The Care and Feeding of Techies
or
(Bag the Bagels, Do the Dew)

#102
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Today we're going to discuss what's important to a "techie", in the work environment and also in their career path. Several studies have been done which we'll address, but also I'd like it to be an interactive session to see what your ideas and thoughts are and see if we're on target.

Once we determine what's really important to techies, then we need to find ways to meet those needs. If you're a manager, perhaps you can make departmental changes to embrace these ideas. If you're a techie, we'll talk about methods to use to persuade your supervisors of your needs.

1. The first thing a techie should do to meet their workplace needs are to _identify them_! How many of you really sit down and thoroughly think through what kind of company, position or work environment you want? I know that when I ask this question of my candidates, many of them don't know how to answer me because they simply haven't given it any thought. Yet, if you end up at a company that doesn't match your work style or have the job functions you like, you'll be unhappy and leave. So, the very first thing you need to do is to *think about what you want!*

a. Identifying whether it's WHO, WHAT, HOW or WHERE that's most important to you may be helpful. Once you've done that, you may find there are trade-offs you'll consider.

WHO: For some people, <u>who</u> they work for is a top priority. These individuals are set on working for a certain company and will move to just about anywhere to fulfill this goal. Reputations, industry leadership, emerging trends, and generational issues often define this choice. Is the *kind* of company you'll work in most important to you? Does it need to be a Fortune 500 company or a small privately held company? Does it need to be a start-up New Economy company, or do you want the more traditional Old Economy firm?

WHAT: <u>What</u> type of work interests you the most? Are the *functions* of the job the most important thing to you? Do you prefer a system administrator position with breadth of duties or a more focused narrow job with depth? Is a large work environment with many people in the department more appealing or do you prefer a small environment where you have more individual responsibility?

HOW: <u>How</u> do you like to work? Is it important how you do your work and the way the company is set up? Is a structured, formal environment more comfortable to you or do you like it loose and informal? Do you need lots of freedom and flex time or is a standard 8-5 work schedule OK with you? Are you more comfortable with a boss who leaves you totally alone to do your job or do you work better with someone who stays engaged in your work? Do you want a company who offers lots of training or do you prefer to just do your job and learn as you go? Do you like a team to work with or a sole individual contributor role?

WHERE: Or does it really just matter that you live in a particular city, because your nearby grandkids are the most important thing to you? You may take any job as long as it's in the location you need. And with telecommuting, the <u>where</u> is becoming more negotiable.

These are some of the many questions you can ask yourself before you seek your next job, in order to target the "right" job for you.

b. In addition to finding the work environment, job functions and culture that fits you, what are some of the perks that would *take care of you and feed you*? Some perks companies are now offering are as follows:

1) According to Doug Berg, techies.com founder and chief techie, "Techies want tangible benefits that actually facilitate their lives". There is often a disconnect between HR and the techies where "companies are putting in game rooms and trying to install the lifestyle benefits that they think techies want, but it could be a case of HR offering bagels when the techies may really want Mountain Dew". Techies like tech stuff, according to a new survey by techies.com. Asking 1000 techies what fringe benefits they would most like to

receive, their top five picks were:
- **Discounted or free home PCs and equipment (36%)**
- **Discounted or free home Internet access (23%)**
- **Spa/health club membership (21%)**
- **Company auto (17%)**
- **Mobile/wireless phone (17%)**

2) "Techies are getting more sophisticated and their interests are getting more refined", Berg noted. "They are bottom line, they don't want a raise, they want _recognition._ They don't want a manager, they want a _mentor._" And HR needs to ask what recognition and a mentor mean for a techie, because it's probably different than for their other employees.

3) Regarding work/life balance, techies may have even spawned HR's trend to focus on this. "We asked so much of tech workers, they'd go home and code in order to make deadlines. They developed the ability to work from home as a requirement". As a result, many techies came to realize that they could accomplish much more at home. And _telecommuting_ was a result.

4) Looking at values, Gen Xrs and techies often share the value of "wanting to _make a difference_ and wanting to be a vital part of their companies". Techies ask, "How does my coding this application fit into the overall system?"

5) Berg also notes that most successful companies are those that have a culture that encourages "_intrapreneurship_", the spirit of entrepreneurship within a big company. "Let techies come up with ideas and then reward and recognize them throughout the whole company, not just the technical side. These companies have a start-up feel within a big company."

6) With the failure of so many dot.coms, it has been said that the new-economy companies that thrive will be the ones with frugal, down to earth workplace, and where the 24/7 excesses are being replaced by a cost-conscious _9-5 reality_.

7) A growing job perk is "paid time off for _volunteer work"._ The trend is taking off in most fields feeling the talent crunch and a new survey finds it up 25%. In 1999, researchers at Harvard report nearly half of employers included formal volunteer work in their business plans.

Do any of these perks feel right for you?

2. The second thing a techie must do to meet their needs in the workplace is to _find_ the "right" job! If you do a poor job of interviewing the company before you hire on, you may end up with an environment that is not at all conducive to your work needs. Techies tend to be more introverted in the interview process, therefore, they don't always ask the critical questions of the interviewer to see if there's a match. So let's start there first: what are the critical questions a techie should ask in the interview?
    a. Once you've defined your work needs, you start with questions that relate to those needs. For example, if you decided you need a job with freedom and flex time, ask how the department is structured for work hours. Is there opportunity for flex time, and how is the on-call handled? Have your questions written out, so that you don't forget to ask them in the interview.
    b. Next, you can ask critical questions about the company and management to determine if there is a match for you. Such questions are: how does management view your ideas? Is there room for innovative thinking in this company? What is your management style? What do you expect from your employees? Where do you see yourself going in this company? Is there a career path for me here? Many of these questions will get a dialogue going and you'll learn more about the company and the management philosophy to see if this is a match for you.
    c. There are certainly many other important parts of the interview to consider, but that is not the purpose of this presentation. For a complete Interview Handbook, you can access it free on my website www.amosassociates.com and find it in the Resource Center in PDF format.

3. Once you've determined what your needs are and you feel confident that the company that just hired you can meet those needs, how do you ensure this? _Communication, communication, communication!_ I've seen so many of my candidates get themselves into a situation that seems untenable simply because they didn't know how to address their needs to their boss. As the owner of my own company, managing 4 employees, I can tell you that I truly want to know what makes my staff happy, keeps them motivated and also what de-motivates them. I feel it's my job to create an atmosphere conducive to productive work, and the more I know what that is for my employees, the easier it is to create it. So my point is that you need to tell your boss _what's on your mind._ Let them know how they can get the best out of you and how they can retain you. I believe that most supervisors want to do this, but often they don't have a clue how to do it. You can help by communicating your wants and needs. Not by giving an ultimatum, but by showing how you can benefit the company by working up to your potential in a mutually satisfying environment. The key word here is "benefit" the company. It can be a win-win situation if you are benefiting the

company by also reaching your potential as a productive employee. If there are obstacles in your way, work with your supervisor to identify those obstacles and ways to work around them. They may not be able to change company policy, but they may be able to be flexible on other things that help. But don't expect your supervisor to be a mind reader! Tell them what's on your mind, in a tactful, non-threatening, "let's work together" manner.

4. Once you've identified your needs and communicated them to your supervisor, if those needs can't be met, then it's time to make a decision. Do you leave and be more diligent about finding a company who can meet those needs? Or do you stay and try to work within the system to make changes? The choice is up to you but remember you can have a say in how you are treated, cared for and fed. And just like the TV commercial where they spell out "Do the Dew", you can spell out your wants and needs and have a reasonable chance they'll be met. Good luck!