

The Early Career

In the early phase of their careers, usually when they are between twenty and thirty-five, people make and deepen initial commitments to a type of work, an organization, and a nonwork life style. Professionals, in particular, expend considerable energy to become competent (and recognized as such by others) in their chosen trade. It is usually an exciting period, in which one begins to try to fulfill expectations about the “professional me” that have been developing (through education) for two decades.

Four general sets of issues seem to be particularly important if one is to try to understand this early phase, the obstacles encountered, and the methods typically used to deal with them. One set of issues relates to adapting to being an employee in a complex human organization. A second has to do with getting established in one’s work or organization and achieving some initial success. A third has to do with establishing some type of a workable relationship between one’s career and the nonwork aspects of life. The fourth relates to a period of questioning of initial career and noncareer choices, which most people go through around age thirty.

Adapting to the Realities of Complex Organizations

Most professionals start their careers within an established organization. Having been students in an educational setting for anywhere from sixteen to twenty-two years, they suddenly become employees

inside what are usually noneducational organizations. This change can create some serious problems for people in their first year of work. Beyond that, the ability to grasp quickly the more subtle realities associated with human organizations often makes the difference between a very successful and an ordinary early career. Some of the more important of these realities are discussed below.

Distribution of Rewards

Simply doing what you think is a good job, or even a very good job, is no guarantee that you will receive the rewards you desire.

For a number of complex reasons, most established organizations do not have performance evaluation systems that (1) completely define what “good performance” is for each job, (2) make sure that employees are aware of those performance criteria, (3) systematically collect data on employees’ performance, (4) feed those data back to employees so they can monitor how they are doing, and (5) use those data as the basis for distributing rewards (such as interesting assignments, promotions, money, discretion).

Considerable evidence exists that such a system would be very beneficial for employees, especially during the early career. But because “good” performance is often difficult and expensive to define and measure, and because creating such systems where they don’t exist is expensive and time-consuming, good performance appraisal systems are

very seldom found in organizations.

Instead, rewards are distributed in most organizations based on the “judgments” of a number of people (a person’s immediate superior is usually the key judge), some of whom may have only secondhand information on many of the people they are asked to judge.

People who are successful in their initial careers are those who perform well on the criteria used by the judges, and whose performance record is known by the judges. It is for these reasons that the better “how to” books on building a successful career stress (a) learning what your bosses’ expectations are concerning your work and (b) getting involved in some highly visible projects.

Development of Potential

Most organizations have no coherent system to make sure that people in their early careers get the experience, training, and human contacts needed to really develop their potential for their own benefit and the organization’s.

Although the development of people is an important goal for most organizations, it is a *long-range goal*. In most organizations, long-run objectives receive a priority lower than short-run concerns. For this and other reasons, employee development is seldom given anything close to the resources needed to do a uniformly good job. Even in companies where resources have been allocated to employee development, and where training programs and job rotation systems have been created, numerous individuals seem to end up coping with short-run demands at the expense of their future development.

We have seen many former students who seem to learn more in their first five years of work than others learn in fifteen years or more. The fast-learning group appear to be different from others in that they proactively take responsibility for their own learning. They seek out role models and mentors, recognizing that one relationship with a highly talented and successful senior person can be enormously instructive. They don’t stay in any one job for more than a few years, taking advantage of the fact that almost all the learning associated with most jobs comes in the first two years. They don’t wait to be assigned to new projects and jobs by others; they nominate themselves. In this and other ways, they actively manage their own careers.

Dependency on Others

Most professional jobs in organizations, especially managerial jobs, make an individual dependent on

numerous others, who often have different or conflicting objectives. Complex interdependencies and conflict are facts of life in most organizations. Individuals who cannot (or will not) find a way to manage their own dependencies are in for a hard time.

Younger people in particular often feel their dependence on others who know more than they do about the job, the organization, the people, and how to get things done. Young managers will often find themselves dependent on the cooperation of subordinates, a boss, other senior officials, various service departments, and possibly even outside suppliers, customers, and regulators. All these individuals and groups have limited time and talent, and their objectives sometimes clash with cooperation. Students are seldom if ever trained in how to manage this type of dependence network.

Managers use a wide variety of techniques to cope with their complex dependencies. Their techniques are sometimes aimed at reducing dependence, sometimes at influencing those on whom they are dependent to cooperate in certain ways, and sometimes at gaining power over the dependencies (which makes influencing them much easier). The faster a young employee learns to use these techniques effectively, the more successful he or she will generally be in the early career.

The larger and more complex the organization, the more time people end up having to spend managing interdependencies. For example, the following is excerpted from a twenty-nine-year-old manager’s description of what he does in a typical day at a moderately large manufacturing company:

When I arrive in the morning I normally read the paper for 15 minutes or a half hour to catch up on the latest news. Randomly throughout the month I will call my boss before working hours actually begin, to let him know that I’m there and on the job, and he can reach me whenever he wants me. This is an important game to play in my situation, because he is located in a different building eight miles away, and sometimes he feels a little insecure as to whether all of his people are working full time and are doing the kinds of things he would like to have done.

I spend about one-fourth of the day actually here in my office. The table in the center of the office is the major working area, and it’s round. I don’t have a standard desk. This was something that I designed when I was promoted six months ago. The average age of my direct reports was about 47–48 years old, and I felt that it would be very difficult for me, being only 28 at the time, to sit behind a big desk and give these guys orders. They had 20 years of experience and knew the company backward and forward. There wasn’t any way I could effectively tell them what to do. So I decided to get in a round table and to make sure that all the chairs

around the table were of the same type and description so there wouldn't be any overt status difference between anyone in the office, so that we could build a teamwork relationship among all members of the group.

After reading the morning paper I would normally attend several meetings. I spend almost 70 percent of my normal day in meetings. By the way, that drives a lot of people nuts, and it bothers me too, but most of our meetings really are necessary. My peers and I have got to know what each other and top management are doing or we trip all over each other. Meetings are often the best way to get the information across. Meetings are also useful when I need the commitment from other divisions for some action, and when we have a problem but not all the expertise to solve it.

This would take me normally till about 10:30 or 10:45, at which point I would come back to the office and handle the mail. The mail comes in a stack of about 4 to 6 inches each day. I would quickly sort it and deliver messages to my staff to work on the projects and various assignments that came through the mail. I would delegate all the assignments with the exception of *politically* sensitive issues. Those I would discuss with the appropriate manager and handle them together with him. Normally it would take me 10 to 15 minutes to sort the mail and another 15 to 20 discussing the various sensitive issues.

This would bring me to around 11:30–11:45, where I would work on my personal mail, which includes salary and merit reviews, expense accounts, purchase requisitions, etc. This would take me right up to lunch.

After lunch, the schedule of activities changes, depending on what part of the year it is. During the first half of the year the work load is not as heavy as during the last half. During the first half of the year I would spend most of the afternoon in meetings of the type described earlier. In the latter part of the year I spend a great deal of time working on the annual long-range plan. This is a very extensive effort and requires hundreds and hundreds of man-hours of work to put together the details, schedules, and plans that support the strategies of this division. One of the reasons that this effort takes such a great deal of my personal time is that my boss' incentive salary depends on the achievement of many specific goals.

Parenthetically, this young man has had a very successful and satisfying early career.

Achieving

For most professionals, the early career is a period directed toward personal achievement. Considerable time and energy are invested in work and in establishing themselves as credible professionals with proven "track records."

In most of the cases we have observed personally, or heard others report, those people who achieved the most professionally in their early

careers were people who were able to generate what Doug Hall has called a "success syndrome."¹ As we have observed it, this process can be described as follows:

1. The new employee does not usually have a traumatic first year and is able to adjust rather quickly to organizational realities. As a result of careful selection or luck, the individual fits well with the organization and its work.
2. The individual gets some challenging initial assignments which, because of the lack of adjustment problem and the generally good fit, he or she performs well on.
3. This initial success bolsters the individual's self-confidence and helps him or her get challenging, more important (and visible) assignments.
4. The person's self-confidence, on top of everything else, helps him or her to do well in these next assignments.
5. These successes continue to bolster the individual's self-confidence and provide access to additional human and technical resources that are needed to continue to quickly grow and handle more important work.
6. The cycle continues, more or less dramatically, throughout the early career period. Success continues to breed success.

The "high flyers"—those who achieve more success in less time than ninety-five percent of their peers—seem to be people who position themselves to have opportunities come their way, and then take advantage of most of these opportunities. Eugene Jennings had studied this process in managerial careers,² which he calls developing mobility, and has identified the types of underlying rules associated with it. Those rules are:

1. Never become overspecialized. Get broad experience in a number of areas and always maintain your options.
2. Become a "crucial" subordinate to a very mobile and successful boss. If you find yourself working for an immobile superior, move.
3. Make yourself highly visible. Make sure your superiors know about your accomplishments and your ambitions.
4. If you are blocked and can't find a way out, leave the organization, but do it in a way that allows you to part

¹Douglas T. Hall, *Careers in Organizations* (Pacific Palisades, Calif.: Goodyear, 1976).

²Eugene Jennings, *The Mobile Manager* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).

as friends. Never allow a showdown to occur, and don't quit work with an emotional parting shot.

Both moderately and very successful people seem to reach a point late in the early career period where continued growth in their achievements requires that they be put "in charge." It is not unusual for professionals around age thirty-five to abandon their mentors and begin to feel frustrated because they don't have the power to continue producing even larger achievements. For many, this period doesn't last long, because they are soon put "in charge."

Establishing a Workable Relationship Between a Job and Other Aspects of One's Life

Most professionals develop two key commitments during their twenties—a commitment to get a job (or organization) and a commitment to an off-the-job life style (with or without a spouse, with or without children). The demands made on an individual by these two commitments periodically change in ways that conflict and put strain on the individual.

The following example, reported by a twenty-eight-year-old man who had established a successful initial career at a bank, is not atypical:

I usually get home by 6:00 P.M. My wife and I have got until at least 7:30 P.M. before we really have any time to exchange more than a "Hi, how are you?" By 7:30 we get the kids to bed. Sometimes we eat with Bobby, sometimes we don't. After dinner we do get some time together, even though we're both a little bit tired. Alice complains, with some reason, that I read magazines and newspapers during the little free time that we have together. We find that time is more precious than it was before. Ever since the baby came, we haven't been able to go to bed before 11 P.M. because that's when Alice completes her last nursing. Normally, we would try to get to bed earlier than that. We hope to resume our normal schedule as soon as the baby starts sleeping through the night.

We're thinking of moving out to the suburbs soon. There's not much for kids to do in the city. There are a lot of other reasons, though. One of our biggest problems is that it is just too damn expensive to live in the city. So we might buy a house—we're really looking into it now—but with a lot of mixed feelings.

Kids, I don't know, we didn't realize until after we had them how much time they require of you. They are just so damn dependent upon you. There's so much work involved with younger children that you've just got to reorder your life a bit. We found the change from be-

ing young marrieds without kids to being young marrieds with kids to be something more than we expected. We have no real desire to go to the suburbs. It's just that it costs so much less to live in the suburbs than in the city. We can own a house, save money, and build up equity at the same time. But in the suburbs I would have a 45-minute commute. I don't like the thought of that very much. On the other hand, I should get to play a little more tennis out there. I have let myself go; I've gotten a little soft. The extra commuting will make time even more precious than it was before though. It's a rough choice . . .

Young professionals whose spouses also are pursuing careers often find it even more difficult to establish and maintain a workable relationship between their two jobs and an off-the-job style. "Dual career" couples who also have children usually find that their time and energy are very scarce resources.

The work vs. off-the-job strains that develop during the early part of a career are not confined to married couples or couples with children. Single people often run into difficulties, too. Witness the comments of these two young men:

We're having a meeting next week out at St. Georges. This is the fifth week out of the last eight that I have been at one of these conventions. Many of these conventions are executive oriented, and many of the executives bring their wives. This creates an interesting situation for a bachelor like myself, particularly when most of the women are middle-aged and older. You see, they don't appreciate seeing me show up at each convention with a different attractive young woman.

I'm in a rather tough situation right now, and I don't see any relief in sight. I was given a promotion six months ago, and at 31 I am now the company's youngest plant manager—which, of course, is terrific. But, the promotion moved me from Chicago to Panto Flats, Texas, which has a population of about 6000. I would like very much to establish a permanent relationship with a woman, but unlike in Chicago, there just aren't many unmarried women around here. My nonwork life style, at this point, is very unsatisfactory.

There are three ways in which people generally deal with a work-nonwork conflict. Some people make changes in their nonwork lives that, in effect, reduce their commitment there. Many successful young executives take this option. One *New Yorker* cartoon captures this response well. A thirty- to thirty-five-year-old manager in a posh office holds a phone in his hand and displays a very annoyed expression. The caption reads: "Martha, how many times have I told you not to bother me while I'm on the way up?"

A second option some people choose is to take actions that reduce their commitment to work. In-

dividuals who receive a great deal of satisfaction from their nonwork lives, and individuals who are disappointed in the amount of satisfaction they are getting from their work, both often select this option.

A third option people sometimes choose attempts not to reduce the commitment to either work or other activities, but simply to allow the conflict to exist and to absorb the strain personally. The young plant manager from Panto Flats “solved” his problem by jetting to Houston and back an average of two or three nights per week, where he eventually did meet a young woman and got engaged. In the interim, he lived with less sleep and a special variety of jet lag.

Pace

People in the early career stages are working hard even without the special demands faced by this young plant manager. In the early stages of a career, people are experimenting with, among other things, the *pace* of their lives. Pace is a widely variable and individually specific feature of life style. Some people work and live faster than others. Although many organizations value efficiency (speed) in their employees, faster is not always better. Sometimes doing more faster can mean doing more in a mediocre fashion.

Another potential pitfall of rapid pace is burnout. Exhibit 37-1 highlights the commonly observed symptoms of burnout. These symptoms can arise from very rapid-paced life styles in which the person comes to one of two conclusions. The first is, “Is that all there is?” Here, the emotional sense is one of disappointment—that I’ve worked too hard and achieved so much, but somehow it’s not satisfying. The second conclusion that can lead to burnout is resignation. This is the sense of having worked so hard and still not having been able to keep up. Effort is no longer seen to produce rewards and so much energy has already been expended in the search for those rewards that there is none left. One becomes exhausted.

In her book, *Living with Stress*, Nancy Gross makes the following statement:

... You owe yourself the indulgence of a sense of humour through which you can cut ... annoyances down to size. You owe yourself the indulgence of the patience that permits you to ignore pressures and delays. ... You owe yourself the indulgence of vacations, of aspirin when you are coming down with a cold, of hours of peaceful privacy, of relaxation, of occasional bursts of the extravagance ... that give[s] color to life. You owe yourself the responsibility of using your body and your mind in the interests of the constructive realities and aspirations that mean the most to you. You owe yourself a pace ... which meets your temperamental needs, which neither hurries you nor holds you back.

Exhibit 37-1 Symptoms of Burnout

Low morale	Exhaustion/chronic fatigue
Depression	Frequent headaches
Absenteeism	Nervous stomach
Increased anxiety	Ulcers/colitis
Overly critical	Weight loss
Disenchantment	Rapid, irregular heartbeat
Mental rigidity	Poor appetite
Loss of sense of humor	Loss of sexual interest
Easily discouraged	Change viewed as a threat
Bored	Not enjoying time off
Easily angered	Feeling out of control
Negative attitude	Overuse of alcohol
Withdrawn from people	Making everything a problem
Cynicism	Postponing decisions
Difficulty in concentrating	Not recognizing limitations
Unwillingness to ask for help	Perfectionism

Adapted from “Burn Out” by Marvin Fogel, *DM Magazine*, August 1979, and “Burn Out in Academia” by Gib Akin, *Exchange: The Journal of the Organizational Behavior Teaching Society*, Vol. V, no. 2, 1980, p. 5.

We believe this is true and encourage you to find the pace that fits you and that will sustain you and your enthusiasm for life throughout your career and lifetime. Indeed, part of the individual–organization matching process involves matching the paces at which each desire to operate.

Balance

Another characteristic of early career work-nonwork experimentation is balance—that is the proportion of time and energy to be allocated to each aspect of a person’s life. Balance does *not* imply, in this case, equal proportions; rather, it simply refers to the proportion of time and energy chosen by an individual. One person’s “balanced” life may seem “out of balance” to another.

A common such phenomenon in the business world is the workaholic’s life style. Workaholics balance their lives heavily in favor of their careers. They typically exhibit the characteristics outlined in Exhibit 37–2. To many people, a workaholic’s life is out of balance. To the workaholic, says Marilyn Machlowitz, author of the book *Workaholics*, life is as it should be. Whether or not workaholics *choose* their life styles or are *driven* to them, many seem to enjoy and thrive on them. Regardless of the workaholic’s predispositions, though, living and working with workaholics creates some special problems that need to be managed carefully. We refer

Exhibit 37–2

Characteristics of Workaholics

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- Spend most of their time working
 - Seldom take vacations
 - Get up early regardless of how late they go to bed
 - Read or work while they eat
 - Make lists of things to do each day
 - Have a hard time doing nothing
 - Are fiercely competitive
 - Work on weekends and holidays
 - Dread retirement
 - Really enjoy working
 - Have strong self-doubts and fear their own inadequacy
 - Strive to get the most out of their time
 - Make little distinction between work and play
 - Pursue everything with vigor, enthusiasm, and intensity
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Adapted from *Workaholics* by Marilyn Machlowitz, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA, 1980.

you to Machlowitz’s book for a detailed discussion of these. The important point for our purposes here is that regardless of the particular balance between work, family, self, and life style you choose, you should try to consider the short-run and long-run consequences of that balance in each component and for the people in it. If you are able to do this, you are less likely to be surprised or disappointed by your choices later on.

Not everyone, of course, experiences the same amount of work-nonwork conflict during the early career. The people we have observed who have experienced the most conflict, and who tend to “solve” this problem in ways that eventually create even more conflicts and problems, make decisions in one aspect of their lives without considering the implications for the other parts. That is, they ignore, to some degree, the interdependence that exists between the various aspects of a life. We have even seen people who tend to be planning-oriented create problems for themselves by planning only *within* their careers. People who behave this way are often able to survive during their early career, but the lack of total life planning and decision making eventually catches up with most of them—often in the midlife period between thirty-five and forty-five.

There are at least four ways to characterize different approaches to balance in one’s life. These are shown in Exhibit 37–3 and are a career focus, a family focus, a pendulum focus, and a do-it-all-now composite focus. The exhibit lists the basic dominant values, the critical demands, the potential rewards, and the potential consequences for each focus. We encourage you to stop and think a moment about your balance, to identify which of these four seems closest to yours, and then to write down your feelings and observations about the values, demands, rewards, and consequences as they might apply to you. How will you manage the consequences? Will the rewards be sufficient? Do you have the skills to meet the critical demands?

Questioning Initial Choices

Most professionals seem to go through a period of questioning their initial work, organization, family, and life style choices after about five to ten years. For some this is a mild period, while for others it can be fairly difficult and traumatic. As a result, some people abandon their initial commitments and make new ones; they sometimes change organiza-

Exhibit 37-3
Approaches to Balance in Life

	<i>Career Person</i>	<i>Family Person</i>	<i>Pendulum Person</i>	<i>Composite Person</i>
<u>Basic Values</u>	Success is getting ahead.	Success is love at home.	Success is getting ahead and then having love at home.	Success is having it all at once.
<u>Critical Demands</u>	Singular focus. Large amounts of time on the job. Political skill. Suppression of "softer" desires. Supportive partner.	Large amounts of time at home. Suppression of "harder" desires. Sharing partner.	Ability to reconstruct from neglect. Ability to change habits. Sense of timing. Patient partner.	Large amounts of time. Ability to plan time, not projects. Ability to manage stress. Sense of timing. Ability to shift focus and to learn quickly. Supportive partner.
<u>Potential Rewards</u>	Power. Money. Prestige. Satisfaction.	Peace. Love. Friendships. Satisfaction.	Sense of quick growth (career). Changing satisfactions.	Power, money, prestige, and love at home. Peace, fulfillment, and satisfaction.
<u>Potential Consequences</u>	Loss of love at home. Sense of hollowness of rewards. Desensitization. Stressful life.	Loss of power, money, and prestige. Loss of impact, sense of contribution.	Loss of love at home. Loss of pinnacle achievements (in order to deal with other focus). Desensitization.	Mediocrity. Sense of being out of control. Stressful life.

tions, go back to school, start over in a new line of work in a new city, or get married or divorced.

People who make poor initial decisions—who start work with very unrealistic expectations, who have serious problems adapting to their new environments, or who have trouble creating a workable arrangement between their work and nonwork lives—often find around age thirty that the satisfaction they are getting from the various aspects of their lives is less than they expected or desired. This leads them to a period of reexamination. A few are forced into reexamination and change. Some are fired. Others lose a key promotion they expected. The spouses of a few walk out on them. Even people who are fundamentally satisfied with their lives seem at least to pause and ponder their life situation around age thirty. Is this what life is really all about? Have I really made the right choices? Am I responding too much to what I think I "should" do?

Those who actually make major changes as a result of this period of questioning are a minority,

no doubt partly because of the difficulties associated with change. Unless one is in a highly unsatisfying position, change usually increases the pain one feels in the short run. Finding a new job or breaking off a marriage relationship can be a traumatic experience.

After the period of questioning is over, or after a change has been made, people generally plunge back into their careers with increased dedication and energy. For five to ten years, they focus again on achievement in their chosen profession.

Assignment

Read the Ben Jerrow case (pages 418-422). Be prepared to describe Ben's life style and the events which caused him to review his life style. What kind of events would (will) cause you to reexamine your life style? What are Ben's options? What do you think Ben should do? Why? What would you do? Why?

At age 36, Ben Jerrow was the youngest full partner in C. B. Kline and Company, one of the world's most prestigious management consulting firms. Jerrow, his wife, and three children led a very comfortable life on his \$65,000 salary.

Except for a slight cold, May 12 (1974) was in many ways a very typical day for Jerrow. He left his Westchester home at 6:30 A.M. and arrived at his office in Manhattan at 8:00. At 3:00 in the afternoon he took a cab to La Guardia, then flew to Pittsburgh for what was scheduled to be a short planning meeting with one of his clients. Instead of ending at 8:00, however, the discussion dragged on until 12:30, at which point Jerrow headed back toward the airport in his rented car. At 1:15 A.M., about three miles from the airport, Jerrow fell asleep at the wheel and drove his car at 50 miles per hour into the back of a truck parked on the side of the road. At 2:12 A.M. Nancy Jerrow received a call from the Woodlands Community Hospital informing her that her husband was in critical condition in their emergency room.

* * *

Benjamin Jerrow was born and raised in Chicago, the second son of a behavioral science professor at a local college. His father served as a consultant to a number of organizations in the Chicago area, and Ben actually worked with him during his summers while going to school at Northwestern. After getting his BS in economics, Ben attended a midwestern business school, getting both an MBA and a doctorate. While in graduate school he married Nancy McKenzie. They had their first child soon after he began work at Kline in the Chicago office.

"I started work at Kline," Ben had said to others, "thinking I'd transform the place in a couple of years into something more competent and exciting. I suppose almost everyone who is attracted to Kline is that way: the five letter men, the superstars, who just look at a problem and it gets solved. Which is to say, they are all very egocentric."

I remember my first assignment well. The old Buttersworth College was taken over by the Board of

Regents for higher education in Illinois. They were going to transform a 3,500-student technical school into a 30,000-student university in the course of five years, and ours was the mission to figure out how the hell to do it; how should you organize, how should you staff, and on and on and on. I remember thinking, well that looks easy enough.

What I didn't know at the time was that the study was badly negotiated, and even more poorly managed.

Jim Welch was the study manager. He's about 5'6" and had a mind that went about 400 miles an hour and a mouth that went about 500. Unfortunately they weren't quite in sync. Jim was very very bright, but he could piss off the Good Humor Man. He was just unbelievable. We'd go up to Jim and say, "Here are the five different organizational alternatives we've got," all laid out on charts. He'd say, "Where's the date." "What do you mean, where's the date?" "Well, there's no date on the organization chart." Half an hour later after a lecture as to why dates are important, you grab the thing and say, "All right Jim, I'll put a fuckin date on it." It was just interchange after interchange like that. In all fairness, every time he'd come up with things like that, there would be a message in it. You just had to pull the skin over your head to make sure it didn't absolutely destroy you.

About halfway through the study, or what we thought was halfway through it, Jim ended up crossing irons with the head of the Board of Regents commissioned by the governor to get this college going. We had laid out the economic analyses and what the organizational and staffing alternatives were, etc. In that meeting, the chairman said, "No, no, that isn't what I really want. I want to know what the University of Illinois, the University of Chicago, Northwestern and a half a dozen other universities are organized like and I'll decide which type of organization we want." That isn't the way Kline operates. To make a long story short, it ended up Jim pissing off the chairman and we got pulled off the study. It just ended right there. An absolute disaster.

Jerrow's second assignment at Kline was not a disaster, but his performance, as rated by the project manager, was close to being unsatisfactory.

I didn't know what the hell I was doing and I wasn't thinking very clearly. That was a phenomenal ego blow. It isn't that it hadn't happened previously in sports or whatever. Part of my game has always been that of the street fighter—I may not start out winning but by the time the thing is over I will. And it was clear

This case was prepared as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation. Copyright © 1975 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Harvard Business School case 6-476-032.

at that point in time that I not only wasn't winning, but it wasn't all that clear that I ever would. I had serious doubts about whether I was smart enough to be able to do it. I knew I worked hard enough to be able to get it done. I began to wonder whether I fit with them from a personal chemistry point of view, and so forth. In fact, I started looking a little for a job. I figured, screw this, I just gotta do something else. I got a couple of offers, none of which really seemed very exciting, but they did help my wounded feelings at that point in time.

Six months after joining Kline, Jerrow began his third assignment. He ended up traveling five days a week for the next six months with almost no break. His performance, as judged by more senior employees, rose to "average" during this period.

It was then I got my first little view of political infighting. I found ideas on this or that which we traded over cocktails or dinner circling back and being presented to the engagement director and the engagement manager by some people as their own neat new idea. I found that happened two or three times and it ended up pissin me off a little bit. So I decided at that point in time, all right, I'll set you up with one that will give you 80% of the answer and when you get shot out of the saddle I'll come in with the other 20% and make it clear who the hell's idea it was anyway. Well, one guy got cut up pretty badly on that one. It was good clean fun.

After one year with Kline, Jerrow decided he probably wasn't ever going to "make it" there. He seriously considered taking a job offer as a VP for a \$80 million a year industrial firm. The offer, however, came from a longstanding client of his Dad, and it wasn't ever clear to Jerrow whether the offer was made because of that relationship or because of his demonstrated abilities. He turned it down.

It got to the point where I didn't really give a damn whether I stayed at Kline or not. And that really helped in a way, because I started to be a bit more bold. I decided to take a number of calculated risks.

In July on a plane from Montreal to Chicago, John Michaels (the head of the Chicago office) asked Ben if the project teams that he had seen since joining the company were different in any ways from what he had expected. Ben said yes, that they were about one-half as effective as he would have expected. A month later, Michaels sent Ben a note asking him to take on the administrative assignment of looking into the effectiveness of their project teams. In September Jerrow put together an effort that included a questionnaire survey of all people in the Chicago office concerning the effectiveness of project

teams and the methods by which they usually operated. He analyzed the results, gave them to Michaels, along with suggestions for corrective action. Michaels agreed with Jerrow's report and told him to go ahead with his improvement program. By December, almost everyone in the office agreed that the working climate had changed considerably for the better. Michaels was clearly impressed.

By early December, while I was far from being out of trouble, the bleeding had stopped and it looked like I was at least not going to be fired. By January this was virtually assured.

In February, Jerrow was asked to come and do a similar survey in the San Francisco office. In April, he was asked by the New York office (headquarters) to work with virtually every Kline office to evaluate and improve their effectiveness. By April, Jerrow was beginning to establish a positive reputation throughout the firm.

Kline had been anxious to make headway into the market for organization, manpower planning, and compensation studies, but had been relatively unsuccessful for the previous three years. With Jerrow's new visibility and reputation, principals in New York began to solicit and then listen to his ideas about how to get into these areas. They also began to ask his advice regarding the two or three cases in that area which they did have.

On May 10, Jerrow received a call from the managing director in New York asking him to take a look at a questionnaire they had developed as a part of a large manpower planning project they were doing for one of the 10 largest industrial companies in the United States.

A couple of weeks later, I finally got the questionnaire. I looked at it, called them back and said it's dog meat. It's just not going to work. It's poorly designed. I don't understand really what you're trying to do, and so on. To make a long story short, they asked me to come to New York to help. I went, and found the way they were trying to go about the case didn't make any sense at all. I ended up spending five days a week there for the next two months—the Monday morning special going out and Friday night or Saturday morning coming back. We ended up completely changing the thrust of the study from one in which we were going to provide answers to one where we were going to provide questions. It served as the first real personnel diagnostic I think the firm had done.

With great effort, we finished just before we were scheduled to present the findings. Our presentation wasn't going to give the chairman the answers he was looking for. In fact it was going to raise questions that would make him as well as the whole personnel function, look awfully bad. And I probably was a little over-

ly aggressive on that one. I showed the presentation to the managing partner on the case (Bob Jordan) the day before the meeting, and he turned white. He said, "Oh, shit, we're dead. The chairman isn't going to like this even a little." But he didn't have time to change the presentation and he didn't really want to cancel the meeting or postpone it, so he made one of the other guys (George Elms) give the presentation with me there. It was one of those things where you figure, "That's it baby. I better get the résumé polished up." The chairman sat there for 45 minutes or so just stone-faced. There wasn't a word that came out of anyone in this whole entourage of his. About three-quarters of the way through the presentation there was one specific piece of data that a personnel guy picked up on and started to blast. Elms couldn't answer the question and immediately passed it to me. I came up with one quick fact that put it all back into perspective again while the personnel guy sat there smoking. He started to interrupt one other time and the chairman told him to shut up and quit trying to cover his ass and that he wanted to hear the whole story. That was when I knew we were in pretty good shape. I pulled one other coup on that one which was unbeknownst to either Bob or George. I suspected the question that was going to come out of it was, "All right, what do we do from here? You've pointed out that things are in total disarray, how do we fix them?" I had half a dozen slides prepared the day before showing how to proceed from there. The chairman asked the question at the end of the session, Bob turned white and George turned red. We took a five minute break and I gave the slides to George and—bang—we were right in for another 200,000 bucks or so with a new project.

In June, Jerrow was asked to come permanently to the New York office, with a healthy increase in pay. They moved in July, to the chagrin of his wife.

Nancy was thoroughly pissed off with me for being away too much and moving to New York didn't really help any.

Kline began getting more contracts in the areas of Jerrow's interests, and he succeeded in developing a few techniques that were considered technical breakthroughs. One of his clients offered a VP job at a 75% increase in pay, but he turned it down on the basis that he was having a good time and learning a lot at Kline. When the annual spring announcement of new partners at Kline came, Jerrow expected to be named one. He wasn't.

It was a legitimate decision. The screw is that I had been led to believe I was going to be made a partner that year. And one other person made it whose track record wasn't as good as mine. I was clearly disappointed, and went out looking for job offers. I got two or three attractive ones, but each had some fatal

flaw. And I began to think it would be smarter to wait a year and leave after being elected partner so there would be no questions at all about whether I cut it or not.

I learned later that Jerry York, a very influential partner in the New York office, had real trouble supporting my candidacy. Jerry is a silver-spoon type of guy, very bright, very good. I managed to finagle my way into doing a project with him, which was the first study we had ever done for this fairly complex client organization. The chairman was an old school buddy of Jerry's. It turned out to be a very interesting study and the beginning of a long-standing relationship—five years now—with the firm. Jerry was directing it and I was managing it. (For all intents and purposes, I was directing it too.) I got very close with the president of their major subsidiary as a result of our compensation work. It was clear that there were sticky problems of communications, trust, and direction between New York, which is where the headquarters were, and Los Angeles, where the sub-headquarters were. This subsidiary represented 60% of their sales and about 90% of their growth potential.

The chairman of the corporation (Ted Young) knew there were problems but wasn't really fully aware of the magnitude. We had an intriguing session with him. I guess I had met with him twice prior to that meeting. The last item on a four or five point agenda was something innocuously worded like "closing the gap between Los Angeles and New York." I went through a brief academic description of what I saw were some of their problems, communications-wise, without really suggesting what the source of the problem was. Jerry began to get a little uncomfortable. Ted has a style of listening in which he will give you his undivided attention while you're talking and won't think about the thing until you stop. Then there will be a massive pregnant pause as he considers a reply. And he has a complete poker face all the time. You'd get absolutely no response—no laughter, nod, shake of the head. I was convinced that I wasn't getting through to him, and Jerry meanwhile didn't know what the hell was going on. He kept confusing the issue with general management platitudes about this, that and the other thing. About ten minutes into it, I said, "Let me try and put it as crisply and clearly as I can in terms of this last specific event we were talking about. You fucked up." Jesus, I thought Jerry was going to crawl under the table. He started talking about 84 different things at 100 miles an hour.

Ted is sitting there with an absolute poker face. Five minutes later Jerry stops. Ted just sat there. There had to be what felt like a 10-minute pause, although it was probably 30 seconds or so. Jerry couldn't stand it any longer, so he started back into it again. When he stopped, another 30-second pause and he started again. Ted broke in and said, "Jerry, you're covering old ground. Ben, why did you tell me I fucked up?" I said, "Two reasons: one, you did, and two, I didn't know any other way to get your attention." And then we started into it. Jerry was obviously sweating armpits through the whole thing. We made some major strides in terms of helping Ted understand what the problem was, and what he could be doing about it.

Jerry and I have been good friends ever since. That was the turning point in my relationship with a number of the powers that be at Kline. If it was still a bit unclear whether I was going to make it at Kline, after that it wasn't.

Within six months Jerrow was elected a partner.

* * *

The 12-room Westchester home owned by the Jerrows sits on 3 acres of land overlooking a small valley. Approaching it from the road, all one sees at first is a large driveway bordered by woods on one side, and by grass and flower gardens on the other.

A friend of Ben's from Harvard Business School stopped by on July 2, 1974, to see how well he was recovering. He found Jerrow in very good spirits, despite still being confined to a bed or a wheelchair. The doctors had concluded a week earlier that there would be no permanent damage, but that he still needed a few more months of rest.

Nancy's been an absolute savior the last two months—especially just after the accident. She got in touch with Kline the day after the accident and gave my secretary the 48-item agenda I had planned for the next day and worked with her to notify people, and so on. She made it VERY clear that "No conversation with him is allowed. I don't care what your problem is, he just is not available." Two or three days after the accident, when I could see that projects were going down the tubes, my reaction would have been to start calling people from the hospital and setting up shop by the bed.

Three or four days after I got home, as we were getting ready for a medical progress review, about a dozen guys from Kline showed up. And I can remember just sitting out there thinking, "Well, you son of a bitch, I guess you're really going to have to die before you are going to get these guys off your back."

That started me thinking. All right, if you're going to stay with Kline for any extended period of time, you're just going to have to do some things to cut down on the workload, especially the physical demands. My average workday had been 10 or 12 hours, and then I'd have a 3½ hour commute on top of that. I'd spend some time with Nancy and yet have very little time with the three kids. So it would mean I'd get four or five, or if I was lucky six, hours of sleep.

I suppose if Nancy was less effective and less strong then this thing may well have been precipitated a lot earlier. She's doing a super job raising the kids. We've always assumed that, you know, her job is to raise the kids and my job is to go out and raise the money. Now we're beginning to realize that really wasn't the way to operate.

Anyway, in the past week I've been trying to think out what my alternatives are. So far I've identified six.

I could try to cut back my responsibilities at Kline. Right now I'm responsible for all training activities for our U.S. offices, for secretarial and support services for the New York office, for three firm research projects, as well as a full client load. And that's insane. If I could just cut off a few things, to get the 65-hour work week down to say 45-50 hours, I think I could manage.

I'm unquestionably in a good position right now to go to the people at Kline and get them to take some of these things off me. What I'm afraid of is that because of the way Kline is, they won't stay off. Other things will come up and I guess I'm afraid that in a place where: (1) there is an unending amount of work to be done, and (2) the norm is for everyone, or at least all the young stars, to work until they drop, that it might not be possible to work a 50-hour week.

A second obvious option is to try cutting down the commute time. There are seven of us from the New York office that live within a 5-mile radius of here, so why not open an office up here. It would be a working office—not for clients. Even if we still had to go into the city two days a week, that would save 10½ hours. And it would be so nice to be able to drive home for lunch.

This idea just might not be practical. Economically it's no problem. And I talked to two of the Kline people who live nearby and they think it's a good idea. But I don't know.

Of course, I could leave Kline. The thought has crossed my mind before. I've got one offer and two potential offers floating around right now. All three are for VP jobs in very large companies. The money in all three cases is very nice, as much as double what I get now. All three of them have the major drawback of being in New York City, which brings us back to the problems of the commute. In two of these there is substantially less travel involved. In the other there is about as much travel. I think in all three cases I could cut the work week back considerably. But I'm not sure. I've always had itchy fingers to run something and all three offer that. But I'd frankly just as soon not get bogged down in a bunch of administrative trivia. It's all I can do to screw up my courage to pay our personal household bills; and, the fewer administrative things I have to worry about, the better I feel about it. In terms of types of people to interact with, it's one of the real negatives in leaving Kline. They are very bright, talented, creative kinds of people. You look at any of the corporate alternatives and, boy, they get very thin on talent very quickly in terms of stimulating your own thinking.

The final obvious option is to leave Kline and start my own consulting company. I really do think I've got some concepts and ideas that are unique and for which there is a huge market. And I've only begun to develop this business at Kline.

We can afford a lower income while I get started. I could set up an office somewhere here near the house.

Unlike the other situations, I'd be in control. One of the beauties about consulting on your own is that if you get cross wired with a client, or you don't like what he's doing or whatever, you can say screw you.

You can afford a hell of a lot more risk. So I take a 10 or 15 or 20% cut in pay—big deal. Once you get to a certain level, an extra buck doesn't mean that much. Yet, if I do well, I could make a bundle at consulting.

One of the problems in sorting out these options is that I'm still not sure how important money is to me. Our family really never had a hell of a lot of money, but we were always reasonably well off. I can still remember selling Christmas cards and cutting lawns, caddying and working in the local gas station and all of that sort of thing. I guess I was 10 when I started selling Christmas cards. I sold vegetables around the neighborhood. The next-door neighbor had a big garden and I would go out and pick his vegetables. He knew that I was picking part of them. I don't know if he knew I was picking all of them. I would just go peddle them to all the neighbors. It was always one of those jokes—what's Ben going to be selling next? I got a job working in a gas station in the summers when I was 13 and 14. The summer when I was 15 years old my dad got me a job as a laborer in a plant. I did the playboy kind of thing between 16 and 17, starting as a lifeguard at the country club swimming pool and ending up as manager of the pool. And there was always, you know, one kind of outside extra-curricular deal or another like getting the flower concession and hamburger truck at college. I often say to myself that money isn't really important, but then,

I look at my behavior pattern and I say—who are you kidding?

When I first joined Kline, Nancy and I sat down and tried to specify what an idealized life style would be in terms of how we would like to live. Then we translated that into dollars and totaled it up. And then we made an estimate of what that meant in terms of yearly income. We passed that figure three or four years ago. I'm doing everything I want to do. I'm not driving a Ferrari and no, I don't have an airplane, but shit I don't have enough time to fly one anyway. No, I don't have a yacht, but I decided I don't like sailing that well either. I'd rather play golf. So maybe the money doesn't really mean a hell of a lot other than as a scorekeeping thing.

There's one other factor that's probably important here. Nancy is the only child of a guy that runs one of the largest privately held real estate development companies in the world. So, she and the kids are going to come out all right financially. Her dad and I have never really talked about it, other than to say that they are in pretty good shape, and I don't really need to worry a hell of a lot about that.

Jerrow paused and stared out the living room window at the valley below.

I don't know. I wish one of the options looked very good and clearly better than the rest.