



Mobley's Musings: Working Assumptions

Many people lose out on opportunities because they have assumptions that don't serve them. For example, recent news about layoffs in the tech industry have some people assuming now is not a good time to look for another job, whether in tech or another field. But at the same time, the February 2023 jobs report shows 517,000 job openings. Does it make sense to assume that not one of those half-a-million-plus jobs would be a good fit for you?

Many of my government clients would like a higher-paying private sector position, but they assume there's too much competition for those jobs or they wouldn't qualify for them. It's true that moving from the public sector into the private sector can be tricky, with substantial differences in everything from professional networks and industry lingo to career paths and performance evaluations. But many people have made the jump and landed squarely on their feet. Ben Fowle, a former federal employee, is now thriving in the corporate world and has helped numerous people make the same transition. On his blog, theformerfed.com, he posts thoughtful articles on how government workers can move into private industry successfully.

When I hear people say they know they won't get promoted, I ask what makes them assume that. More often than not, it's just a "feeling," not an evidence-based conclusion. And I ask them to examine whether any unconscious behaviors could be causing their assumption to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Many people assume that any change in their job is going to be bad, especially if they're being asked to take on tasks they don't want to do. They're often operating under two different assumptions: first, that they have no choice and can't negotiate these changes and, second, they won't like the new tasks they're being asked to take on. Surprisingly, when I ask people about their best job, they often talk about a role they were not enthusiastic about taking on but ended up being enjoyable and resulted in significant learning.

When you think you know something to be true — in your work life, at home, or in the realm of ideas — it's best to think again. Question your assumptions and be open to what might be possible.



Ask Sandy When Does More Become Less?

If you've given enough presentations or made enough speeches in your professional life, you may recognize the moment you've said too much. Audience members' eyes start to glaze over, and the sound of paper shuffling ticks up noticeably. But because they have so much more to say, some of my clients ignore these signs and insist on sharing every example and every piece of data. And some even repeat what they said to make sure everyone understands!

In a TED talk, [Niro Sivanathan](https://www.ted.com/speakers/niro_sivanathan), a psychology researcher and associate professor of organizational behavior at London Business School, explains that instead of bolstering an argument, too much information actually weakens it because of what he calls the dilution effect. Too much information impedes our ability to process it, he says. To manage the surfeit of both strong and not-so-strong evidence and data, the listener mentally averages the information, thus weakening the strongest points as well as the overall argument. If the speaker only shared the strongest evidence, the argument would more likely be persuasive.

Sivanathan tested his theory using pharmaceutical advertisements, which are required to include the potential side effects of a drug. Two groups watched commercials that described the health benefits of a drug. One group saw a commercial that cited only the major side effects, such as a higher risk of heart attack and stroke. The other group saw an ad that included the same major side effects but also mentioned several minor side effects, such as eye dryness and itching. When it came to assessing the drug, the group that saw the ad with both major and minor side effects thought the drug was not as risky as the group that saw the ad with only the major side effects. The addition of minor side effects diluted the importance of the drug's major side effects.

The dilution effect cuts both ways: a pharmaceutical company that wants to downplay the risks of a drug should provide more information about side effects rather than less; but if you want to persuade your audience of your case, you should limit your presentation to only your strongest evidence and keep your communication brief. By not overwhelming them with too much information, your audience will not only be more convinced of your viewpoint, they will also appreciate your respect for their time.

If you have any questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to: sandy@learningadvantageinc.com



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Moments of Truth Create Customer Satisfaction

Many years ago, the CEO of Scandinavian Airlines, Jan Carlzon, used the term "moments of truth" to describe the myriad interactions customers have with companies and the lasting impacts those moments can have. He explained that SAS customers don't know the quality of the airline's maintenance, the skill of the pilots, or other operational aspects they're not directly exposed to. Instead, they evaluate the airline based on things they can see, such as the cleanliness of the tray table, the attitude of ticket agents, and the efficiency of baggage handling. These moments of truth can determine the success or failure of the airline.

Carlzon's insight made me think about the moments of truth for other professions, such as coaching and consulting. Certainly being prepared — showing up on time and having knowledge about the subject to be discussed — is one key determinant. Another is the care you demonstrate with clients. Do they know they matter to you? Are instances of misunderstanding handled without rancor and clarified tactfully?

I think every business can benefit from analyzing its moments of truth to find weaknesses that may require it to invest differently. One retail organization focused on their merchandising and in-store customer experience, offering distinctive products, stores that were fun to shop in, and helpful salespeople. Customers were delighted, until they had problems with the store's credit card. To save money, the store contracted out its credit card operation to a little-known bank that outsourced its customer service to an offshore call center. Customers often had to make multiple calls to get simple issues resolved, which negatively affected their perception of the store. The retailer — and its customers — would have been better served if it had invested in a better credit card partner.

Similarly, a cell phone service provider touted its robust customer care system, with its elaborate response escalation scheme, as a differentiator. Unfortunately, their response team was anything but responsive. After multiple calls and hours spent on the phone being escalated from level 1 to level 2 to level 3 without a resolution, many customers switched service providers. Investing in better customer service training could have stemmed the defections.

How can you find shortcomings in your organization's moments of truth? Some companies hire "secret shoppers" to discover strengths and weaknesses in their customer service.

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