

# Executive **EDGE**

## **KEEPING THAT GREAT NEW JOB**

Lots of good managerial jobs are available in today's booming economy. This is the good news. The bad news is that—according to the Center for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, NC, and Manchester Partners International, an executive-search and coaching firm—about 40 percent of newly hired managers fail within their first 18 months.

What causes some people to become “revolving-door hires”? Manchester Partners surveyed 826 human resources specialists, who said managers tend to fail for four reasons:

- They do not build good relationships with peers and subordinates.
- They are confused or uncertain about their bosses' expectations.
- They lack the skills necessary for company politics.
- They are unable to accomplish their new job's three or four most important objectives.

How can prospective managers improve their chances of keeping a new position? There are at least two ways.

**Change Yourself** WJM Associates, a New York City-based executive-coaching firm, begins by giving job candidates detailed aptitude tests and then showing them how to adopt their personal styles to better fit work environments. Byron Woollen, WJM's chief psychologist, says, “I believe people can depart successfully from their natural tendencies, if they're aware of what they need to do.”

**Clarify Your Objectives** Lois Frankel, a partner in Corporate Coaching International, Los Angeles, urges candidates to clearly analyze their own job expectations. Debbie McClister, a former electronics executive now looking for a new position, says she asks prospective employers as many as 20 questions about the job and their expectations of the person who will fill it.

Manchester Partners' Ray Harrison tells job candidates to make sure they understand a position's “critical few

objectives.” “Any management job has 101 responsibilities, but there are usually only two or three that you absolutely must excel at,” he says.

*From Anne Fisher, “Don't Blow Your New Job,” Fortune, June 22, 1998, pp. 159-162.*



## **STRIPPING EMPOWERMENT OF ITS POWER**

Empower your employees, the theory goes, and they will revitalize the workplace. But many chief executive officers (CEOs) send mixed messages about empowerment and actually undermine organizational empowerment efforts, writes Harvard professor Chris Argyris. Further, organizational change programs are riddled with inner contradictions that prevent innovation, motivation, and drive—the hallmarks of empowerment. Empowerment, thus inhibited, has failed to be the transformational agent it was expected to be.

Empowerment is supported by employees' internal commitment, which is based on personal involvement and motivation, and undermined by external commitment, the type of commitment employees feel when everything is decided for them. To foster internal commitment, top managers should try to involve employees in defining objectives and specifying ways to achieve them. But many CEOs are ambivalent toward internal commitment and empowerment. More comfortable with a “command and control” management model, CEOs rely on well-defined processes to achieve empowerment. This reliance

on processes imposed from the top down imposes empowerment rather than allowing employees to undertake it themselves. Job requirements remain predetermined and employee commitment remains external.

Organizational programs designed to implement change and foster empowerment also increase organizational contradictions. Their established method of producing change by first outlining steps to be taken—for example, “create a vision”—and then giving instructions for each step—for example, “map out operational strategies that will achieve the vision”—again makes empowerment imposed from the top down.

Employees, given little or no opportunity for involvement in a process that is supposed to increase their involvement, assume empowerment efforts are not sincere. Management's mixed messages of “do your own thing—the way we tell you to,” while they may be inadvertent, wind up fostering cynicism and inefficiency and preventing real, lasting change.

*From Chris Argyris, “Empowerment: The Emperor's New Clothes,” Harvard Business Review, May-June 1998, pp. 98-105.*