

Be a Process Developer and Improver:

From Wanting to Resolve International Disputes to Avoiding Problems between International Customers and Suppliers

As a child, what adult roles did you dream about? Years ago, boys often wanted to be firemen and policemen while girls frequently aimed at nursing or teaching in addition to being a mom. Since more types of work became more available to both sexes, today's girls may be the ones who want to fight fires and catch criminals while boys may be looking forward to the joys of nursing and teaching or being stay-at-home dads. Both girls and boys are often excited about becoming rock stars, professional athletes, and performers.

You can see that shift in vocational interest among my children. My older daughter is a doctor while my older son is a nurse. My younger son is a museum curator and my older nephew is a teacher. My younger daughter is a television producer's assistant.

Shifts in work preferences also occur after children learn more about what's involved in various careers. Here's a personal example: As a child, I was fascinated by the idea of becoming a judge after reading the biography of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. After learning more about what most judges do while attending law school, my career interest shifted to management consulting. I felt that applied creativity and hard work could do more to help solve important human issues as a consultant than in any courtroom role.

Youthful experiences also matter in determining what careers seem promising and potentially rewarding. For instance, Dr. Erik Myhrberg explored the world in a way that few American youth of his day did. His father worked for an international airline, and the family frequently followed his dad's new assignments to different global locales . . . averaging a move every year while he was growing up.

At a time when fewer Americans traveled or lived outside the United States, Dr. Myhrberg observed that the people he met around the world were more similar than different. The cultural differences he observed fascinated him, and he wanted to learn more about the world's cultures. As a result, he looked forward to becoming an international attorney and using his

profession to help bring people of all nations closer together. It was a worthy, heart-felt desire.

After starting college in the United States, Dr. Myhrberg learned a lot more about the American legal profession . . . most of which he didn't like. By the time he was a college senior, he had abandoned international law as a career goal.

Instead, he wanted to work internationally and teach. But what kind of work should he do?

In the last hundred years, business has changed in so many ways that good strategic and operating methods are now almost the opposite of what they once were. In its day, the highly centralized operations of the Ford Motor Company in Michigan were a marvel of mass-production efficiency; the firm assembled its millions of vehicles on perpetually moving lines where workers simply did one or two activities, continually supplied by mountains of self-produced parts crafted from raw materials at its mines and the nearby Ford steel and glass works.

Today, automobile companies make almost none of their parts and produce none of the raw materials for parts. As a further difference, some of the more advanced vehicle makers (such as Toyota) don't employ assembly lines, favoring instead team-based assembly in fixed locations to which parts from an ever-changing list are fed by suppliers just as they are needed. Instead of being sourced locally, purchased parts often travel almost half way around the world to reach an automobile plant.

There's good news and bad in that shift in manufacturing methods. It's wonderful for the people who now make the components that others use half a world away. Their salaries and prospects rise. It's a challenge, however, for the automobile assembler unless the components fit perfectly and work well together.

With people in so many different countries attempting to cooperate with others who speak different languages, use different measurements, and favor alternative quality standards, there's a possibility of creating expensive chaos rather than an effective system of smoothly operating cooperative enterprises. To help suppliers and their customers, international standards makers (such as ISO, International Organization for Standardization) have

developed rules that smooth the flow of useful commerce by ensuring that customers and suppliers understand each other and work well together. While not everyone is going to speak the same language, everyone can employ complementary business processes designed to consistently deliver what their customers need . . . when they need what they buy.

After learning about the international standards, Dr. Myhrberg decided he would like to help suppliers and customers understand and apply the standards to their processes and activities. Within a year after graduating with Master's degree in International Management from the American Graduate School of International Management (Thunderbird), he launched a consulting firm, Moorhill International Group, to provide this kind of assistance.

Moorhill prospered, and Dr. Myhrberg enjoyed having more opportunities for international travel to explore outstanding processes and gain occasional teaching engagements. For one three-day lecture about ISO, he spent three months working hard to prepare his ideas for the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Once in Beijing, he was impressed by his listeners who were the cream of the crop from various Chinese academic disciplines. He also found the experience contained an irony: While most of those who were listening held Ph.D. degrees, he did not.

Drawing confidence from his success in China, Dr. Myhrberg decided that the time had come to earn a doctorate and gain credibility that he hoped would expand his teaching opportunities. Concerned about the possible cost, time involvement, and distractions involved in earning the prestigious Ph.D. degree, Dr. Myhrberg carefully investigated many schools. He read all the published material provided by the schools, spoke with former students, reviewed what had been written about the schools in business publications, and contacted the schools.

After being admitted into one Ph.D., he was immediately impressed by a genuinely written e-mail from a faculty member:

“Hello Mr. Myhrberg:

“A sincere welcome to Rushmore University, and the Rushmore system of learning.

“Beyond the uniqueness of the teaching style of the University lies the true value you achieve -- the ability to integrate the learning modules into your everyday life.

“On behalf of the Faculty, Staff, and Administration of Rushmore, it’s my pleasure to welcome you as a new member in good standing in our University community.

“With your acceptance, you are continuing a journey to learning and experience that will enrich your life and your lifestyle.

“Alan Guinn, Professor”

Friendly professional communications continued through e-mails from his advisor and editor, and he was glad to have chosen Rushmore.

Dr. Myhrberg realized that he could enhance his academic credentials and standing in the business community by focusing his Ph.D. studies on writing a dissertation that could be published right after graduation. As an expert on standards, he chose to write a dissertation that has since been published as *A Practical Field Guide for ISO 2001:2000* (MIGI, Moorhill Press, 2004). After graduating from Rushmore, he coauthored another book with Dawn Holly Crabtree, *A Practical Field Guide for AS 9100:2004* (ASQ Quality Press, 2006), that provides further hands-on direction for learning, applying, and maintaining international standards.

Compared to his prior learning experiences, Dr. Myhrberg was grateful for the opportunity to study at Rushmore through the Oxford tutorial style. He appreciated having an academic advisor to help him plan and engage in his study program as well as a technical editor to improve his writing. He was also happy that the university provided expertise in so many subjects and subspecialties that were of interest to him. Not least, he appreciated the flexible payment options that made his studies more affordable.

With a strong desire to teach, Dr. Myhrberg was delighted to receive an invitation (which he accepted) to become an associate professor at Rushmore. In this role, he has enjoyed the opportunity to tutor those with a passion for international standards. Clients often ask him to conduct classes to help their organizations implement the standards. Increasingly, he is asked

to be the official trainer for these client organizations on the subject of international standards.

Because of his dissertation, Dr. Myhrberg had completed the research necessary to take on more writing and speaking assignments. By providing credibility for his expertise, His dissertation is also an effective career platform.

Due to his well-received books, Dr. Myhrberg is more frequently asked to speak now and he enjoys those engagements. He also hears more often from his peers at the national and international level.

Since graduating, his consulting assignments have come more frequently from larger companies and higher level executives. The assignments themselves tend to be larger, more complicated, and integrated into the organizations' activities.

What are the lessons for you in choosing and developing a great career?

1. Find out who works on the tasks that fascinate you.
2. Investigate which of those roles would be the most fun for you.
3. Develop the knowledge and experience you need to be a top performer.
4. Share your insights by speaking with other top performers.
5. Become better known through research-based writing.
6. Teach the next generation to follow in your footsteps.
7. Keep improving.

I wish you well in applying these lessons.

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Donald W. Mitchell is a professor at Rushmore University who often teaches students who are interested in business processes. For more

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