THE TRANSITION FROM IDEALITY TO REALITY

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We learn a lot about problem solving in college. We feel confident when we graduate, especially if we have done well academically, and we are ready to prove ourselves in the work place. It does not take long, however, to realize that situations in the work place are not as clear cut as the situations that were presented in the classroom. Many of the problems we encounter can not be resolved using the problem solving techniques we learned in college. My presentation will discuss issues that may affect a person's success and productivity in the work place.

College was a wonderful experience for me. I have always enjoyed school, so attending college was a natural progression after high school. The degree I earned was a Bachelor of Science in Computer Applications Management (CAM), which is a mix of Business Administration, Mathematics, and Engineering. My university did not have a Computer Science program until the year I graduated. The CAM degree enabled me to get exposure to different disciplines and I enjoyed going to the different schools for my classes. The atmosphere at the Business school was very different than the Engineering school. The students in the Business school seem to be more outgoing whereas the Engineering school has a more reserve atmosphere. Also, the ratio of men to women was about equal on the business side, but the engineering school had a ratio of approximately 8 men to 1 woman.

I graduated with a degree and I was fortunate to have a job offer by the time of commencement. Before I chose the job, however, I talked over the opportunity with a professor. Interestingly enough, he said that I would probably be leaving the position after about 2 years because new college graduates typically do not stay in their first job for very long. The job does not turn out to be what they expect. Unfortunately, he was correct, but not for the reason that he explained. I was a victim of downsizing. In the mid-80's, lay-offs were relatively new so it was extremely shocking. I was always taught that if you work hard you will go far. I do not doubt that this is true, but the work environment has changed so that you may not have a job even though you give your best effort. It is

important, therefore, that a person gets themselves involved in a network of contacts. I find it helpful, when hiring, if someone that I know recommends a potential employee to me. Most of the people I hire are recommended by people whose opinion I respect. The contact may not get you the job, but it is more likely to result in a phone call or interview with the hiring manager than if the hiring manager saw your resume in a stack with other resumes. In college, I was not taught about networking. I took classes about resume writing and interviewing techniques, but there was really no mention about networking.

My next position was on a team of 10 people, of which I was one of two women. I enjoyed the work of a software evaluation engineer and I was determined that I was not going to be a victim of downsizing again. I was eager to learn and I worked hard, and I also had no problems putting in extra hours. Unfortunately, I did not fit into the group norm. The group, in general, was not enthusiastic and eager to put in the extra effort. I was naive and did not realize that most of the group did not have the same work ethics that I had. There was much resentment because of my ambition. They felt that I was trying to show them up and therefore, I was a threat to them. Also, we experienced a lay-off during my tenure in the group, and some people felt I should have been fired because I had the least amount of seniority in the group. They told me this to my face. After much emotional turmoil, I realized I would never fit into this group because I was more ambitious than the group would ever accept. I would need to be the one to change, not the group. I felt, and still feel, that I have the work ethics that I want to keep. I am not implying that I have the appropriate behavior and the other group members were wrong, but I am saying that I did not fit in, which impeded my progress and the progress of the team. Now, when I interview for a position, I find out about the group norms to see if the fit is appropriate for me. In college, getting along with others was not a focus. We did have group projects, and everyone may not get along, but the projects were of short term so everyone could manage for that period of time. We did learn about group norms in my Organizational Behavior class, but the technique was never practiced. Also, being a women in this group may have been a disadvantage, but I still see the combination of work ethics and assertiveness to be the main factors for this situation. I think any person, man or woman, who was ambitious and eager to succeed would not have been appreciated in this group.

It is important, therefore, when searching for a new position, that I find out about the group norms to see if they are appropriate for me. I interview the group to see if they will fit me, just as much as they interview me to see if I am a good match for them. Now, I am at Intel where people are encouraged to learn and to take on as much responsibility as possible. In fact, for most people, we have too much to handle, but this is the kind of environment I want. There is still that fear of being part of the company's downsiz-

ing, but Intel has a deployment program that takes into account lay-offs. When deployed, employees are paid their regular salary for a period of time, usually 3 months, and their new job becomes finding a job. The employees name goes on a list, and they are considered first for any open jobs in their area of expertise at Intel.

I have discussed two factors that have played an important role in my career: downsizing and group norms. Hard work and technical competence are a given, but the changing work environment and not fitting into the group are some factors that may impede your success.

Biography

Debra Lee is a software manager at Intel Corporation in the Supercomputer Systems Division. She manages a group of software engineers that produce software for the iPSC/860 parallel computer. Her background is in software quality assurance where she has 7 years experience, and she has been active on the planning committee for the Pacific Northwest Software Quality Conference. Debra received an MBA and BS in Computer Applications Management from the University of Portland.