

CASE 9: WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

The Story

Harry Spratt is having a life crisis. He is forty two years old, a Director level public employee in the mid-management ranks. He feels stuck. He was a boy wonder, a Director at the age of 30. And there doesn't seem to be any light at the end of the tunnel in his chosen field of agriculture.

The problem seems to be that there are really only a few major organizations involved with setting agriculture policy across Canada. You either work for the feds, or you work for one of the provinces. The only other option to progress up seems to be moving to another field. Harry feels that when you go to university and get an Honours degree in Agricultural Science, and then go to graduate school, you should not have to leave your chosen field to advance.

Harry thinks he must have done something wrong. He has questioned his superiors about his performance; they simply repeat that his productivity is great, his skills are at their peak and he is a net asset to the organization. He now feels that he is bothering management; despite what his superiors say, Harry feels himself slipping. He just doesn't have it anymore.

Today, Harry's paranoia reached its height. His boss called him in and offered him a one year special assignment. Harry was going to be put in charge of a task force accountable for establishing a new inspection program mandated by political masters. Now, Harry feels he is being shunted off the main career track and put on a shelf.

"The writing's on the wall," he said to his wife Jill, who is a successful real estate manager, "and my name's not in it."

The Intervention

Poor Harry. He is faced with the same dilemma that many people his age and generation face in the workplace: you can't move a brick up a pyramid, i.e. there are too many people in mid-management to make it a shoo-in to become a senior or executive person. Harry needs to:

- Be guided through a decision making process on his future, based on assessment of his expertise and motivation;
- If he decides to remain within government, Harry needs to be mentored in how appropriate it is to be a good solid mid-management person in an organization that is delivering services to the public, and use "lateral promotion" as a way of achieving job satisfaction. This means seeking out and performing exceptionally well on "special assignments", enjoying the diversity of the work, and getting rewarded for a job well done, if not monetarily, then, at least by a sense of accomplishment.