Knowing Yourself Comes In Handy When Changing Careers

Many alumni and graduate students I have spoken with over the years are interested in changing job functions within their company or, in some cases, making a significant career change. For some, the change represents a move from a technical role (Engineer, Software Developer or Scientist) to a business oriented role (Product Marketing, Strategic Planning or Business Development). For others, the change represents a move from being an individual contributor to a manager. Often, these changes also can require different competencies, skill sets, or approaches. For some people, the desired change becomes a logical transition of skills they already possess. For others, it can be an awkward and difficult transition that seems destined for failure. Why does this happen? The answer is simple: some people know themselves much better than others. Here are a few questions to ask yourself when considering changing jobs or careers.

Is this new role a good match for your skills and attributes? STUDY the job description and thoroughly understand the requirements and expectations of the job as well as skills and attributes deemed most important. Read through your performance reviews and make a list of the areas that received the highest ratings. How well do these areas compare to the skills and attributes emphasized in the new role or promotion you are considering?

Do you know what it takes to be a Manager? Managing people can be extremely rewarding. It also can be very frustrating. Are you the type of person who can deliver tough messages when needed or are you the type who internalizes issues, procrastinates, and has a hard time conveying “bad news”? Do you like the idea of hiring the right people and building a team or would you prefer delegating those roles to someone else?

How will you feel being held accountable for other people? If you are accustomed to being held accountable for your work only, how will you feel being held accountable for the work of a group or department? How will you handle members of your team or department who are not holding up their ends of the project?

Will you enjoy motivating other people? Do you enjoy coaching and developing people to help them succeed or do you feel that people should simply do their best work every day and should not need to be motivated? How will you motivate people?

Answering these types of questions before you change job functions or careers can prevent you from taking the wrong job or help convince you to take the right one. Taking the time to get to know yourself is certainly worth the time and effort!

I hope these suggestions are helpful. Please contact me at jworth2@vcu.edu if you have any questions or would like to arrange an appointment.