

TOPGRADING YOUR CAREER

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With over 32 years as a headhunter, I find myself reflecting and comparing Corporate America 1970 to Corporate America 2002.

In the '70s, employees went to work for large corporations expecting a job or career for life. They believed that if they showed up for work early, worked hard and long, the company would take good care of them and their family.

Over the past thirty years, the term 'lifetime employment' has become as ancient as the horse and buggy. If you want lifetime employment, the only place left is to become Amish and marry an Amish man or woman and eventually take over their parents farm.

Today in Corporate America we hear terms like 'Shareholder Value', 'Downsizing' and 'Rightsizing'. I remember in the late '80s and early '90s, if a corporation's stock was in the Tank, they would announce on the front page of The Wall Street Journal

that they were eliminating 2,000 jobs to become more profitable and their stock would jump. Today, in 2002, those announcements don't even wiggle their stock.

Corporate America isn't being managed by strong 'know and love the business' CEO-types any more. It is being managed by Wall Street.

Thirty years ago when a new employee was hired, they were given a handshake, maybe a hug, and introduced around to the other employees who smiled and welcomed them to the company. Today, they get an offer letter in writing by registered mail verifying the offer and also telling them they can be fired or terminated for any reason (becoming an Amish farmer is starting to look pretty good).

Is a CEO really needed with shareholders, institutional investors and corporate legal departments dictating to Corporate America?

If you've not yet read Topgrading: How Leading Companies Win By Hiring, Coaching and Keeping the Best People, Bradford D. Smart, Ph.D., you should. It's about keeping your top performers (A's), turning your B employees into A employees and replacing your C employees with A employees. Employees should be doing the same thing - Topgrading. Here's a short test I developed on whether you work for an "A", "B", or "C" company.

- | Yes | No | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Your company has had two or fewer CEOs in the past 10 years. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Your company has been profitable 8 of the last 10 years (including special and one-time charges). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. Your company uses the term 'shareholder value' once or not at all in an employee meeting. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Your company appears to be as concerned about you and your family as much as 'shareholder value'. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. You would refer a friend or relative to work for your company without hesitation or compensation. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Your company, if forced to downsize, gives ample severance and outplacement assistance. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Your spouse thinks you should never leave your firm (spouses know). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. You are still passionate about your job and having fun in your job and career. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. You see yourself retiring from your company. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. Management in your company loves animals (even "Chainsaw" loved his dogs). |
| ___ | ___ | Total 'Yes' and 'No' Answers. |

Scoring:

- 0-1 "No" AnswersA
2 "No" AnswersB
3 "No" AnswersC (You should have a resume prepared and be scanning job opportunities).
4 or More "No" Answers.....(Why are you still there?)

Bradford D. Smart, Ph.D., Topgrading (Paramus, NJ, Prentice Hall Press, 1999).

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