

CAREER

Portfolio Work Is Antidote for Economy



Lavinia Weissman

While the presidential candidates debate job loss and job creation, this election may have merely brought to the forefront a pattern of protecting shareholder value through layoffs, downsizing and outsourcing that began in the mid-1980s. This method of managing profit and productivity has led to low employee morale, growing job

dissatisfaction and a rising increase in work-related medical issues from stress and occupational hazards that cost Americans \$300 billion in health care expenditures per year.

In contrast, the European Union (a 25-country alliance) now measures the most successful economy in the world with a GDP of \$10.5 trillion that is home to 140 Fortune 500 as compared to 50 in the U.S. The EU is half the landmass of the U.S. Culturally, its citizens "work to live" as a way to have a life that includes for most six weeks paid vacation.

The greatest difference between the EU and the USA is how people work. In Europe, there is a far better quality of work life and far less income inequality. Quality performance is managed by companies that pay well and provide the environments in which workers can network and learn by breaking apart hierarchies and tightly controlled systems of delegation. In the U.S., fewer than 15 percent of companies work this way.

This approach to work encourages productivity and profits by replacing the idea of "job security" with the concept of any worker gaining stable employment by performing a series of challenging assignments and doing them well. This assumes that the worker gives a high degree of service and intelligence by "working smart" rather than "working harder or more."

As a result of working this way, workers can build a quality portfolio of work that keeps them continuously employed.

On the job, you can identify and distinguish a portfolio worker by watching the way s/he:

- Exercises a distinct expertise that grows in depth;
- Solves problems through various forms of networking;
- Links work into a process of continuous learning that is not employer dependent;
- Builds career stability through reputation and actual service rather than through employer dependency.

Portfolio workers learn and join in work with others through consciously defined work practices that go well beyond the behaviors of "who do you know?" and grow from "who have you worked with and what have you learned with them?"

So while most workers cannot change an entire company, an individual can shift personal thinking and actions to influence change on the job that brings more job satisfaction by:

- Taking the time to reexamine your personal values;
- Initiating a personal learning strategy;
- Identifying who you want to learn with and gaining their cooperation;
- Taking the initiative to apply what you learn on the job; and
- Personally documenting and measuring the value you contribute to others on specific projects which you staff.

By shaping your career as a portfolio of learning and accomplishment, you can guide yourself to your next job or shape your own business with clients in service of high performance work for growing job satisfaction and income.

Lavinia Weissman, a journalist, coach and capacity builder based in Jamaica Plain, has organized the thought leadership, coaching system and resources in service of this approach to work that she calls WorkEcology.

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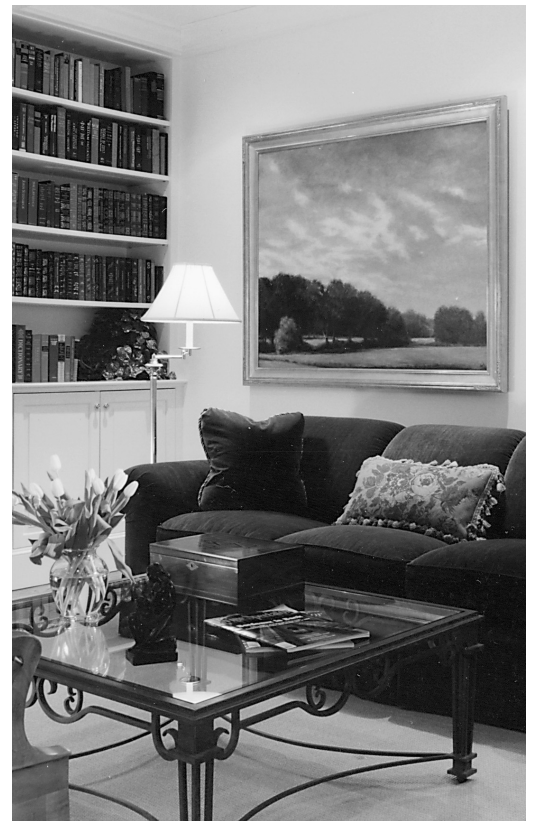
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