

Career Rx

By [Lisa Chenofsky Singer](#)

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Innovation and Employability

When working with clients, I am always curious about what led them to choose the work they do and the organizations they affiliate with. I look to understand what values they share with the organization. I ask why they select the company initially, and if they are no longer there, what changed? Did it have to do with the company's values, their manager or their own shift in life style? Where did the mismatch occur? Typically, a change in values triggers a change in status with one's job.

When companies are struggling with a down economy, how do they stay agile? The companies that enable their employees to respond to the market and customer demands will be able to shift and respond to new revenue possibilities. They can experiment with an eye towards the future, engage in today's demands and respond with their intentions to meet the market requests.

Think about innovative companies. Apple is known for emphasizing the importance of design and understanding the crucial role aesthetics play in public appeal. The development of products that are both functional and elegant has earned them a devoted following. Google's mission is to "organize the world's information and making it universally accessible and useful." Their culture continuously strives for high ethical standards. Googlers, as staff members are called, are encouraged to take risks, engage in their company related passions, and be part of the bigger solution.

A convenient definition of innovation from an organizational perspective by Luecke and Katz (2003) is: *"Innovation . . . is generally understood as the successful introduction of a new thing or method . . . Innovation is the embodiment, combination, or synthesis of knowledge in original, relevant, valued new products, processes, or services.*

Recognizing innovation is important for success when you are positioning yourself in the job market. What do you offer that is in demand or can create a demand? How can you help a company, whether it is part of a larger organization or your own start up to deal with an issue that is important to the public? How do we continue to push limits? Google understands that no search engine will ever be perfect. They constantly strive towards a common goal of providing a fast, accurate and easy-to-use service that anyone seeking information can access globally. They learn from each effort, even if the effort did not succeed initially.

As you keep looking towards the future, think about how you have managed your development. In the past, companies created development plans for more senior staff based on the next opportunity intended for their succession within the organization. The less senior staff would work with their manager to determine what training they needed for their immediate role. How many of us planned for ourselves to keep ourselves on track with market demands and the disciplines within our career?

Those who choose to manage their own development, may push the limits at times, take alternative tracks, or methodically work on a plan outside of their daily work. This is thinking in the terms of employability versus employment.

Employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work and to self-sufficiently operate within the job market to realize one's potential through sustainable employment. It is based on your knowledge, skills and attitudes. How you use and present these attributes to employers within the context you chose to work in. Context is our personal presence and understanding of the job market you work in or are seeking work in.

Many individuals may need support to overcome physical and mental stumbling blocks to learning and personal development when updating one's capabilities. Employability includes understanding one's capabilities and using relevant market information to make informed decisions about career options. Realizing when such information would be useful, and interpreting the information allows you to turn it

into intelligence. People need to explore opportunities and to do things differently, to access appropriate training that can lead to employment. Keep in mind that your self development is within your control while other market factors may be outside your control.

You may choose to reinvent yourself and engage in a new discipline with appropriate training through formal and informal learning. Placing yourself in a learning environment is very important. Focusing on your core principles to guide your actions will typically serve you well throughout your career. Many times, we stray as we get engaged in the making of profits and lose sight of our own mission. Why did we enter this field of study in the first place? As we remain in the field, how do we stay on top of changing environments, trends, and innovative approaches?

At Google, they see "being great at something as a starting point, not an endpoint. We set ourselves goals we know we can't reach yet, because we know that by stretching to meet them we can get further than we expected. Through innovation and iteration, we aim to take things that work well and improve upon them in unexpected ways. ...Ultimately, our constant dissatisfaction with the way things are becomes the driving force behind everything we do."

Think about your last role, what was satisfying? What did you become complacent about? What would you have changed? Would this have put you on a new path? Employability is a lifelong endeavor of learning, presenting and understanding.

"Nothing stays the same ever. You are either getting better or worse."

Source unknown

Lisa Chenofsky Singer is the Managing Director of Chenofsky Singer and Associates LLC www.ChenofskySinger.com, providing Executive and Career Coaching and Human Resources Consulting.

Lisa's extensive human resources and coaching experience with Fortune 500 companies, small enterprises, medium-sized firms, and non-profit organizations gives her the unique ability to bring together wide-ranging perspectives on career transitions, executive and leadership development. She has consulted with a wide variety of sectors — consumer goods, financial services, healthcare, media and entertainment, pharmaceutical and life sciences, publishing, professional services, technology, and non-profit. Lisa has a passion for motivational speaking, conducts career forums, and provides executive and career coaching.

Lisa's greatest strength is that she enables individuals and organizations to see themselves in new ways, freeing them to achieve their goals. Lisa can be reached at Lisa@ChenofskySinger.com.