THE MACKAY ROUND TABLE

The Art of FIRING & HIRING
Most experienced people are hired these days after being fired or downsized out of a job

Before we begin I want to make the point that the information in this session should be shared with family, friends, and business associates. It is so important. It’s worked for me for 50-plus years and will not be obsolete in five years.

This session is on firing and hiring. Conventional wisdom would say: Start with hiring. Let’s tackle the subject differently. Almost everyone has been fired or let go at some point in their career. Most experienced people are hired these days after being fired or downsized out of a job.

I got fired once. It’s no embarrassment to me today, but it was gut-wrenching then.

As you know, my father, Jack Mackay, was the Associated Press bureau chief in St. Paul, Minnesota. If they gave Olympic gold medals for networking, he would have been a contender. It was summer vacation, my junior year in high school … And, of course, my father with his connections got me the job. Overnight, I was a summer salesman at Howard’s haberdasher. What invaluable lessons I learned during that stint:

1. **Greet people with a million-dollar smile.** Before you could count to “One-Mississippi,” you learned to march up to a customer and say, “Howdy … may I help you?”

2. **Never put more than three ties on the counter** … it will only confuse the customer.

3. **Always, and I mean always, play to the spouse** (female). She will make the buying decision 99 percent of the time.
Many workers are clueless about how to hold down a job legitimately.

AND

4. Once you get the customer to try on the pants, consider it a done deal.

At the time, I was young, footloose, and fancy free. I didn’t have a care in the world. Better said, I was clueless about holding down a job legitimately.

Inch by inch, I took advantage of this sweetheart deal:

- rolling in a little late in the morning,
- stretching out my lunch hour a few extra minutes,
- zipping out a few minutes earlier than my shift ended.

I was getting away with larceny. Why not try a little homicide?

That’s when I started to ask for days off so I could play in a golf tournament. Hey, I was a hot shot … slated to be the next Ben Hogan.

The rest is history. Management, of course, never called me in. They went directly to my dad and said…

“Too many distractions…
 too many favors…
 too many special requests…
 We can’t rely on your son. What a nice kid, but… !”

I was devastated. I can count on one hand the times my father ever raised his voice at me while growing up.
His words echo in my head still today.

“Disappointed…
let me down…
let yourself down…
look what will happen to your name and reputation around town when
the word finally gets out…
You'll never work at Howard’s Men’s Store again.”

My dad made me—no, forced me—to write a letter of apology in my
own words … not his.

The list of lessons is long, but two dominate:

- First, never, never, never ask for days off in a temporary job. Chances
  are it’s so regular employees can enjoy some time off.

- And second, realize that the person you are likeliest to hurt by
  slacking off is not your employer … not yourself. It’s the person who
  stuck their neck out and put together this cushy deal for you in the
  first place. And suddenly cushions come in short supply.

The lessons I learned from this train wreck were unforgettable. It may
not be particularly useful to you in your career today. But it could be of
unmatched benefit to your kids. Why? Because they are very likely to get
their first substantial summer or job or internship via your networking.

Even if you’re CEO of your own company, being “fired” looms as a threat
for most. The name may be different.
The game’s the same:

- The banks won’t finance your expansion, and your business strategy suffers shipwreck.
- You negotiate a merger and find yourself ousted from management.
- Or, you work your tail off to head a civic or professional organization, and the board taps your arch-rival instead.

In 2005, I corralled several superstars like Robert Redford, Joe Torre, and Jamie Dimon of JP Morgan Chase. They were interviewees for a book I wrote. These beacons of success had all been fired. And you know what? To a person, they thought being fired was the best thing that ever happened to them.

Being fired is all about coming back from setbacks. They’re setbacks suffered by you … or by people you want to recruit. Setbacks deserve study. Never forget that even ideal candidates with flawless careers have almost certainly suffered setbacks. Most have been passed over for promotions or are stalled in dead-end jobs. Why else would they be talking with you?

OK, let’s jump from summer jobs … to CEOs … and life and death on Mahogany Row. Life isn’t always sweet in the C-suite. Be prepared for a bumpy ride when you travel at high altitudes.

Study the CEO fatality list. You’ll discover why leaders regularly get blown out of the saddle: They think they’re riding herd on their communication. They’re sure they’re managing expectations … but they aren’t.
Former eBay CEO and unsuccessful California gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman was just named to head Hewlett Packard. She’s their 4th CEO in 6 years.

Whitman’s predecessor was Léo Apotheker. This is a very smart guy. He was brilliant when he ran SAP in Germany. SAP was considered a model management culture. Nonetheless, when he moved to Hewlett-Packard, Apotheker barely lasted a year. Why? … He:

- dismantled the web-OS mobile-operating-platform business,
- considered spinning off Hewlett Packard’s PC business, and dropped smartphones and tablets,
- slashed earnings forecasts 3 times,
- and oversaw a 40% drop in the price of the stock.

Just a few days ago, Hewlett-Packard Board Chairman Ray Lane participated in a press conference call. Among other issues, Lane stressed communications problems:

- [Apotheker lacked the] “ability to get down deep into the businesses and understand the dynamics that were going on….”
- “We didn’t see an executive team working on the same page or working together.”
- “We struggled … when we communicated to our constituents, customers, press, investors, with clear, concise communications.”
In short, Apotheker did a God-awful job of managing the buzz! Here’s a guy who speaks 5 languages fluently.

But he couldn’t find the right one to get out the necessary messages fast.

A powerhouse like Meg Whitman was sitting on the board, fresh from a political defeat. Without a doubt, she was looking for something new to do. Who could be surprised by what happened? If the board ousted the CEO, the dream solution was sitting in their very ranks.

Doubtless, you have also followed the case of the Swiss bank UBS. A 31-year-old rogue trader of theirs in London just lost the bank $2.3 billion! It seems he was speculating on the Swiss franc. The day after the scandal broke, the markets demanded the CEO of the bank resign.

The chief executive declared he wouldn’t. In his words, “if someone [a trader, for example] acts with criminal intent, you can’t do anything.” The markets weren’t buying that excuse for a second.

Mind you, Switzerland had already bailed out UBS in 2008. As to speculative trading, red flags were everywhere.

And they didn’t have little white crosses on them. The CEO was out the door in less than a week.

The handwriting may be on the wall, but it is almost never written in black and white. When you fire someone, do it professionally. Don’t gloat. Today’s victim may prove to be tomorrow’s industry legend.
By Forbes estimates, J.K. Rowling’s net worth is a billion dollars. Her Harry Potter books have sold 400 million copies. According to Inc.com, J.K. Rowling was a “former secretary who was once fired for writing short stories at her computer. She used her severance pay to help finance the first Harry Potter” book.

The famous last words of Rowling’s former boss were captured by another source: “We made the right decision to sack her, and I wouldn’t be surprised to see her come crawling back here for her old job once this Harry Potter thing blows over.”

When any person or organization is fired, they are wise to follow the same advice. And that is the first thing we say to a lost customer at MackayMitchell Envelope Company: “Thank you for giving us your business all these years.”

And we say it with sincerity and mean it. The next is: “What can we do to make it an easy transition for you?”

And finally: “If things don’t work out, we’re ready, willing, and able to consider stepping right back in. We sure would love to keep in touch with you from time to time.” And we do.

We also say approximately the same thing to one of those few star employees we’ve lost over the years. You could be seething at someone you see as an ungrateful opportunist. Swallow hard. Wish health, wealth, and wellness. An adage learned in negotiation aptly applies here, too. He or she who burns bridges better be a damn good swimmer!
I continue to be amazed at the shock impact surrounding so many top level firings. Countless bright people never see the axe coming. And if they do, they panic and focus on the craziest things. On the other hand, what do the really smart folks do? Figure out exactly what they can change and what they can’t.

I’m reminded of two guys who were facing the firing squad. The officer in charge just finished “Ready! Aim!” He’s on the verge of “Fire!”

Then one of prisoners about to be shot yells out:

- “Hey, wait just a minute.
- First of all, this blindfold is too tight.
- Second, you didn’t offer us a last cigarette.
- Third, I didn’t have the chance to shout ‘Long live the Revolution!’”

“Shhh,” says the other guy: “Don’t make trouble!”

Well, there’s some truth to that. You’re checking out.

A demanding style rarely yields a commanding result. Consider what the guys with the guns can do.

How painful do you want to make this experience for yourself?

Michael Bloomberg is today worth $18 billion. He’s the 13th richest man in the United States. All agree he’s at least the second richest resident of New York City. He’s been mayor of the Big Apple for nearly ten years. In
1981, Michael Bloomberg was also fired by the investment banker Salomon Brothers. (Salomon Brothers, by the way, was ultimately demolished by financial scandals in 2003.)

When Salomon jettisoned Bloomberg, this was not such a bad deal for him. Taped to the spear they hurled at his heart was a check for $10 million. Those were his proceeds from Salomon being merged into another firm.

Not exactly severance … but $10 million is $10 million—no matter what they call it. They offered him outplacement counseling. He said, Thanks, but hey, I’ve already got something in mind.

Bloomberg took the cash and founded Bloomberg Financial. The rest isn’t just history. It’s financial history … billions-and-billions big.

I landed an interview with the mayor at City Hall in Lower Manhattan back in 2003. I asked him straight out: “In a high-risk job, don’t you need to be prepared to be fired every day?”

Those famous brown eyes gleamed back at me. Hizzoner said: “As you move up the ladder, you’re not paid for what you’ve done in the past. You get paid for what you’re going to do in the future. You should be forced to work harder and make tougher decisions.”

I asked Bloomberg what if the sun suddenly set on his political career in New York. This was back when running for yet another term was still plausible.

His answer: “My Plan B is better than the other guy’s Plan A … I could look you in the eye and say I’ve done as good a job as I could.” Then he
quoted a predecessor in the mayor’s job, Ed Koch: “If the voters reject me … somebody else will get a better job, but they won’t get a better mayor.”

And the mayor said he already had his next job mapped out. It was to run the Bloomberg Foundation. I’d call that unshakeable career planning. You control what you can control … and know exactly where you’re headed, if somebody pulls the switch on you.

Bill Belichick, legendary coach of the New England Patriots, is like nearly all of the greats I’ve met in life: He’s also tasted failure big time. Belichick was cut loose well into in his career, as head coach of the old Cleveland Browns. In fact, he was fired by team owner Art Modell—a distant cousin of our very own Mitchell Modell.

(Hey, everybody makes a questionable call. Who can forget that Apple once fired Steve Jobs?)

Well, Art Modell told Bill Belichick that Bill was through.

Art “was going to go in another direction.” Belichick didn’t have a tantrum. He didn’t hurl a bucket of Gatorade across the locker room. Instead Bill focused on what he could control. You see, firing is everyday business for a head coach in the NFL. It’s an inevitable, recurring fact of life.

It happens every year.

We had a chance to chat about his views on firing after Bill had three Super Bowl wins under his belt. Here’s how Bill sized things up for me. “Harvey, we go to camp every year with 80 players,” he told me. “We have to cut to 53.”
“Every year I fire 27 players. The guys who don’t try hard are the easy ones. … They deserve to be released.

“The guys who bleed for you, who do everything you ask them to do as well as they can … [The guys] who play through adversity and who play hurt—those are the hard ones. Then it’s a matter of competition and they lose out. … The coach has to tell them because you represent the interests of the other 53 players.

“You owe it to the team to make the decisions that are best for the team. [That creates] the team’s best opportunity to win.”

Cutbacks are part of the annual drill in the NFL. That’s not the way it should be in business. Wholesale cutbacks are also the way many managers have tackled the Great Recession. In my opinion: cost-cutting is never the ultimate solution to beat a recession. You have to sell your way out.

The time couldn’t be better to look for a cracker-jack salesperson. Look at it this way: The best time to hire people is during a downturn when everyone else is firing them.

The people who fire and hire well? They know human nature to a fare thee well.

Recently I read a couple of tips on building rapport. They apply to any interpersonal relationship. They’re especially meaningful between boss and subordinate. These come from Joyce Lain Kennedy’s very perceptive columns. They appear in the Chicago Tribune and a hundred other papers around the nation.
Let’s say you’re reviewing the documents for a firing decision with one of your colleagues. One simple step can help build solidarity.

Ask that person to join you on the same side of the desk to “look at the materials together.” That basic gesture says you respect that person’s input as an equal. It also implies this decision needs teamwork to be done properly.

Another piece of advice dealt with managers working for much younger bosses. “Remember not to treat your boss like a son or daughter,” Joyce Lain Kennedy counsels. “Ask questions rather than issue warnings.”

More and more bosses have to face the “young-boss problem.” It’s easy to cross the line between being the wise mentor and the tiresome, judgmental airbag. In delicate firing decisions, be confident and sure-footed. But don’t come across as all-knowing and inflexible.

I’ve met many experts on human relationships. In the business context, none understands the human angle better than Dr. Tony Alessandra. Most psychologists can analyze relationships in a snap. Tony understands how to build them.

Tony is president of Assessment Business Center, a company that offers online 360-degree assessments.

He is also a founding partner in The Cyrano Group and Platinum Rule Group companies, which have successfully combined cutting-edge technology and proven psychology to give salespeople the ability to build and maintain positive relationships with hundreds of clients and prospects.
Tony is a prolific author of 18 books, translated into 49 languages. He’s been named one of America’s most electrifying speakers and was inducted into the Speakers Hall of Fame in 1985.

With a marketing degree from Notre Dame and a Ph.D. from Georgia State, he has all the right wallpaper.

Roundtable members … I give you Dr. Tony Alessandra.

**TONY ALESSANDRA**

**Harvey:** Tony, you’re big on assessing behavior. What tips do you have on judging the behavioral style of job candidates?

**Tony:** Well, Harvey, I think it’s important to understand that there are four basic styles that a lot of models have. Probably the most popular one is DISC, where they talk about people have either a style of high dominance, high influence, high steadiness, or high conscientiousness.

So I typically teach people to take two simple decisions on a job candidate to determine what their style is. Decision number one, Is this person more open or more guarded? Open people tend to be more relationship oriented, more big picture type people; whereas, guarded people are more self contained, a little bit more private.
When we’re judging the behavioral style, we really need to look at what kind of sales job it is.

The second decision is, Is the person coming across more direct or indirect? So direct people are more assertive, more demonstrative. Indirect people may come across as more quiet, maybe even shy; they tend to ask more questions.

So those are the two big decisions: Is a person more open or guarded, and is the person more direct or indirect?

Now, the question is, Why do we even want to know that? Well, first of all, if a person is open and also direct, you’re dealing with a high influence style. If the person is guarded, but direct, you’re dealing with a high dominance style. If the person’s open, but indirect, you’re dealing with a steadiness style. And of course the last one is if the person is indirect and guarded, you’re dealing with a more thinker, cautious, conscientious style.

When you hire somebody, especially in sales, what kind of a sales job is it? That’s what we really need to look at when we’re judging the behavioral style. If it’s a high ticket item that is somewhat complex, maybe I’d be looking at a high D. If it’s maybe a one call sale and it’s not a big ticket item and it’s not complex, maybe a high I would excel there. If it’s the type of a sales job where you’re constantly going back and reselling, retaking orders, doing service for that particular account, maybe a high steady style would be great. If it’s a very technical, engineering type based product, maybe a long time, many call sale, I may lean toward the conscientious style, the high C.
When hiring someone, an important thing to observe is what is that first impression that they give.

So those are the four styles, DISC. Some people call them, instead of the D, they call it a director or a driver. The I, instead of the influence style, they may call it an expressive or socializer. The S, the steady style, they may call an amiable or a relator. And finally the C style, the conscientious style, they may call an analytical or a thinker.

It really is important to match the style of a job candidate with the type of sales situation and the type of customers they’re calling on.

Harvey: Wow, I’ve been hiring for many, many decades, and I can tell you that’s a fascinating answer. I’ve got to listen to this over and over again, that answer.

The next question, What traits should managers look for when they hire salespeople? And I don’t know if you necessarily have to prioritize or not, but I’m just going to listen.

Tony: Okay. Well, there’s a lot of different traits that people have. I mean, if you go through the literature, you’d probably find dozens of different traits. But I’m just going to tell you what my answer would be. One thing is I want to look at the image, how the person comes across, what’s that first impression.
You know that old saying, “You never get a second chance to overcome a bad first impression.” So I want to make sure that the person’s image, the way they look, the way they dress, the way they carry themselves, the way they talk, just that whole aura that they project so that they can connect with people.

Then I want to make sure I have somebody who has a proper attitude. It’s almost like how you come across, how you think, our attitude is reflected in everything we do. So I want people with a positive attitude, a can-do attitude.

Then I want somebody who has good depth of knowledge, and by “depth of knowledge,” I mean knowledge—although some of this can be taught, Harvey—but knowledge of my industry, my company, my products, my competitors, and of course today, with all of the online resources that you have, even a job candidate who comes in could do some homework about the company, its products, its competitors, and the industry in general.

I certainly want somebody who has some depth of knowledge.

Another side of that coin—so one side is depth of knowledge. To me, the other side is breadth of knowledge. And breadth of knowledge is being able to discuss a broad spectrum of subjects. It’s almost like being a renaissance person, being well read so that you can talk to people about things that they’re interested in.
I’d also look for people who obviously have great enthusiasm, who are mature in how they think and what they do, and somebody who just projects that they are a professional. It’s not necessarily what you do; it’s how you do it. I want people to come across in a very mature, professional manner.

So those are some of the things that I would look for when I’m looking for a salesperson, the traits that I would look for.

Harvey: Well, if I could find someone with those traits, it looks like I’d have a superstar.

Tony, I’ve always said your attitude—and my Roundtable has heard this over and over again—your attitude determines your altitude. So of course I loved when I heard that word “attitude,” as we all know, which shapes so many of the things we do.

Next question, What generally gets people fired and how can they prevent it?

Tony: Well, I think there’s a few things that get people fired. One, and probably the big thing that you hear, is they just don’t get along with the people that they’re working with. They don’t get along with their immediate boss or supervisor.
They don’t get along with their peers. They don’t get along with the customers. So that’s one thing, they don’t have good relationship skills.

Another thing that would get people fired is they’re not doing what they were hired to do. So when you get hired, there’s obviously certain job responsibilities. The question is, Are you doing those to the degree that the company needs you to do those? So it’s just not performing well.

And of course, how you can prevent it is to just make sure you know exactly what it is you’re going to be judged on in the company. What are those job responsibilities? What are the expectations that the company has for your behavior and your output? And do everything you can, whether it’s going to company sponsored training programs; to doing a lot of self learning, research, reading; picking people’s minds, especially people who have been with the company for long time; just making sure that you are capable and competent to do what it is you were hired to do.

Then second, on the relationship side, to do everything you can to get along well with people.

Harvey, you know that the thing I’m probably best known for is my platinum rule, which is “Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.” I call that adaptability, which is your ability to change your approach or change your strategy,
People need to learn relationship skills, to get along better with people and be a better listener depending on the situation or the person you’re dealing with. And I really believe that people could learn relationship skills, to get along better with people, to be a better communicator, to be a better listener, maybe to ask more questions than talk. But just learn to connect with other people.

So that’s what I think either gets people fired or can help prevent them from getting fired.

Harvey: That “Do unto others as they want done unto them,” that’s your platinum rule in your best selling book; is that right?

Tony: Absolutely. Yes, it is.

Harvey: Okay. I just have to comment, four little words: Get along with people. I mean, basically what you’ve been talking about. Isn’t that simple? And yet so, so, so difficult. Also what I heard you say is agreements prevent disagreements.

If you know what your job responsibilities are, again, the probability that you’ll be successful is a lot higher.
Tony: Absolutely.

Harvey: Again, agreements prevent disagreements.

Next question, this is not intended to be a curve ball or a trick question, but here's what I wrote up. What is the number one stress in firing for the firer? How can you avoid it?

Tony: Well, I really think that depends on the individual. Let’s go back to those four styles that I was talking about. So, for instance, for the high S—the steady, amiable, relating type—the biggest stress for them is hurting somebody's feelings. If I’m going to fire somebody, will they then not like me? That’s a big stress for them.

I think that’s a comparable stress for what I call the high I, the high influence, the socializer, the expressive style. They don’t like not being liked. So that’s one of the big things that stresses them.

Each of the styles actually try to fire people differently. The more relating, amiable type, they will ask you questions and hope that you will quit rather than fire you. “Well, Harvey, you know you’ve been here on this job for several months now, and I was just wondering, how do you think it’s going?”
And if the person they’re asking the question of says, “Oh, it’s going great. I love it here. I think things are good.” The relator can’t fire the person.

Now, when it comes to the high C—again, nobody really likes confrontation, maybe the high D, the dominant driving director, they thrive under stress. I’m not saying that they like it, but it doesn’t bother them, it kind of rolls off their back.

The high D, the dominant style will walk in and say, “Harvey, don’t bother being seated. Terminations are never pleasant,” and boom, right there, it’s over. Whereas, the more expressive, socializer type would say, “Hey, Harvey, I’ve got a great opportunity for you, not with us,” and they try to make a fun thing out of it.

I just think when you’re going to fire somebody, it really is important, if you want to avoid the stress, is to really do what I think a lot of athletes do, and that is practice it in your mind.

What would I say? Why am I going to say it? Why do we have to let the person go? Is it because of the relationship issue that they don’t get along with people, or they haven’t been performing the way that we hoped that they would perform? What if the person says this, what would I say? What if the person says that, what would I say? It really is going through the whole process in your mind. But I will say for most people it is stressful to fire somebody.
You need to be prepared for every possible reaction that you might get when you fire someone.

I, myself, do not like to fire somebody, but I know every so often you have to do it. So you just have to be prepared. You have to know how the person might react, whether they're going to cry, whether they're going to go, “Whew, boy, this is good news because I knew things weren't working out for me here.” How are they going to react? And if it's very negative, how will I respond to it?

That's how we resolve the stress of firing somebody, by simply being prepared for every possible reaction that we might get.

Harvey: Let me just throw a little PS in here on this question.

I have no idea if you agree with me on this philosophy. But I've always felt in the majority of all firings that if I'm firing you, Tony, and you're reporting to me and you are surprised or shocked, then I'm a poor manager, that along the way I should have been coaching you and should have been giving you warnings.

Do you agree with that or not?

Tony: 100 percent, Harvey. 100 percent. I think a person needs to really know how they stand with the job. Now, you may not agree with this, but I think that within 90 days, you pretty
well know whether somebody’s going to make it or not, and they should know the same thing. Again, if they are surprised, then it really was you’ve created maybe false hope or expectations for the person, when you should have been telling them what they were not doing right or how they could correct certain things.

Harvey: Well, I had no idea what you were going to say, but that’s nice to hear. And yes, I agree with you, after 90 days—I’ve said that to the Roundtable on several occasions, even used some examples. One of my fun examples is that you can live next door—you and I can be best friends, we’re married for 25 years, and then one day my wife says to your wife, “Let’s go on a vacation together for six weeks to Europe, and we may never talk again.” You really get to know someone, of course, after 10, 20, 30 days, let alone 90 days.

Let’s move on. When you hire, does a good team require a mix of behavioral styles?

Tony: Absolutely. I have a couple of simple sayings that everybody’s heard before: “Birds of a feather flock together,” and the other saying is “Opposites attract.” When it comes to behavioral styles in social settings, in personal settings, birds
When you have two people who think and act the same way, one of them is redundant.

Harvey: I love it. I just absolutely love it.

Last question, What one or two people have influenced you the most and why?

Tony: Oh, boy. Well, I'll tell you, when I was in my doctoral program at Georgia State University, my dissertation chairman, my head professor, his name was Dr. David Schwartz.

Now, I don’t know if you know that name, but he was the author of a best-selling book called *The Magic of Thinking Big*. And that was a book that earlier in my life, when I was
You can trade knowledge with someone who has a different expertise than you in your trade.

Younger, I had read, and it really had a very significant positive impact on me.

And when I went to Georgia State—now, here I am in my 20s, a doctoral student—there in the living flesh was Dr. David Schwartz, and he really was such a positive person. He really lived—to me at least, he lived what he wrote in that book. He was a motivational speaker too, in addition to being a college prof, and I think, obviously, that rubbed off on me.

I never even thought about being a professional speaker until I came across him. He's the one who pushed me through my doctoral program and kept me on track to make sure that I finished and finished on time. So he was a big influence.

A second big influence was Jim Cathcart. I met Jim Cathcart, another professional speaker, a very, very, very close friend. I met him in 1979. We both were speakers on the same program. We both had booths at that program. We were kind of selling our product, our books and everything. His booth was right next to mine. And we really hit it off.

I had never met him before. He was already a professional speaker. I was really just getting into it. And we decided, almost like the peanut butter and chocolate, you know, a Reese's, you know, “Hey, Jim, if you teach me more about speaking, I'll teach you more about sales and marketing,” and it became a great relationship.
I would say the last—there are many people, Harvey, I mean, including you, so I won’t even go there. But Bill Gove, early in my speaking career, I spent a weekend with him, and he took me to the side and said, “Tony, you’re not maximizing your ability as a speaker. You are trying to come across as a college professor, very professorial and proper,” and he said, “But that’s on the stage. Off the stage you’re a New York Italian who is very mischievous and funny, and none of that is coming out on the platform.”

He said, “You’ve got to work and let that come out on the platform.” And once I started doing that, it really was a turbocharge to my career.

So I would say Dr. David Schwartz, Jim Cathcart, and Bill Gove, three key people early in my career.

Harvey: Am I ever glad I asked that question, for several reasons. But number one, Dr. David Schwartz, I’m not knowledgeable about his work. I love the title, The Magic of Thinking Big, what a title. But when you said he lived what he wrote in that book—and of course there are so many Jekyll & Hydes out there—that’s someone that you can really respect.

But then you mentioned Jim Cathcart, who is a pretty good friend also through NSA. Some of our members in the
You need mentors who will be heroes in your life.

Roundtable are NSA members, and Cathcart, again, is the best of the best. He’s a beautiful person.

And then, Tony, you know I’ve got a new book coming out, launched November 1st, which you’re going to help me, and I thank you again for that. In the book—you don’t know, because at the point of this interview, I haven’t mailed you the book yet—it talks about Bill Gove, who worked at 3M.

I’m, of course, a Twin City boy, St. Paul, went to work for an envelope company in St. Paul. Bill Gove, I write in the book, was one of my major heroes. And the same thing, he used to coach me on the side. So what a thrill to have you mention Gove and Cathcart. That’s just terrific.

Well, I’ll give you the bottom line.

I have been mesmerized with what you shared. Again, thank you very much. And I’m sure our Roundtable members are going to enjoy this session with you, like I just have. So thanks again.

**Tony:** Okay. Thanks a lot, Harvey. Bye now.
Harvey: Tony, you're the sizzle in everybody's steak! Thanks for your visit and the invaluable smarts you bring to both candidates and employers in your penetrating columns.

Watch any business report—in fact, watch any newscast—these days. Sooner or later the topic of jobs is center stage.

A couple of days ago, one such news item blind-sided me. Blind isn't the word for it! Some firms are not just firing. They're firing their very future. There's a new trend in business. It may be one of the dumbest fads I've run across yet. They call it "brightsizing."

This is "corporate downsizing in which the brightest workers are let go. This happens when a company lays off those workers with the least seniority.

[It's] those young workers who are often the best trained and educated." Some of these younger tigers are scorned by the broader employee population. They're seen as under-experienced and lavishly overpaid.

A business can be backed into a corner with a suicidal labor contract, of course. Who could imagine any firm making a decision to hack off their best and brightest, voluntarily?

Why even bother to have a recruitment program with this sort of attitude? A company can’t be run by software, no matter how brilliant the programs are.
Here’s how I see the modern counterpart to the 18th century Age of Enlightenment. I call it the “Age of Rebrightenment.” Through continuous learning, you need to keep the workforce retrained all the time.

The unshakeable truths about firing are the same, regardless of which side of the table you’re on.

You could be the manager or the employee. You could be the candidate.

Here is some wisdom to ponder:

- **The real reason a person got fired from a job is rarely the given reason.** Get down to plain English. Stop trying to merchandise a mistake. What happened and what are you doing to make sure it doesn’t happen again?

- **It’s not the people you fire who make your life miserable. It’s the people you don’t fire who make your life miserable.** When an impasse is reached, find a way to move on. Employers may feel guilty. Employees may be terrified about where the next paycheck is coming from. The unavoidable issues are:
  - Is everyone prepared to accept reality?
  - What viable work can this person do for the future?
  - At what level can they do it?
  - How fast can they learn the skills?
  - And who’s going to pay for the training?
Only a dummy doesn’t know where the emergency exit is, but don’t act like you’re ready to use it.

The time to start worrying about what you’ll do when you’re fired is the day you get hired. The greater the risk quotient in your job, the truer this is. This is totally different from resigning yourself to failure. I also subscribe to the wisdom uttered by former Secretary of State George Schultz: “The minute you start talking about what you’re going to do if you lose, you’ve lost.”

Look at things this way: What happens if you’re forced out for whatever reason—fairly or unfairly? Only a dummy doesn’t know where the emergency exit is. Have a plan. File it away. Then concentrate on winning.

Likewise, what do you do when you just hired someone who is irreplaceable? Start worrying what happens if you have to replace them. If people don’t pack their parachutes in advance, it’s hard to dedicate yourself to winning and risk-taking.

The likeliest managers to get fired are often those who have the most trouble firing others. You can sum it up this way. People who take things personal, make things personal. They tend to postpone. They linger in stalemated situations. They try to “hope” their way out of impasses, rather than being decisive.

And, the last pointer on firing—at either end of the termination event:

Don’t be cold-blooded. But be cold-bloodedly realistic about the people you’re dealing with. Dispel your illusions well before you end up in a wrestling match.
A few years ago management expert Jeffrey Sonnenfeld wrote a classic. It’s called The Hero’s Farewell. Among other keen points he makes is this: Some CEOs, especially founders, just don’t want to retire.

He points to William S. Paley—who built CBS, the Columbia Broadcasting System. Paley had one wild career. For a time, CBS made television sets. It even owned the New York Yankees. In 1966, Paley turned 65.

That same year, he disregarded a mandatory retirement rule and continued as CBS’s chairman of the board. In 1983, he left the company for a five-year sabbatical and resumed his position in 1987. Paley ultimately died in 1990. He was still appearing at company functions until the bitter end.

“A former Paley-appointed board member commented, ‘You have to recognize Paley had not wanted to retire … he regards it as his company. There have been five presidents since I’ve been on the board. It keeps you alert because it’s always Paley against the president.’”

I knew one of those presidents pretty well: Tom Wyman, who passed away in 2003. He was CEO of Green Giant before it was taken over by Pillsbury. “Wyman’s reign [at CBS] lasted a record six years” until he was ousted in 1986.

There are many morals here. The biggest is probably: Never let a superstar pick his own successor. The board of a public company shouldn’t let it happen. A level-headed superstar shouldn’t allow it either.

To prevent this kind of problem, people have to be incredibly realistic and objective … and sometimes very creative:
1. **Size up the leader’s personality.** Sonnenfeld pegs four leadership styles: monarchs, generals, ambassadors and governors. “[For example,] the monarchs cannot leave until they exit feet first. [That’s] through death or a palace revolt. [T]he generals leave reluctantly and then stage a return effort.”

2. **All companies change their leadership needs.** Different horses for different courses. A firebrand entrepreneur can launch a business or turn one around. Often an in-the-trenches operator is needed to nudge it to the next level.

3. **Leaders get out of the way much more easily if they have something new and substantial to do.** Chair a blue-ribbon committee for the White House. Start another business. Nicolas Hayek is a great example. First he turned around the Swiss watch industry with Swatch. Then he developed the Smart Car with Mercedes. In Hayek’s case, he stayed with the same corporate entity. But he immersed himself in a fresh “green field” for his energy.

High-level staffing shifts require enormous ingenuity. Sometimes a little smoke and mirrors go a long way. Let me tell you about a stroke of interpersonal creativity that knocked my socks off.

I met a retiree in Phoenix just before last Thanksgiving.

The guy moonlights as a cabbie. He picks up a couple of bucks to make ends meet for him and his wife. They draw Social Security. The cabbie has a son in Manhattan.
The cabbie called his son the night before I met him. Here’s what he said: “Son, I hate to ruin your day. But I have to tell you that your mother and I are getting a divorce. Forty-five years of misery is enough.”

The son, who is an advertising manager, was devastated. “Pop, what are you talking about?!” his kid screamed.

“You can’t divorce Mom after all these years. That’s crazy.”

“It may be crazy,” said the old man, “but I’m going to tell her on this coming Thanksgiving Day! It will be the last one we spend together.”

The son was frantic. He called his sister in Evanston.

She exploded: “Like heck they’re getting a divorce.

“We’re both going to fly to Phoenix and talk some sense into Dad, I don’t care if it is Thanksgiving!”

She immediately called her father, the cabbie, and shouted at him over the phone: “Don’t you dare do a thing until Brother and I get there tomorrow.” And she hung up.

Then the cabbie turned around and looked at me with this twinkle in his eye: “When the phone calls were done, I sez to the little woman: ‘OK, they’re coming for Thanksgiving, and they’re paying their own way. Now what do we tell them for Christmas?’”

Some Baby Boomers are structuring the late stages of their careers with innovation. In Aspen, I mentioned the problems caused by Baby Boomers.
They’re shunning retirement and causing compression for Generation Xers who want to get ahead. Some Baby Boomers are, however, charting out a novel alternative.

My friend Mary Weber Nord is a retired executive in the Twin Cities. She used to be Director of Talent Resources for the ad agency Fallon Worldwide. That firm was acquired.

As human resource officer, Mary supervised an endless series of staffing contractions. Seen as the “Angel of Death,” she decided she wanted to put a more positive finish on her career. She voluntarily left Fallon and founded her own consulting group. She has a high-versatility skill mix and a willingness to do a variety of different things:

- She offers recruiting and human resources consulting.
- She spends part of her time doing fund-raising for her college alma mater.
- And, she’s conducting self-defense classes for women.

Mary took the multi-tasking she mastered so well as an agency executive. Now she’s applied it to managing a diversified series of mini-careers for herself. This only works if you are an accomplished networker who has a commanding list of contacts at the ready. The different “channels of opportunity aren’t always immediately obvious.”

Many people are spending part of their time taking care of the aged. The “young old” are taking care of the “old old.” Some of this is voluntary, but much of it is paid work as well. This multi-task solution is redefining late-
Stage careers for many. It’s also making the idea of odd jobs not so odd any more. By the way, not all these jobs have the same status level. One later-life entrepreneur put it this way:

“I have steak days, and I have peanut-butter days.”

One thing is sure. Top firms are scrutinizing every new full-time job as never before. Among financial services firms, few have been as successful as the North Star Resource Group. It’s a firm with some 70,000 clients.

In 2008, New Yorker columnist Malcolm Gladwell featured North Star in a piece titled: MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED: How do we hire when we can’t tell who’s right for the job? The reason behind Gladwell’s fascination with North Star: “No one knows beforehand what makes a high-performing financial adviser different from a low-performing one,” writes Gladwell.

In 2007, North Star “interviewed about a thousand people. [It] found forty-nine it liked, a ratio of twenty interviewees to one candidate.” The candidates undergo a “training camp” where they act as financial advisers. That period lasts four months, and, during it, they are each expected to acquire at least ten real-world clients.”

Here’s their math: They want to know “If someone can obtain ten clients, and is able to maintain a minimum of ten meetings a week.” To do so “means that person has gathered over a hundred introductions in that four-month period.” According to North Star’s Co-president: “Then we know that person is at least fast enough to play this game.”
“Of the forty-nine people invited to the training camp, twenty-three made the cut and were hired as apprentice advisers.” North Star figures it takes another three or four years to see if people really have the right stuff. It hopes to retain about ten of those twenty-three.

Some of the very best businesses make book on these odds: Only one in a hundred of the people you see are likely to have the goods to be a star. Today’s best firms are pouring candidates through the narrowest sieve imaginable.

I remember John Y. Brown, former Kentucky governor, once joshing me. “Harvey,” he said, “I have never seen a bad résumé.” That wry observation should be tattooed on every manager’s forehead. Everybody’s a winner on paper. Or at least that’s the story people try to write.

The truth is that we’ve all become immune to the hype.

We all know how people try to window-dress their careers on paper. When I interview a candidate for any job, I x-ray how well that person sells himself or herself. That starts with the résumé and letters of recommendation. Is the tout credible? After all, what do you expect the reference letter to say? “I hope your company can do something with Jack because—God knows—we certainly couldn’t!”

No matter what the job, salesmanship matters. In a certain way, everybody on the team is a salesperson for the organization. Of course, we need financial types, advertising mavens and IT geeks. But, no matter what the specialty, each and every one has to be able to sell ideas.
The number one purpose of a résumé is to win an interview

But you don’t get the order, i.e. you don’t get the job. Unless you merchandise your personal pitch. What exactly are you going to do for us? How long will you take to do it?

The quality of a person’s résumé is a reflection of a person’s capabilities. Not just the experiences it includes. How that career is presented is extremely important as well. Despite laborious cut-and-paste editing, most people have incredibly weak résumés. They have unexplained gaps.

The language is shrouded in corporate double talk. Again, step back and judge the person’s ability to sell ideas and sell himself.

The Rockport Institute did a rock-solid tip sheet on what a résumé should be. The tips included:

- The number one purpose of a résumé is “to win an interview.” Does it get someone’s foot in the door?
- On average, one in 200 résumés secures an interview. What does this résumé do to create interest?
- Does the résumé “focus on the employer’s needs” not the candidate’s?

The priority is spelled out in the word itself. The purpose of a r-e-s-u-m-é is to r-e-s-u-m-e work!

Several years ago, I remember one particular search we conducted. We ran an ad for a salesperson and received 135 résumés. Thirty were screened through initial interviewing. CEO Scott Mitchell and I interviewed the 8 finalists—and rejected all of them. We were back to square one again.
Plan your needs so you aren’t backed up to the wall when any one person leaves

Searches for our firm may take thirty days to two years.

I’ve been asked, “But how can that be? How can you tolerate unfilled vacancies for that long?” First, we plan our needs so we aren’t backed up to the wall when any one person leaves.

Second, I’ve been in business for half a century. In that time, I’ve been “open for hiring” fifty-two weeks a year for years. When anyone really solid comes through the door, they have a job—even if we don’t have a place. That gives us bench strength.

Third, our selection process is so rigorous that our long-term retention rate is well above 80 percent. Getting hired by MackayMitchell Envelope is like a battlefield commission.

It generates pride for the recruit and for the entire workforce. They see real evidence that management is doing its job.

At MackayMitchell Envelope Company we have a ten-step hiring process for key people that I do think is unique and useful. Sure, we don’t use all ten steps for every new hire, but we use more of them than you might think. Does it sound as slow and as painful as the Chinese water torture?

Imagine your pain at the other end if you have to fire someone you mistakenly hired. Then the investment doesn’t look so bad.

1. The candidate is invited for an interview. Nothing exceptional here, except that our personnel interviewer is both a professional recruiter and a skilled gatekeeper. She’s bright enough to know what
management is looking for. She’s secure enough not to automatically screen out intimidating or unusual candidates. Her name is Teresa Mazzitelli. And I mention her name because she is so exceptional.

2. **The candidate is invited back for six to eight follow-up interviews with members of our management.** Again, not unusual, except that the interviewers discuss their findings. They must also make a specific hire/reject recommendation with reasons why. (It’s great training.)

3. **I talk with the candidate for thirty minutes.** Or rather, they talk with me for thirty minutes. They carry the conversation. Who cares how sympathetically they nod approval to what the chairman says?

4. **I talk with them on the phone for thirty minutes.** Mobile is everything. Can the person project, persuade, and communicate clearly over the phone? Now is the time to find out if you’re hiring Brian Williams or an answering machine.

5. **I dial up some outside sources.** Check out the candidate in the industry. Who knows or should know about this person? Contact people you trust and who have a good feel for other people.

6. **Scott or I interview candidates in their home setting with their spouse and children.** I want to see the candidate’s personal values at work in the most revealing setting. It’s also a great integrity test. Does the candidate’s home life match the description in the interview?

7. **We socialize with the candidate in a different environment.** Is the candidate a classical music or movie buff? Then it’s off to the
Pressure has grown to make every new hire letter perfect.

concert hall or the theater with candidate and spouse. How does this person act in a social setting? These venues are especially important for salespeople. Isn’t that when they need to be their most skillful and persuasive?

8. **The candidate sees two or three top managers in other, noncompetitive companies in our town.** The visits are brief. How do I get my associates to devote time to this? Of course, I reciprocate and review their final candidates!

9. **A trip to the Master: Every city has a master of profession.** Master controller, master purchasing agent, master executive secretary. The successful candidate has to pass muster with the master. I make a point of personally knowing the masters. (By the way, their leads are often a terrific way to find candidates in the first place.)

10. **A trip to the industrial psychologist.** A skull session is mandatory. These visits have to be addressed with the right attitude. Psychologists don’t determine success or failure. They assess fit. Brad Swanson and Bill Kirkpatrick are the industrial psychologists we use, and they have helped us make countless staffing decisions.

You might think companies have dropped psychologists as a frill with all the belt-tightening. Just the opposite has happened. Every placement has become more important. Pressure has grown to make every new hire letter perfect.

Industrial psychologists can be pivotal in answering uncountable questions. Let me cite just a few:
Psychologists can help you unpack both capabilities and motivations

- Will a candidate be a good networker? Will this person be a dedicated team player? The psychologist can help you unpack both capabilities and motivations.

- Many qualified people in today’s job market say they’ll work for a demotion or downscaled job. But will they really … and for how long?

- Likewise, impressively experienced senior candidates claim they will accept a temporary executive bridge position. These are so-called “survivor-jobs.” An industrial psychologist can help you sniff out if such a person is legit.

- Someone may catch your eye because they have the credentials to be a remarkable mentor. Do they have the motivation and emotional makeup to do the job? A psychologist can aid in sizing up the candidate’s fit for that task.

Rare is the day that the psychological experts and I don’t agree on a placement. Though it’s uncommon, it sometimes happens. When it does, I trust my gut.

Remember Dave Barry’s admonition: It was an inspired lone individual who built the Ark. It was a committee of professional experts who built the Titanic.

Why are we so incredibly careful in searches? Whenever we do a search, this story comes invariably to mind: Two married couples can live side by side for 25 years. They are best friends. One day one of the couples calls the
Every time you flirt with the idea of hiring someone, take a cold shower.

other couple. “Hey, we’ve got a good idea. Let’s go to Europe together for six weeks.” Upon their return, they never talk again.

Not only is this story true. It’s true thousands and thousands of time over again every year. Every time you flirt with the idea of hiring someone, especially a superstar: Take a cold shower. Never target anything unless you expect to be happy with this head hanging in your office for some time to come. One question summarizes the acid test: “How would you feel if the same person were working for your competition instead of you?” If the answer is “not so bad,” then take a pass and fast!

Psychologists are a pivotal input in management hiring. So are social media. That’s at least the assumption.

Do the numbers say social media are a fad or a real force? Here are some statistics worth noting compiled by CareerEnlightenment:

- 89% of companies will use social media networks for recruiting in 2011. That’s up from 6% in 2010.

- 1 of 3 employers rejected candidates based on something they found about them online.

- 92% of hiring managers plan to recruit via social networks,

- 79% of hiring managers & job recruiters review applicants’ info online.

Of all companies surveyed:

- 45% use Twitter to find talent.
People are using every powerful device—including social media—to hire talented people. It’s also true that business people research nearly every strategic proposition to death. That’s with one glaring exception. Many senior managers don’t know diddley about what attracts talent to organizations.

In 2009, the Conference Board Review ran a dynamite article. Its title: “Talent Is Everything.” The authors were three senior managers at a Deloitte research subsidiary. Here are several of the power points made:

- “Top executives may be asking many of the right questions. [But] they often lose sight of what appeals to and keeps hold of talent in the first place. Compensation and benefit packages are surely important. [However,] the opportunity to develop professionally consistently outranks money in surveys of employee satisfaction.”

- Talented people recognize the importance of compensation and benefits. But they always rank the opportunity for “professional development” as the leading priority in picking their next job.

I couldn’t agree more.
The Deloitte researchers present a parallel example: “Extreme surfers have used global practice networks to push the limits of their sport. In the 1950s, six-foot waves were considered challenging; today, big-wave surfers routinely and successfully ride sixty-to-seventy-foot waves. Big-wave surfers tend to congregate at specific beaches and breaks to learn their craft.—[They] connect at competitions and, increasingly, through the Internet. They gain from carefully watching each other and observing new techniques and practices under different wave conditions.”

Likewise, talented people congregate at skill centers where their skill base is going to be demanded. They go where they can develop in the fastest and in the most advanced ways.

“Only by helping employees build their skills and capabilities can companies hope to attract and retain [talented workers. They] join companies and stay there because they believe they’ll learn faster and better than they would at other employers.”

Talented managers want the opportunity to “pull” training that nourishes their hunger for knowledge. They won’t wait for some central training office to figure out what program they should be spoon-fed next.

Troll for talent … and throw back marginal candidates.

Any successful hiring process these days puts a premium on multiple interviews. Why are they so important?
A job offer is often an unexpected jolt, and people usually get swept away by the rush of excitement.

A colleague is likely to catch what you miss. It’s kinda like why bottlenose dolphins hunt in packs. They actually drive their fish prey into mud-banks.

Dolphins think in terms of group good. And, you aren’t just on the lookout for isolated mistakes or gaps. You’re also scanning for inconsistencies.

A group has a better chance of pinning someone down than an individual does. A glib, quick-witted candidate will often explain a hole in a résumé one way to one interviewer. In a second conversation, a whole different spin is presented.

Or, team play is celebrated to the human resource director. To the sales manager, he comes across as a chest-pounding personal performer. Are you getting Jekyll or Hyde?

Or both in one, which—as we know—can be far worse.

Hiring wisdom—both as seen from the candidate’s and the recruiter’s perspective—form a valuable expertise. Use it in strengthening and extending your network.

Some of you may not do much hiring. And you may not have a career switch in mind for yourself. Nonetheless a colleague or a protégé of yours might be contemplating a career move. Or you could have a son or daughter who is entertaining their first proposition from another firm.

A job offer is often an unexpected jolt, and people usually get swept away by the rush of excitement.
Getting a job is a job. Having a job is your bread-and-butter. That may be. But having a job is a piece of cake, compared with getting a job. That certainly includes being considered for a dream job plenty of people would die for.

Several years ago, a long-time friend from California called from out of the blue and asked me if I would advise him on getting his dream job. The post was the athletics directorship at a medium-sized university. This school wanted to take their athletic program to the next level. The bad news was they were interviewing six awesome people for the spot!

Within 30 minutes I gave my friend a game plan. I assured him if he followed through on these ideas, he would automatically leapfrog over the competition.

Worst-case scenario: It would be a photo finish as to whether he got the job or not. Here’s what I urged him to do:

- Write up a 3-5 year business plan with strategies and tactics. He would describe in believable detail how he intended to implement the plan.

- I told him to go back and interview the school’s last five athletic directors or however many are alive. I urged him to specifically ask them if they had to do it all over again: What would they do differently?

- My next suggestion was to lay out a fundraising program. Most athletic programs are financially under siege. He had to present himself as a creative but thrifty dollars-and-cents pragmatist.
Do your homework, and you should be able to anticipate every tough interview question thrown at you.

- I insisted he get a list of the search committee members. Then, of course, he Googled each of them. (Today he would run them through Facebook, LinkedIn, and the Invisible Web as well.) Certainly he also telephoned his way through his own personal network.

- The next piece of advice: Travel incognito to the university. Walk the campus. Talk to students about what they are looking for in their athletic program.

- And, the coup de grace: Discreetly contact the athletic conference commissioner. Inhale any precious feedback you can get.

Of course, my friend got the job. It was the start of a phenomenal career. Each successive step was built on doing the same sort of preparation that landed him this opening. And he did the preparation better and better each time.

The point of the process is this: If someone really wants a job, there is no such thing as a cold call. Do your homework, and you should be able to anticipate every tough interview question thrown at you. Want to convince people you are the perfect fit for a job?

Then you have to persuade them you know what it takes. That means in specific detail.

You’ll never pass the test without doing the homework. But the toil can be worthwhile: Find a job you love, and you’ll never work another day in your life.
Tierney Remick is Global Market Managing Director for the executive search firm Korn/Ferry International. She is a leading authority on executive search, especially at very senior management levels. Tierney has been part of my last two books. She enjoys premier billing on the Business Week list of the most influential headhunters.

Based in Chicago, Tierney is the “nose who knows about C-level” job searches. It’s quite likely you have already heard her sage voice as a guest on CNBC and CNN, and in the Wall Street Journal and Fortune.

Roundtable members … Here’s Tierney Remick.

Harvey: Tierney, first question, Not that long ago, 60 percent of all CEOs ended up getting fired. How are CEOs and other C-suite execs fairing in the present recession?

Tierney: Actually, Harvey, it’s a really great question, because it would suggest that in 2008, 2009, at the beginning of the downturn, so many senior level executives were facing challenges they had never faced before, that if anything, boards and management were given the benefit of the doubt of time, if it’ll work through whatever crises or challenges you’re facing in the business as a result of the financial crisis.
In hiring, find out who really has the intellectual and learning agility to manage through and succeed

I think now we’re seeing, in 2010 and beyond, that the turnover has increased at a pace reminiscent of that 60 percent number that you referenced. It has done so for a couple of reasons.

If you look at many of the C-level executives today, they were developing their careers at a time when we were in a period of very high growth, so their success as leaders was as much connected to the fast growth of the companies or businesses that they managed, more than potentially even the strategies that were being employed. Then comes the financial down-turn, and now they’re all being faced with challenges that they had never faced before throughout their career.

So we’re finding out who really has the intellectual and learning agility to sort of manage through and succeed, even in spite of new experiences that they haven’t had to lead through before, versus those that really don’t have the ability to adjust as quickly. So of late we’re seeing more turnover.

Obviously, you’ve read about some of the more high profile turnovers in the paper, but it's at HP or B of A or others. But I would also suggest that we're seeing it reflected in the C-suite in general.

Surely. It reminds me of years ago, right out of college, in fact, when I was trying to pick a money manager. I didn’t have any
money, but I still wanted someone to look after whatever little I had. And on through the decades, I’m interested in what happens in the bad times, not when the market is flowing, of course, straight upward in a parabolic curve.

Question number two, next question, Are there any new career strategies top managers are using these days to get their careers back on track? What separates fabulous business leaders from the mainstream?

I think one of the observations that we have had over the last—and I will put this in a five year time frame, because it’s been most obvious the last five years. Those senior leaders who have been willing to take risks in their career in terms of leading a new business unit, taking on a new international assignment, taking on a different functional area of expertise that would be complimentary and very adjacent to what they had been developing over the course of time, but a role that will broaden them in a way that truly brings general management skills to bear.

Those are the individuals who are standing out of late. They’re the ones that are very resilient. They are quite able to think strategically through challenges that they may not have faced before and come up with solutions. They’re also able to embrace new areas of responsibility and thoughtfully put together a strategy on how to build a business forward.
A breadth of thinking combined with a breadth of experiences is more attractive today.

So it’s the breadth of thinking, combined with the breadth of experiences, that’s more attractive today. Whereas, previously, I think people who had gained expertise in a particular area or a particular region stood out. Now, it’s the cross-functional, cross-geographic, cross-divisional breadth that definitely separates the fabulous leaders from those who may be more traditional.

Harvey: Well, I just love your insights.

Next question, is worldwide networking playing a greater role in senior managers finding jobs? The sphere of influence of a significant business executive might be strictly regional in the U.S. So does such a person still suffer from an image handicap by not having global contacts?

Tierney: That’s a question we get a lot from clients who may currently be very domestic in their nature in terms of their business sphere or their business influence sphere. But what we are finding is that networking, which could also be defined as partnership or alliances or joint venture activities, are playing a greater role in how businesses can expand. And therefore those senior managers who have skills in the area of partnership development, external constituency partnership
It would behoove a business leader of today to truly understand what’s happening on the global landscape.

To the question of domestic versus international, there’s no question that even if your business may only operate in one particular country or region, more than likely either the products or the services or the technology that you utilize comes from outside the region within which you operate, and it would behoove a business leader of today to truly understand what’s happening on the global landscape. Because while it may not touch their business in a way that they feel the impact today, chances are it will have an impact on whether or not they can grow or scale.

Well, the reason why I asked you that question, I’ve always said from the podium, even if you’re running a two-person lemonade stand, you must think global, and I’m sure you agree with that answer.

Next, Tierney, we’ve talked about hiring from many angles in the past. Let’s spend some time on firing today. What are the most important lessons you see senior executives having to learn from the experience of firing people?
The failure of a strategy is as much a reflection of leadership as it is a reflection of the person who may not have been able to execute a piece of it.

Tierney: I think it’s pretty safe to say that very few leaders truly enjoy having to be put in a position of having to fire people. And I think what we’re always looking at is, how do they get the business to a position where they had to reduce staff, or how did they get the business to a position where they made a hire that didn’t necessarily work out as significantly as had been hoped? Because at the end of the day, a leader who ends up having to fire somebody is not only making a statement on that individual’s poor performance, but they’re also making a statement on their leadership, and learning that it’s about looking at the whole person when you hire them, not just the skills that they bring.

But also if you’re driving a business strategy, you know, the leader at the top is responsible for driving that strategy as well. The failure of the strategy is as much their reflection of leadership as it is a person who may not have been able to execute a piece of it. So what they’re learning is that they take some responsibility. It’s a long winded answer, but there’s responsibility in that, that needs to be owned and to learn from.

I also think in terms of the actual process, it’s treat them with dignity. You know, the companies that do the best in this are the ones that view the alumni, whether they were fired or left on their own, as future clients. And handling the people that exit the organization with dignity and respect will pay back benefits multifold for those organizations that do it well.
Harvey: Well, that makes good sense as far as the alumni are concerned.

Next question, and you know the answer better than anyone. How are women faring on the world stage at the senior executive level? Is there still a glass ceiling? If so, how will it be permanently shattered?

Tierney: Harvey, if I knew the answer to that question, I would be doing something different. No, I’m just teasing.

Harvey: I lay up at night thinking of these questions.

Tierney: So yes, there is a glass ceiling. The question is, Is it getting thicker or thinner, I guess?

That’s right.

Harvey: The reality is it depends on how you define women executive leadership, because if you look at small business growth, the leading creator of small business growth, particularly in North America, but it’s even outside of the U.S., are women business
leaders. They are women who may have been trained in what we would define as the academy, large corporate Fortune 500 equivalent type organizations, who have taken the skills and expertise and have decided to create something new or different on a smaller scale.

So there’s tremendous female leadership in the ranks of small business that are influencing those activities. And while that’s been impacted slightly because of the economic recession, it’s still a pretty significant fact.

Also, if you look into Asia, where the growth rate of businesses and the growth rate of activity is outpacing the demand for talent, frankly, companies are looking at leadership in a very gender agnostic type of way. It’s about the skills and expertise, and if it’s a male or if it’s female, they’re indifferent. They need the talent. So there’s less ability to debate male/female in high growth environments than there might be in other more static environments.

I think where the glass ceiling is the thickest is still the Fortune 500, the large corporate organizations. I think if you look at the executive leadership teams of many of those organizations, they reflect the leader. I think it has been stated by many that when people tend to rise to the top of large matrix organizations, while diversity may be a strong business rationale for the leadership ranks, many people choose those who look quite familiar to themselves.
Diversity of leadership gives diversity of point of view, which provides diversity of opportunity for business growth, until that happens, I'm not sure that the large corporate environments will change that dramatically in the near term.

I do see tremendous growth for women in leadership roles in small and mid cap businesses around the globe.

Harvey: Thank you for that answer. And fasten your seat belt now, I'm warning you.

Tierney: Okay.

Harvey: Day after day you see executives navigating through their world with Smartphones and tablet computers. Are most senior executives techno-literate enough to do their jobs well? If not, where do they come up short, or is the opposite occurring? Are some top execs losing the emotional literacy needed to have intelligent phone and one-to-one conversations? My wife wanted me to ask you this.
E-mail, social media, Twitter, and the like have replaced one-to-one communication.

Actually, it’s both ends. Depending on the nature of the business, obviously, one senior leader’s comfort with all of the new and latest and greatest technologies may or may not be immediately relevant to the day-to-day job, but they should understand how it can impact the work life of the people and the employees within the company.

So for example, if having the Smartphones and having the iPads or having the technology enables the company faster, they should be aware of that in order to be able to support that from a resource investment.

I do believe that the second piece is actually a more important piece, which is the e-mail, the social media, the Twitters, have replaced one-to-one communication. Whether or not it suggests a lack of emotional literacy, what it does suggest is that lots of miscommunication can happen or misunderstanding or misinterpretation without voice-to-voice conversations. I think it’s increasingly important for senior leaders, even with all of the technology, to make sure they develop personal relationships with the people they need to, and really connect with their employees in a human way, and not just the technological way.

What one or two people have influenced you the most and why?
Your mentors should have an incredible amount of integrity and honesty

Tierney: One of the individuals who has influenced me the most is my father, who is still living. I am one of eight children, and my father was a senior executive with the 3M company in Minneapolis, where I was raised; spent a career of over 40 years working through the organization. And he played, as a global executive, in a variety of different businesses with 3M over the course of his career, and what I always noticed was that he loved embracing the new challenge.

He saw the global world stage much earlier than I think some of my siblings or even some of my colleagues had seen. And he also led with an incredible amount of integrity and honesty. And I think integrity is an increasingly important value in today’s corporate environment. I was always impressed at how he was able to be an incredible businessman on a global stage and also stay very committed to building a family at the same time. And so he’s definitely one of my heroes.

Another individual who influenced me very early on was a gentleman by the name of Ferdinand Nadherny, who was the president of Russell Reynolds Associates, where I started my career in executive search. And Ferd had been a very successful CEO, but he spent an inordinate amount of his time, as president, training the new employees at all levels of the organization the fundamentals of client/service relationship management, correct writing skills, communication; and just the time he took to seed the organization with individual
talent and give back from a training perspective made a huge difference. It’s the reason that I’m still in this business today.

Harvey: Tierney, you command our esteem once more. As to definitive advice for up-and-coming managers at all levels, you define the very essence of blue-chip.

You may personally consider yourself to be out of the job market. But I wonder if anyone is ever really invincible or on the sidelines. Would a done-everything, been-everywhere superstar like Meg Whitman have seen herself in the job market? Then an opening likes Hewlett-Packard takes shape. Suddenly things take on a different perspective.

Recruiters describe a talented star who is happy as a clam where they are today as a “passive candidate.” Trust me. With the right opportunity properly merchandised, it doesn’t take much to flip the switch on the coyest candidate.

It all boils down to selling yourself and your ideas.

What makes you delectable to a sharp headhunter is incontestable authority and leadership. The same principles abide when you are being considered to be the volunteer head of an art museum. They prevail when you're being recruited to secure a major league sports franchise for your city.
Being ready for the call is a matter of planning and design ... not a matter of luck. “Depend on the rabbit’s foot if you will,” quipped R. E. Shay, “but remember it didn’t work for the rabbit!”

That’s it for this month’s teleseminar. I hope you enjoyed it.

Bye for now.