

**THE
COMPANY
DOESN'T LOVE
YOU**



Be the CEO of Your
Own Career

CHARLES L. JONES

SB
PRESS

The Company Doesn't Love You: Be the CEO of Your Own Career

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I dedicate this book as a blueprint and playbook for those people who are seeking knowledge on how to successfully navigate the stages in their career. Even though the struggle is real, I hope it inspires you to believe in yourself and understand that the only courage you need is the courage to follow your own dream.

C O N T E N T S

Chapter 1: The CEO of Your Own Career	15
Chapter 2: The Company Doesn't Love You	31
THE LIFE FULFILLMENT FRAMEWORK	47
Chapter 3: Family	49
Chapter 4: Financial	61
Chapter 5: Fears & Challenges	73
Chapter 6: Faith	87
Chapter 7: Friction: Diversity, Equity & Inclusion	95
THE CAREER LIFE CYCLE	109
Stage 1: Exploration	111
Stage 2: Establishment	129
Stage 3: Elevation	151
Stage 4: Enrichment	171
Stage 5: Exit	185
Moving Forward.....	201
About the Author	205
Acknowledgments	209
Endnotes	212

THE CEO OF YOUR OWN CAREER

It was a hot summer day in 1975 in Magee, Mississippi, a tiny rural town an hour's drive from any sort of a city. Inside a mobile home just outside of town, an African American, no-nonsense mother scolded her ten-year-old son for his half-hearted effort on his daily chores. Again.

“Momma...I don't want to do chores! That's girls' work! I need to go outside!” With a firm but loving tone, she admonished him: “Charlie, you're lazy! You'd better go to college and get an education because you clearly aren't cut out for manual labor!”

Charlie ran out onto the porch and threw himself on the steps, crying as he confronted the realities of life. Frustrated, he thought about his options, but there seemed to only be so many career options available to an African American boy in that era: a preacher, a barber, a teacher, or a soldier. But this kid was different. He dreamed of more!

That same night, Charlie dreamed of himself as a grown-up. He had become an important leader in the community, a businessman wearing a dark suit and tie with round eyeglasses

framing his face, a salt-and-pepper beard, and a really nice car—a wood-paneled station wagon! (For you younger folks, that’s kind of like a souped-up minivan!)

In the dream, one of his neighbors called his name to give a speech to the community about his journey. The now grown-up, successful Charlie stepped onto the podium, happy to share all his wisdom and knowledge with the audience.

Charlie woke up the next morning inspired by his big dream. He jumped out of bed and searched excitedly for his father, eager to share his vision. His dad wore a few different hats in those days to provide for the family. He was a preacher, a barber, and had also owned a pool hall and a used car dealership. His busy dad paused to listen as young Charlie shared his dream.

Then his dad offered this advice: “Charlie, you have to know where you come from in order to know where you’re going. You can go to college, get a job, or go into the military, but I know one day you’re going to get out of this town and do big things!”

And Charlie believed him.

I know, because I am Charlie—Charles L. Jones. Almost half a century later, I’ve retired from an executive position in a Fortune 100 company after a 26-year fulfilling corporate career. That 10-year-old boy’s dream came true, but in ways he could have never imagined.

It wasn’t easy—far from it! My success in corporate America didn’t happen by accident, and it wasn’t due to luck

or a company looking out for me. I wasn't on some secret fast track. There was nothing magical about my journey. But I did learn a thing or two along the way about the natural cycle of every career and how to navigate to success.

Did it involve sacrifice and dedication? Yes. Hard work? Absolutely. Some discomfort and failures? Sure. Good bosses and not-so-good bosses? Supportive colleagues and underminers? Of course. It had incredible highs, forgettable lows, and everything in between.

Yet I had the vision and a desire for more. I wanted to achieve that elusive American Dream by climbing the business success ladder. That dream has meant different things to different generations of Americans. It may mean something different for you as an aspiring leader, but for me, it meant succeeding against all odds as a poor African American boy growing up in Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement.

And I believe that you—no matter your story or the odds stacked against you—can accomplish your career dreams, too.

News Flash: You Are in Control!

Maybe today you're just starting on a career path and could use some guidance as to what to expect. Or maybe you find yourself wanting to advance in your career but feel stuck and can't seem to jump the gap that keeps you from getting to the next level. You might feel held back by ethnicity, gender, family, personal challenges, your education or lack thereof, and any number of reasons.

Or maybe you just feel like your company doesn't care about you or your best interest. Well, here's a newsflash: Your company *doesn't* love you. And you shouldn't expect them to. It's not their job to manage your career—and that's good news. Your career growth, advancement, position, or any success you're going to achieve is 100 percent in your hands.

Does that surprise you? Does it shock you to think you have the ability to advance your career? How does it feel to know you're not at the mercy of your corporate circumstances, and the direction of your career is in your hands?

Maybe you can relate to a recent nationwide survey of U.S. workers that revealed 46% of workers are *dissatisfied* with their employment. Survey participants gave weak marks to the most important driver of job satisfaction: their current job's potential for future growth.¹ Do the math—that's almost one out of every two people who feels underappreciated, underutilized, just plain stuck, or trapped in a dead-end career. Other complaints included lack of communication, unfair pay, favoritism, overwork, micromanagement, and overbearing or incompetent managers.

Do any of these complaints sound familiar? Believe me, I get it. At one time or another in my career, I've felt the frustration of most of these situations. But as I reflect back on my experiences, I understand that every mistake, setback, and test I faced was necessary for me to take ownership of my career journey.

Been There, Done That

When it comes to climbing the corporate ladder, I've *been there, done that*. My career path began in military leadership before transitioning to corporate leadership, and it culminated in my becoming a Human Resources Business Lead for North America Sales with Mondelez International (formerly Kraft Foods).

That's a long way to travel for a dark-skinned African American man, born in the mid-1960s during the Civil Rights Movement and raised in rural and poverty-stricken Mississippi. For young Charlie, the odds of graduating from college, serving as an officer in the military during wartime, retiring as an executive from a Fortune 100 company, and starting a consulting business were, quite frankly, too far-fetched to imagine. It was simply taboo in those days to dare to dream big.

But I didn't let that stop me. I attended Jackson State University, a historical Black College & University (HBCU), on an ROTC scholarship. I joined that program initially thinking it was a way to get an easy *A*. I quickly learned that would not be the case, but I did work hard and graduated from the program with honors and a degree in finance. I was also blessed to meet my wife, Bobbie, a fellow finance major, during this time.

After graduating college I was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the US Army and began my service. During my Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Officer Basic Course at Fort Sill,

Oklahoma, I was recognized as the top student of my class. Following that course, I was honored to serve in the Army's 1st Cavalry Division as one of only a few African American officers assigned there.

I was promoted to First Lieutenant in 1988 and assigned as the Executive Officer of a C Battery, 1-68 Air Defense Artillery at Fort Hood. As the "XO", I was second in command and assisted in the management of four platoons of Soldiers and air defense equipment. Part of that job involved writing battle plans, so in mid-1990, when the first Gulf War was about to begin (Operation Desert Shield, then Operation Desert Storm), my unit deployed to Kuwait as an advance party to develop battle plans, pre-position supplies, and handle other support logistics before the rest of my higher headquarters arrived.

In January 1991, I was promoted to Captain and assumed the responsibilities associated with commanding, leading, and managing soldiers. I returned to the US in September of 1991.

My first daughter was born only three weeks before my deployment to the Middle East for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, so by the time I returned home, she had already celebrated her first birthday. With my new daughter in mind, I knew I wouldn't stay in the military much longer, because I recognized the stress it would create for my family long-term and didn't want that for my life.

I asked to be transferred out of the all-male combat arms units and into the Quartermaster Corps to stay closer to home. This unit more closely resembled the diverse makeup

of corporate America, and I thought switching to this unit would better help me to assimilate into the *real world* and prepare for what I knew would be my exit strategy from the military. Within two years, I was offered a corporate leadership position.

After serving my country for six years in both peacetime and war, I began my corporate career with Kraft Foods, now Mondelez International. I was selected for a management training program that, combined with my persistence, hard work, and lessons learned that you'll find contained in these pages, resulted in a promotion approximately every two years.

Before I retired in 2018, I held ten positions of increasing responsibility with commensurate salary and benefits. In my final position, I was responsible for Human Resources Leadership for 5,000 sales associates and leaders across America and helped drive total revenue of \$2.5 billion.

Your Career Life Cycle

In my work with Kraft, I spent a lot of time thinking about the product life cycle. When a product enters the market, it has a life cycle that carries it from being new and useful to eventually being retired out of circulation from the market. This process happens continually, taking products from their introductory stages all the way through their decline and eventual retirement. (Kraft's Trolli Road Kill, a fruit-flavored gummy candy shaped like flattened dead animals, is one example that sped through the cycle rather quickly.)

THE CEO OF YOUR OWN CAREER

An *aha* moment happened for me when I realized that a career follows a similar cycle—but most people don't recognize it. Whether you are in corporate America, a small business, a non-profit organization, or even if you are an entrepreneur trying to build a business, the typical career has five career stages everyone must go through to succeed, whether at one company or—more likely—a number of companies.

I call it The Career Life Cycle, and the stages are: Exploration, Establishment, Elevation, Enrichment, and Exit (the 5 E's). I navigated each of the five stages while at the same company, but that isn't always the case for everyone.

As you assess your status at each stage of your career, you may need to course-correct when necessary, seek a new job,

You have to be willing to be flexible but not run from challenges.

or make a career change, especially if you are a new entrant in the workforce with less than five years of

experience. And there is always the reality that a company may not be a good fit for you at any stage. You have to be willing to be flexible but not run from challenges.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with exploring new opportunities and job-hopping as you pursue your career path. Remember, you are the CEO of your own career, so you get to make that call. However, the sooner you find your passion and locate the company that fits you and your goals the best, the sooner you can get established and build a foundation to jump-start your career.

If you're just starting out in your career, you may envision climbing that corporate ladder quickly, skipping rungs as you go, fast-tracking to the top.

But there is a process to be followed to get there. When you understand the process,

When you understand the process, you can engage it with purpose.

you can engage it with purpose. You can prepare for the next stage and lay a foundation for a fulfilling retirement, rather than being forced into obsolescence and decline.

You can position yourself to live the life you want to live once your time in the corporate world is complete, while also enjoying every phase of your career journey by following these five stages:

1. Exploration

The Exploration Stage is the early employment time where people are typically in their early- to mid-twenties, have graduated from college, and recently entered the workforce.

At this point, it's about discovery, self-promotion, and individualism. Often, people create several fantasies and unrealistic expectations about what comes next. That's normal. But a common mistake

It's great to be confident, but equally great to embrace humility and realize you have a lot to learn.

made during this stage is to be impatient, subscribing to the "I Want It Now" mantra of instant gratification. No, you are not ready to lead the company immediately after graduating from

college. You're not going to springboard to instant success as an entrepreneur. Your non-profit isn't going to change the world in a week.

It's great to be confident, but equally great to embrace humility and realize you have a lot to learn.

2. Establishment

At this critical stage, it's about applying what you have discovered in the exploration stage. You'll often be given opportunities to demonstrate learning agility, to make

It's about the collective us and we, not I or me.

mistakes, to deliver results, to lead at different levels, and to receive promotions with greater responsibility. This

stage requires you to build effective teams and achieve results through others. It's about the collective *us* and *we*, not *I* or *me*.

In some cases, you may be assigned a mentor or coach to assist in your career development and advancement—but not always. You may need to seek out support. Receiving feedback from others is important; if you don't, it's possible your development can be hindered.

In the corporate world, this stage usually starts around twenty-five years of age and covers about the next ten years of your Career Life Cycle. During this critical time, you'll plan ahead and take steps that look further down the road. For example, you might look into retirement planning, rather than postponing it until later in your career.

3. Elevation

At this stage, you've been in the game long enough to understand how it's played and should have earned a seat at the table. In most cases, it's simply unacceptable to consistently fail to deliver results or to add value to the company daily.

By now you should have clearly embraced the reality that you are the CEO of your own career. You should ask yourself where your ceiling is and what's your motivation. You've probably been assigned a sponsor and should have been placed on the Succession Plan to be promoted to at least two levels above your current salary grade.

If you've done the work, connected with people, and delivered results, you're probably considered to be high-performing, high-potential, and top talent at the company. If it's not working out for you, maybe it's time to consider employment elsewhere.

If you are an entrepreneur building your business, by this stage you need to consider how far you want the business to go and what systems, people, and processes you'll need to build to get there.

At this stage, it's essential to balance career and personal life, because it's likely a lot will be asked of you in both directions, creating competing commitments. Your retirement plan should be well on its way, utilizing wealth-building strategies like 401k, stocks, and personal savings.

4. Enrichment

During the Enrichment stage, you begin to face reality. You should ask yourself how far it's possible for you to go. Usually, by this point, you'll reach the highest attainable position based on your career trajectory and promotability within the company. Unfortunately, in most cases, position and salary stagnation occur due to limited advancement opportunities.

For business owners and organizational leaders, it's time to start thinking about your exit strategy. As with every product, your Career Life Cycle is inevitable, so now is the time to prepare accordingly so you won't be pushed out by forces beyond your control.

If you haven't yet met with a financial advisor, it's time! By this point, you need to know your retirement savings goals in both the dollar amount and the year you're shooting for. A trusted and certified financial planner will help you make sure you're where you should be.

Also during this career peak, you should become a mentor to help guide others through their career experiences and challenges. At this stage, it's important to do reverse mentoring. Find that younger person who can also teach *you* a thing or two, enriching you with a new perspective. You'll also begin to prepare for life after your corporate career, laying the foundation for the post-retirement life you want to live.

5. Exit (or Decline)

You have a choice at this stage. You can either prepare to exit with dignity and on your own terms, or you can ignore the Career Life Cycle and slip into decline.

In the Exit stage, the decision has been made, either by you or the company, that it is time to part ways, voluntarily or involuntarily. If you're not prepared to step away from your corporate career or business and into what's next, this can be the most difficult stage, but it doesn't have to be.

As I'll share in the pages to follow, it certainly wasn't difficult for me because I had prepared for it, even though the circumstances weren't the ones I would have chosen. You may choose to retire, or you may decide to reinvent yourself to remain viable in the workforce.

The point is, by following the Career Life Cycle and the advice I'll give you in the pages to follow, you'll have the power to choose—because you are the CEO of your own career!

Achieving Your Highest Potential

Over the course of more than 30 years climbing the ladder in corporate America, I came to understand these five stages. I learned that there are key lessons, defining moments, and life-changing events that occur when you are chasing the American Dream—and they are transferable. You can learn them and apply them to your own journey, to pursue your own version of that dream. You don't need to live an unfulfilled life or be

stuck in a career you don't want. With a little preparation and planning, you can control your own success.

Against all odds, I survived and conquered in my Career Life Cycle. That's not to say it was always easy, or that it will be easy for you. You'll need to make sacrifices, just as I did. But

You don't need to live an unfulfilled life or be stuck in a career you don't want. With a little preparation and planning, you can control your own success.

when you engage the process intentionally, you'll enjoy a satisfying and lucrative career, maybe at one company, but more likely across a few different companies.

It is my desire—my obligation—to pay it forward by sharing my journey from humble beginnings to career success, and the practical life experiences and lessons that shaped my professional path and personal fulfillment. In the pages that follow, I'll share practical life lessons, both empirical and anecdotal, that you can apply while navigating through the pitfalls and landmines of an ever-changing corporate battlefield.

If you apply the lessons I learned—sometimes the hard way—that are shared in the upcoming chapters, you will be well-positioned to achieve the highest potential in your own career.

You'll be able to measure your progress through each of the Career Life Cycle stages, avoid frustration, gain clarity on your direction, and ultimately exit on your own terms, financially secure and satisfied with a job well done. You'll be ready to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

THE CEO OF YOUR OWN CAREER

Your career is in your hands, just as it was in little Charlie's hands so many years ago. But will you accept the responsibility to be the CEO of your own career? I hope so, because whether you realize it or not, you already are.

THE COMPANY DOESN'T LOVE YOU

For more than twenty years, I seemed to be *the guy* at my company, the poster child for success and fast-track promotions. I moved up the corporate ladder so quickly you might've thought I was on a career advancement escalator.

In the first ten years of my career with Kraft, I moved from a basic, entry-level position for a degreed professional (Operations Supervisor responsible for fifty manufacturing employees) to the Area Human Resources Manager for the West Coast, responsible for manufacturing, engineering, and supply chain employees in six plants and four huge distribution centers.

Over the next ten years, I continued my climb all the way to the top—corporate headquarters in Chicago, where I ultimately became a Human Resources Business Lead for North America Sales. I was responsible for 5,000 sales associates and leaders across the country and helped drive total revenue of \$2.5 billion.

But there was a personal cost to it all. I made sacrifices as I gave the best years of my life to the company. I relocated

my family—frequently—all across the country. I also traveled regularly. (Although when I had to travel to one of the distribution centers in Hawaii, the trip didn't feel like a sacrifice!) I missed school plays, parent-teacher meetings, and often felt like I was on the outside of the special relationship my daughters had with their mother as a result of her playing the single-parent role so often.

And yet I can honestly say that my career success was fulfilling, even though there were significant tradeoffs. As one of the company's shining stars, I was well-compensated with salary, bonuses, and company stock (which allowed me to pay my daughters' college tuition)—so I assumed the company appreciated all my sacrifices and would always have my back.

In fact, it never occurred to me that it might be otherwise until 2013, when I came to discover a painful reality that everyone must know about the Career Life Cycle.

Trouble in Paradise

I had been with the company for twenty years. During that entire period, I hid the fact that I struggled mightily with some intense emotions, bouts of anxiety, and unexpected moments of anger. I couldn't explain my reactions, and trying to keep them under control left me feeling physically and emotionally drained. Finally, after one especially harrowing experience in a boardroom that year, I decided to see a doctor. That's when I learned the source of my struggle: PTSD.

THE COMPANY DOESN'T LOVE YOU

I had been triggered on and off since my time in combat during the Gulf War way back in 1991, yet I never knew why. I'll share more of that story later, but imagine the relief I felt to know not only what was happening, but also that there was a weekly treatment program to help me manage the symptoms more effectively.

Of course, attending the program meant I had to be open with my boss to explain why I would need an afternoon off each week for therapy appointments. As a long-tenured employee and executive, that type of request generally isn't a problem, so I didn't foresee there being any issues.

I sat down with her the next day to share my diagnosis and explain my need for treatment. She was very supportive and, of course, allowed for my time off each week. I told her I wanted to share my diagnosis with my colleagues and staff in the department so they would know what was going on, too.

I clearly understood HIPAA laws and knew it was not a requirement to disclose my personal health concerns, but at the time, I felt it was the right thing to do. In some ways, it was a relief not to have to hide it any longer. I felt there was no reason to be afraid or to be in denial. It was a courageous and defining moment in my career. Even though this was a very difficult conversation, I felt it was necessary and the right decision for me.

At some point in your career, you will have to face your fears and challenges, too. There's no standard answer or solution. Therefore, I strongly recommend that you consult

with your family, seek professional advice, and be willing to accept the potential outcome prior to disclosing personal and confidential information.

It wasn't long before I noticed a difference in how I was being treated. The company began to bypass me for promotional opportunities. I volunteered to lead large projects as I had done many times in the past; however, they would not select me to lead. I applied to open positions in the company for which I was qualified, yet I never received a follow-up nor any explanation regarding why I was not selected. In most cases, I saw the position was given to less qualified individuals. It seemed as if my career advancement came to an abrupt end after senior leaders found out about my PTSD. I will go into greater detail and provide lessons learned on dealing with fears, challenges, and obstacles in another chapter.

What hurt me the most was that I had opened up to them about my troubles, thinking they would understand, support me, and even leverage my reality for the good of the company. But that's not what happened. Instead, I felt like I was being separated from everyone else, almost pushed out. I was told, "Charlie, you can work from home." But I didn't want to work from home; I wanted to be in the office with people. I began to feel like they wanted me out of sight and out of mind.

Deep down, I could tell that the end of my stellar career run was near because they didn't seem to know what to do with me. In addition, I felt they were afraid of what could happen; they didn't want to be responsible or take a risk. I

suddenly realized a painful truth that everyone must know, and the sooner the better: *the company didn't love me.*

For all those years when I felt like I was giving my lifeblood to the company, thinking I was *the man*, all the company saw was just *a man* getting an honest day's pay for an honest day's work—nothing more, nothing less. That was quite a wake-up call for me. I'd been believing the myth that companies really care. But in reality, that's not why they exist.

Luckily, because of intentional retirement preparations, I had already started crafting an Exit Strategy (Stage 5 of the Career Life Cycle). Consequently, when I was called into a meeting in 2018, told my job was being eliminated, and was handed a severance package to leave the company, I was neither shocked nor unprepared.

So now it's time for you to look in the mirror and ask yourself: *Am I under the same misconception that the company is looking out for me? Have I left my fate in the company's hands? Do I feel like the company or someone else owes me in some way?*

If you answer yes to any of these questions, you're in line with hundreds of thousands of employees everywhere. But because you have this book in your hands, your story is about to change.

It's time to step back, analyze your situation, and grab the reins to take control of your own career. No matter where you are today, you can decide where you want to be when it's your time to retire—once you realize that the company doesn't love you—and that's OK.

Our Changing Workplace

In the early 20th century, career choices and advancement were often dictated by tradition, socio-economic status, family, and gender. For men, career choice—and status within those careers—was most often determined by what their fathers and other male family members had done before them. As I mentioned previously, in my family that meant being a preacher, barber, teacher, or soldier. For women, career choice options were even more limited by convention and social customs.

After World War II, corporate organizations became the driving force in American business. Both employers and employees operated under an implied contract: employees would be loyal to the company, and, in turn, employers would provide employment until retirement, which often included a comfortable pension.

Later in the 20th century, however, this traditional career trajectory of staying at one employer became a thing of the past. According to *USA Today*, the typical worker will have 12 different employers in his or her lifetime.² There were several factors for this shift, including the transition from manufacturing to a knowledge-based economy, that caused a decline in the implied contract of *employee loyalty for lifetime* employment. To get ahead or to make more money in today's business climate, employees often have to look outside their current place of employment. My long-term employment with Kraft was actually something of an anomaly for the 1990s and 2000s, and certainly would be today.

THE COMPANY DOESN'T LOVE YOU

While traditional career ladders still exist in the 21st century, they operate within a different environment. For example, according to the Society for Human Resource Management, some of the new trends include...

- ▶ The way work is organized and performed continuously evolves and changes.
- ▶ Traditional career paths will continue to wane.
- ▶ Jobs are broken down into elements, which are then outsourced.
- ▶ Employees are working alongside a non-employee workforce lacking solid career paths and logical career progressions and may be harder to motivate.
- ▶ Workers value job enrichment, flexibility, and career development more than job security and stability.
- ▶ Work is redesigned to accommodate increased demands for flexibility, such as telecommuting hubs and online technologies for connecting with global colleagues and virtual worlds.³

Global staffing firm Randstad conducted a survey that showed 73 percent of employers said fostering employee development is important.⁴ That's great, but the flip side is that only 49 percent of employees said leadership actually adheres to this practice.

In a traditional career ladder system, a person is hired, then through a combination of experience, education, and opportunity, he or she gets promoted to higher levels with additional responsibility and commensurate compensation. This progression within the same corporation continues until the individual retires, leaves the employer for another opportunity, reaches a level at which no further promotional opportunities exist, chooses to decline subsequent promotional opportunities, or is terminated.

But in reality, individuals are the CEOs of their own careers. They decide where they put their career ladders, how long they leave them in place, and how high they want to climb. Or, at least they do if they avoid buying into the following popular myths.

Myth 1: Yes-People Get Promoted

A *yes-person* is the one who endorses or supports every opinion or proposal of an associate or superior without criticism because they fear that, if they don't, they won't advance. Do you always stop what you are doing to assist a colleague with any problems? Do you always answer your phone on the first ring, no matter what you're in the middle of? Is your calendar jam-packed with meetings you really don't even need to attend? Are you afraid to express your opinion when you think it goes against what your boss thinks? If any of these sound familiar, you may have bought into this myth already.

THE COMPANY DOESN'T LOVE YOU

I've observed people's careers going off the rails by trying to be that people-pleaser all the time. Admittedly, some company cultures actually seem to favor this sort of group-think on everything. In those instances, an employee may just be following the default company protocol for advancement. But even in those circumstances, artificially going along to get along is going to hurt you in the long run.

For one thing, many times when someone says "yes" but doesn't really agree, silent resentment grows just below the surface. This

Artificially going along to get along is going to hurt you in the long run.

tension builds over time and kills morale. Then, when that frustrated person has had enough and finally decides to say "no" or to speak against popular opinion, he or she is perceived in a negative light. After all, something must be wrong, because there's never been any disagreement before.

It's far better to honor your integrity at all times. Be courageous. Speak up. It is entirely possible to politely disagree with a colleague or manager, and, in my experience, your willingness to stand for what you believe is right earns you more esteem and respect than mild, disingenuous agreement. Of course, that doesn't mean your position will always be accepted, so you have to be okay with that, too.

It's far better to honor your integrity at all times. Be courageous. Speak up.

Myth 2: You Have to Be Good at Everything

Another myth that relates to the yes-person problem is the idea that you have to know it all and be good at everything. People try to talk a good game to make managers think they can do it all and handle everything that comes their way—but when it's time to produce, they don't always deliver results. They overpromise and underdeliver.

When I was an Associate Human Resources Manager in South Carolina, for example, we hired a new employee over similar applicants because he was bilingual. We had many Spanish-speaking employees at this site, so having someone on our HR team who could help us with translation on certain special projects would be critical.

During his interview process, he said he could write HR strategies, workforce plans, compliance audits—you name it, he could do it. So I initially assigned him several easy projects to do, including an employee relations plan strategy to find ways to improve relations with our Hispanic com-

Don't inflate your skill sets. Be honest about your strengths and your struggles. If anything, underpromise and overdeliver, not the other way around.

munity and improve their lives. But it quickly became apparent that he couldn't do it—any of it.

When his 6-month evaluation came up, the decision was clear: he wasn't performing or delivering results, and, as a result, he was fired. I didn't have a problem with that because he had been dishonest

about what he could do. He misrepresented himself as having more knowledge than he actually had.

Don't inflate your skill sets. Be honest about your strengths and your struggles. If anything, underpromise and overdeliver, not the other way around.

Myth 3: You Are Entitled to Quick Promotions

Another myth is that young workers can expect quick promotions. This false assumption has been popularized partly by young, ambitious college graduates, but also by the way companies present employment opportunities to this demographic. If you've recently graduated from college and are just getting started in your career, you are not entitled to special consideration or promotional opportunities because you graduated with a high GPA.

With Kraft, we had a process recruiting the best and brightest talent from key universities as they prepared to graduate. We would offer to bring them into a special program, giving them rotational assignments leading to high-level managerial positions. We let them know it was an opportunity to advance rapidly, and—this is key—we'd tell them the things *they* would have to do to make it happen.

The problem came a few months after they were hired—they forgot their side of the bargain. They would start to act entitled, behaving as if they believed they deserved to fly right up that ladder to join upper management in two years or less because they were the cream of the crop. That type of

advancement would be an extremely rare exception to how the corporate world normally works, even in the case of specially-recruited young talent.

If you are new in your career and were put on a fast-track to management by virtue of your scholastic resume, recognize

Bring your A-game every day, in whatever situation you find yourself.

that you are probably moving at a faster pace and experiencing more than you would have with a regular, entry-level position. Then

continue to do your part. Bring your A-game every day, in whatever situation you find yourself.

Where We're Going

Maybe at this point, you're thinking, *If the company doesn't love me, Charlie, why even bother? Why should I give my best to a company that ultimately doesn't even care that much about my success and advancement?*

I get it. Yes, I worked incredibly hard, sacrificing mightily along the way—and yet, I still believe that my experience was both rewarding and very much worth it. Anyone who intentionally designs and manages their career around the Career Life Cycle, no matter where in that process they are right now, will be well-positioned to enjoy a satisfying and successful career.

As a lifelong learner, I enjoy a wide variety of opportunities and learn a lot from them. With each move and promotion, I

experienced working with different cultures, developed new skill sets, and learned to be confident in my own talents and abilities.

Several years ago, I was able to take advantage of my company's Education Reimbursement Policy. I went back to school, earned an MBA Degree, and the company covered my tuition.

When we accepted promotional opportunities, the company always provided a great spousal support process, which included resume writing and employment tips. And they would provide homeownership support by purchasing our home if it did not sell within a limited timeframe.

I don't regret any aspect of what I went through, not even my challenges and obstacles, because ultimately I learned. If you aren't willing to learn, or you're not willing to apply what you learn, you simply won't be successful. Equally important, I refused to succumb to the "I'm the victim" mentality. I

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was not seeking nor expecting a handout from anyone; however, I always embraced and accepted a helping hand.

Nobody gave me anything. I had to prove myself each and every time. But those challenges and lessons made me stronger. They made my faith stronger and my story worth telling. As a result, I have been able to live my best life and live out my purpose.

THE COMPANY DOESN'T LOVE YOU

Over my 20-plus years in a corporate career, I was able to be a positive role model. I impacted a lot of people, gave them opportunities, inspired them, encouraged them—and I really enjoyed that.

To go on a journey, it helps to have a compass and a map. If you don't have them, you could literally end up anywhere. In the following chapters, my intent is to provide you with the tools to craft your own career roadmap.

First, we'll unpack what I call the Life Fulfillment Framework that serves as a compass: Family, Faith, Finances, Fears & Challenges, and Friction. These five areas deserve special attention throughout your career and form the frame through which the Career Life Cycle makes the most sense. Then we will go deep into each of the 5 stages of the Career Life Cycle that can serve as your map for what lies ahead. I'll share my personal experiences and lessons learned in each stage and offer guidance to help you successfully navigate your own career experience.

So if you're ready to be the CEO of your own career—even knowing that the company you work for doesn't love you—then let's get started!