

How to have your career your way

Book Report: How to control your San Diego job destiny

By [Marty Graham](#), SDNN

Wednesday, November 4, 2009 no comments | [be the first to comment!](#)



Many of us who are looking for routes out of our own personal holes in this Swiss cheese economic downturn have turned to ideas on how we can reshape ourselves for this new unknown, the post-crash workplace.

But it's hard to guess what that new workplace will look like. Some believe the crash harks the end of jobs as we knew them in many sectors of the economy - prompting a stampede of retraining into the few professions, like medical support and teaching, where we anticipate the job model will survive.

Others remain vibrantly optimistic that their jobs will be as they were only better.

Lisa Quast remains a firm believer in the idea that workers control their destiny, and her book, "Your Career Your Way," offers a guide for a future that women workers create - although the book would probably work fine for men, too.

For women, careers haven't been as rewarding as they should be. We earn 80 cents on the male wage-earner dollar, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics - despite the fact that we have narrowed the gap on educational attainments to less than two percentage points, according to the Census Bureau. Among the worst professions, women lawyers make up nearly half of law schools' graduating classes and 30 percent of the profession, but earn less than 60 percent of their male counterparts.



What if that's because women count on working very, very hard and some good luck to get ahead, without knowing exactly what our 'ahead' should look like and what we have to get us there and how we should plan that trip?

That's what Quast wants us to go to work on. In her recent book, "Your Career Your Way," Quast tries to get readers to think about their careers - not just the job and the immediate future - and ask the question where do I want to go and how do I get there?

This short and to-the-point book is really a series of exercises for the reader, who will write the answers in the book, and presumably burn the book before it falls

into enemy hands.

Quast urges us to turn to our own co-workers and bosses for answers.

In this very brave strategy, we will ask them about our strengths and weaknesses to find out if their perceptions correspond with our own - and to begin to think about how to change that perception both by changing what we do and changing what we appear to be.

Those answers (once the urge to defend oneself passes) combined with the answer to the infernal question of where you want to go and what we need to get there, help the reader build a strategy to succeed. Whether the answers come down to getting over shyness or learning to be a better listener, dressing and acting more professionally, training in skills like public speaking or software programs or finishing things on time, provide the guidance we need to get to where we want to go.

It would be nice to see some guidance on how to get paid what we're worth - something the book lacks. Gaining more responsibility without the benefits of better pay seems like a hollow victory indeed.

But the book does a good job of offering a direct and simple course for getting much closer to the career advancement many of us hunger for.

One of the most feared interview questions is: Where do you want to be in five years? It's also the one to which most people say they fudge the answer, knowing it's not enough to say "not homeless and not choosing between lap dances for the blind or greeting people at WalMart."

I know someone who looked right at the interviewer and said I want to be in your job. It might have worked better if she added with you as my supervisor, advising me on my strengths and weaknesses.

Marty Graham writes for SDNN.

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