

# The 4.0 Career Is Coming... Are You Ready?

Even in the midst of our economic disaster that's hitting all but the wealthiest Americans, a transformation is continuing within people's orientation to work. I call it the rise of the 4.0 career.

This growing shift concerns how men and women think about and pursue their careers. It also defines the features of organizations that they want to work for and commit to. This shift that I describe below transcends its most visible form: Generation X's and, especially, Generation Y's attitudes and behavior in the workplace. Those are part of a broader shift whose origins are within men and women at the younger end of the baby boomer spectrum.

I first encountered this while interviewing yuppies (remember them?) in the 1980s for my book "[\*Modern Madness\*](#), about the emotional downside of career success. I often found that people would want to talk about a gnawing feeling of wanting something more "meaningful" from their work. They didn't have quite the right language back then to express what that would look like other than feeling a gap between their personal values and the trade-offs they had to make to keep moving up in their careers and companies. The positive ideals of the 60s seemed to have trickled down into their yearnings, where they remained a kind of irritant.

Flashing forward 25 years, those people are now today's midlife baby boomers. Their earlier irritation has bloomed into consciously expressed attitudes and behavior that have filtered down into the younger generations, where they've continued to evolve. Today, they're reshaping how people think about and pursue their careers within today's era of interconnection, constant networking and unpredictable change.

I'll oversimplify for the sake of highlighting an evolution of people's career orientations:

## **Career Versions 1.0, 2.0, 3.0... And The Emerging 4.0**

The 1.0 career describes doing whatever kind of work enables you to survive. It's what people do when they're in situations of extreme hardship, political upheaval, or within socioeconomic conditions that limit their opportunity and choices. That probably describes the situation for the masses of people throughout most of history. And of course it exists today, especially among those who have been hardest hit by the current recession. In these situations, your criterion for "success" is being able to earn enough of a living to survive -- pay your bills and support your family. The conflicts that people experience within the 1.0 career often include the impact of working conditions, discrimination and limited opportunities for getting onto a career path that can lead to something better.

Version 2.0 emerged with the political and economic environments that supported the emergence of the modern "career." That is, work within increasingly large, bureaucratic organizations that developed from about the late 1800s into the early 20th century. Those organizations required layers of management and administration -- white-collar jobs, within bureaucracies. Your career could advance along a defined path, and it was available to people who were able to gain a

foothold within it. That path was often facilitated by educational opportunities and/or social class advantages people brought with them.

The 2.0 career is what most people define as "careerism:" Pursuing more power, authority, money and position within an organization. It's all about performing -- doing whatever gets you those external rewards. Our career culture begins conditioning many of us that way in childhood, as Madeline Levine described in her book, "[The Price of Privilege](#)." It probably even contributes to the widespread experience of ADD.

Over time, you become set up for conflicts between performing to get those rewards on the one hand, and your internal desire to achieve something of deeper value, on the other. The 2.0 career still predominates within today's career culture. It's where you find the conditions that generate, for example, work-life conflict, boredom, workplace bullying, hostile management practices, and subtle racial and gender barriers to moving up.

The TV show "Madmen" highlights much of the experiences of the 2.0 career, and it predominated until harbingers of the 3.0 career began to appear during the last 20 years. The 3.0 career reflects a desire to find more personal meaning and sense of purpose through work. That's what I began to find among members of the baby boomer generation when I interviewed them in their younger years.

The 3.0 careerist struggles for more balance between work and personal life, and is less willing than the 2.0 careerist to stick with an unfulfilling job, or settle for one when job-hunting. Conflicts within the 3.0 orientation are visible, for example, in the pushback against the longer hours companies increasingly pressure people into. Or, in rebellion against being available 24/7, even while on a vacation. Also, an increasing number of people say that moving up is a downer for them. For example, a [Families and Work Institute](#) report found that promotions are being turned down by workers in the thick of their careers. Workers used to be eager to take on more responsibility, and now they aren't as much.

A woman in her 40s expressed that theme, saying, "Simply put, I want more fun in my life." She added that there was "too much disconnect" between her duties as Chief Operation Officer -- including managing her staff and dealing with the other people on the senior management team - - and what she described as the "neglected me, this person hiding inside the roles I have to perform every day." She said, "I'm going to do something different at this point, no matter what kind of adjustments I have to make."

The 3.0 careerists do not want their professional lives to be the enemy of their talents or interests outside work. They want less fragmentation and more integration among the different parts of their lives. More than just having a successful career, they want their careers to serve and support a successful personal life.

That latter point distinguishes the 3.0 from the emerging 4.0 career. The former is more self-development-focused. In contrast, the 4.0 careerist wants more than sufficient work-life balance and personal meaning. To be sure, those remain important. But the 4.0 career is more focused on having *impact* on something larger than oneself.

In essence, the 4.0 careerist is motivated by a sense of service to and connection with the larger human community through the product or service he or she contributes to. The vehicle for this is the opportunity for continuous new learning and creative growth, through which you use your talents and capacities for having a positive impact on human lives, through your work.

This is the future. You're likely to be feeling the pull towards the 4.0 career. And even if you're not, you need to know how to work with those who are. For example, the most savvy men and women already know that today's workplace requires a high level of collaboration with very diverse people. You need to align your talents and skills with common objectives, whether a product or service. That means diminishing your ego, learning to "[forget yourself](#)" in the service of teamwork towards that larger purpose, while also constantly looking for opportunities for learning, growth and having impact.

From the 4.0 perspective, you move *through* self-interest, not *into* it. You're tuned in to the larger picture, in which you're one player, while finding ways to make a positive contribution to the service or product. It includes being aware of how you're perceived by others, and scanning for ways to be collaborative rather than self-promoting at others' expense. As a CEO recently [commented](#), "the definition of success is the company, not an individual."

Consistent with the above themes, the 4.0 careerist wants to work for a company that practices and values positive leadership, transparency, informality, collaboration, high ethical standards, innovation... and is also a fun place to work. They want companies that promote and value diversity and an equitable reward system for achievement. Within them, people work hard but also have fun.

The 4.0 career is visible in the pull men and women report towards wanting to contribute to the [common good](#) -- whether it's through the value and usefulness of a product or service. That [theme](#) links the 4.0 career with the emerging new business model focused on creating sustainable enterprises and the "triple bottom line" -- financial, social and environmental measures of success. It combines financial success with contributing to social needs and problems. This is "social entrepreneurialism" -- the movement towards creating successful businesses that also contribute to the solution of social problems. In effect, the 4.0 careerist thinks of work as a vehicle for change and influence upon the larger human community.

## **A Broad Movement**

I mentioned above that Generations X and Y embody many of the characteristics of the 4.0 career. I'll describe their contributions to this evolution in a future post. But it's clearly a broad movement transcending generations.

For example, a survey of 8,000 workers across all age groups and occupations by [Concours Group](#) found that the most productive, energized workers gravitate towards companies that provide opportunities for ongoing learning, growth and creative challenge. They want their work to have a positive impact on something more meaningful than just the narrower rewards of money, position, or power. And, they want the service or product they work on to have a positive impact on people's lives. Regarding older workers, the New Face of Work Survey conducted by

the [MetLife Foundation and Civic Ventures](#) found similar trends among older baby boomers. It reports that half of that group say they're looking to shift their careers in a direction that would provide more service to others.

And, a 2007 survey by [MonsterTRAK](#) found that 80 percent of those surveyed said they want a job that has a positive impact on the environment. And 92 percent said they would choose working for a "green" company. Other research shows employees working at companies with corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs are the most satisfied. They stay at their jobs longer and are more content with senior management than their peers at companies with lackluster CSR programs, according to a survey conducted by [Kenexa Research Institute](#).

### **How The 4.0 Careerist Thinks And Behaves**

Here are some ways to assess yourself and your work environment in relation to the 4.0 careerist. Do you find:

- Ways to contribute something positive to people's lives, whether through the product or service, regardless of your status within the company.
- Opportunities for new learning, continued growth and expanding your skills and competencies.
- A positive, fun work environment that makes you look forward to going to work.
- A safe and nontoxic office environment and building, including sufficient natural light, and green equipment and furniture.
- Open communication and feedback, up and down.
- A team-oriented, innovative and challenging work culture.
- Employee recognition and reward programs that are fairly applied.
- Positive, supportive leadership and management practices, including corporate citizenship, ethics, transparency and corporate responsibility practices.
- Commitment to diversity in hiring and promotion of employees, including differences of gender, racial/ethnic group, and sexual orientation.
- Support for workers' well-being, through wellness programs, exercise, stress management, flextime and other programs, not surface gestures like free coffee and soda.

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