

# CareerNotes

The Newsletter of Career Strategies Incorporated

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*Priscilla*

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## Career Strategies

What is going on in the world is actually implied in our company name. There is not just one career strategy out there - there are many. Employers of all kinds are becoming more interested in the careers of their people, but they rarely intentionally accommodate more than one strategy for managing a career. On the other hand, managers, particularly experienced ones, understand the different needs and goals of the people who work for them.

As a manager said in a workshop recently, "I know who has to leave early for day care, who wants to get an MBA, who is interested in marketing, and I do my best to help. If I do this for you, will you do this for me - Doesn't every manager do that?"

But there are new career strategies or career patterns evolving that are harder for a manager to accommodate. Here are a few others we see:

Surfing USA Surfing careers are ones in which people look for the latest wave, ride it in almost to the beach

and then look for a new one to ride. The new wave may be in a different company or a different specialty, but in this kind of career, timing is everything. In one of our corporate workshops ten months before the millennium, a COBOL programmer complained. Her COBOL knowledge had brought her to the United States from Russia and she understood that knowledge advantage would soon go away. "I need a Java project. I know Java is the next thing. I have to know Java." She was right, of course. To execute a surfing career strategy, you must know what you'd have to learn after Java, as well.

The Gold Rush We all saw last year the attraction of talent into dot com start-ups. They went for the equity. The theory behind that career strategy was that you took the risk, worked like a dog for a couple of years and then banked your earnings and did whatever you wanted - travel, study, golf, charity, you name it. Last winter it looked as if no one could lose trying this strategy. People at the peak of

their professional careers earning healthy salaries and bonuses envied those who joined the gold rush. Dissatisfaction with "regular" jobs went through the roof.

The Levi Strauss Play These people saw the opportunities in the e-commerce world but took less of a risk because they marketed their talent to the Gold Rush companies. Just like Levi Strauss who invented blue jeans for the miners in San Francisco at the time of the California Gold Rush, they saw the opportunity, but distanced themselves a little from the boom and bust cycle. As many dot coms become dot bombs, they are selling their version of blue jeans to different customers.

In our next few newsletters, we will explore a few of the new career strategies that are emerging and what companies are doing to attract, hire and retain people that operate with these new career strategies.

## Success Stories

Some facts have been changed to maintain confidentiality

### The Surfing CFO

Jan didn't see the pattern at first. "It looks as if I am a job hopper because I'm at a new company every four or five years. But I am really committed. It's just that when the company is launched and the finance staff gets to be around twelve people I get bored and restless. I have nothing exciting to do any more. I've taught them to do what's needed."

Jan had the background of a great CFO including MBA, and CPA. His most satisfying and successful experiences were with start-up firms. A natural salesman, he enjoyed the search for investors and presenting new business propositions. A natural mentor, he loved putting a new finance team together and developing their talents. A natural entrepreneur, he jumped at the chance to put together the best new financial systems and processes. He had no

patience with big company bureaucracy. He wanted direct contact with business strategy and senior management.

Jan has put in place the activities to make his surfing strategy successful. He has developed a reputation as a start-up CFO. He has contacts with venture capitalists and attorneys. He speaks at entrepreneurial conferences and at MBA programs on entrepreneurship. He is always keeping an eye out for the next wave to ride. But he is always true to his reputation for leaving a great team in place when he moves on.

### Lucy and Levi Strauss

"You have no idea how much money I was worth on paper last year!" Lucy joined a dot com during 1998 and rode the cycle both up and down. "People just couldn't wait to invest in

us. We were growing so fast. I guess I was hired in human resources to reduce the chaos."

In the year and a half that she worked there, Lucy learned a lot. "Well, that experience pushed me to the limit of what I knew about human resources, and beyond. That company just didn't have the time for the usual human resources solutions."

Now the company has failed, Lucy is back on the job market. "People always ask me if I'm disappointed because I didn't make a lot of money, but I'm not. Now I bring a whole lot more to the marketplace. I know much more about business strategy. I've tried out all kinds of new ways of doing things. And I have a network of great managers out there who used to be on my old team and who know what I can do."

## NEW ON THE WEB

"This is a Great Time to be in Human Resources!"  
by Priscilla Claman.

Check it out on the HR Today site:  
[www.hr-today.com](http://www.hr-today.com)



"Why Would Anyone Want to Be a Leader Today?"

by Priscilla Claman.  
A recent PowerPoint presentation (from 11/27/00) presented to Boston area alumni of Harvard Business School

Check it out at:  
[www.career-strategies.com](http://www.career-strategies.com)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

AAIM Conferences

"Compensation 2001" with Priscilla Claman and George Mullen

Tuesday, May 8 and Wednesday, May 9  
Beachwood Hotel  
Worcester  
9 am - 4 pm

"Career Development" with Priscilla Claman

Thursday, May 10  
Holiday Inn, Peabody  
9 am - 4 pm



For more information regarding these upcoming events, please call our office at: (617) 227-5517 or e-mail us at: [info@career-strategies.com](mailto:info@career-strategies.com)

# Eileen Adler's Solution to The Universal Performance Rating Problem

Remember when you were in school and you got a 90% on a test? You knew exactly where you fit in the realm of "perfect performance." What if you got a 70%? Did that suggest to you that you had better buckle down and start studying? What if you got a 100%? Did that suggest that your hard work had paid off and you were capable of taking on new tasks - perhaps tutoring someone who was struggling?

Now translate that grading system to your work environment. If your manager told you she was giving you a 90% performance rating, what would that suggest to you in terms of your performance? Or 70%? Or 100%? What might your performance discussions be like when using such a straightforward, understandable measurement system? How might your performance discussions be different than getting a 3 or a "Meets Expectations" on your performance evaluation?

In the end, performance appraisals come down to one thing - the dreaded rating. We at Career Strategies have yet to find a company that is completely happy with theirs. Companies are constantly revamping their rating systems every year or two in hope of finding the one system that really works. What we need is a rating system that people understand universally and have real life experience with.

Some of our clients use a numerical system for rating performance, such as a scale of 1 to 5, with the highest number being the best. When we ask managers to describe employees that deserve these ratings, the performance criteria are not comparable. Managers have their own definitions of what constitutes a 3 or a 4 or a 5. So does the human resources department.

The one thing we are certain of is that a numerical rating system is not clear to the people who are administering it. Or more importantly, because there is so much room for interpretation, a company's performance rating system may not be administered fairly from one employee or department to another.

Currently, there is a movement away from the numerical scales to words. For example: Never, Sometimes, Usually and Always; or Need Development, Acceptable, Successful, Excellent. Our experience has shown us that this scale has the same pitfalls as the numerical system. Whatever the words you decide to use, managers will still view them as equivalent to a numerical scale: Never equals 1, Sometimes equals 2, and so on.

Test your rating system. Ask your managers to describe employees at the various ratings. Then review their written performance appraisals for consistent administration of those ratings. Our research has shown that you will most likely find inconsistent application of your rating system.

The criteria for a great performance rating scale are that the scale should be straightforward, easy for everyone to understand, capable of being administered consistently to all employees, and a good fit with everyone's portfolio of real life experiences.

Why not try out the percentage system - Eileen Adler's Great Solution to the Universal Performance Rating Problem? It fits all the criteria.

Since the percentage grading system is something all of us have grown up with, and since performance ratings are an important part of our work culture, why don't we stick with the same system? In our minds, switching to a 1 to 5 rating system is equivalent to growing up using the U.S. Standard system for measurement and having corporate America use the Metric system.

Moving back to percentages, a universally understood grading system will create a corporate-wide understanding of the performance rating structure, something that has been missing from the evaluation process.



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