handle major change
- Break down communication barriers
- Energize your leadership team
- Successfully build on an acquisition or merger

Our proprietary services include:

- State-of-the-art tools to take the pulse of your organization and then move to action
 - Web enabled systems
 - Experts to gather and analyze information, moving your organization

to action

- Individual leadership coaching to give you world class leadership capabilities
 - Leaders who know themselves and their aspirations, build their capabilities and become catalysts developing others
- Workshops to build interpersonal skills in your organization so that:
 - Communication is timely, concise, accurate and personal
 - People listen to each other
 - Negotiations are quick and effective
 - Differences create rather than destroy value
 - Teams move forward, get results and quickly commercialize new products and services
 - People understand and link their motivations to your organizational needs
 - Your teams understand what it takes to create a committed, energized workforce
 - People use their time well
- Systems that make it easy to drive performance and build capabilities by:
 - Linking objectives throughout the organization
 - Strengthening key competencies
 - Making sure you have the bench strength where and when you need it
 - Giving people tools to take charge of their own careers and development and have a major long term influence on your organization
- Proprietary simulation and modeling techniques that let you explore how to maximize the value of your workforce
 - Move from guessing what might happen to looking in depth at the financial impact of different approaches