

Career Path: I’m a Better Manager Now that I’m Out of the Job

Career Development



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When you share your thoughts publicly, you wonder how people will react. Will they see what you've written, do they agree with your ideas? Perhaps most importantly, for me at least, will anything you've said be helpful to them in their lives?

I love writing this Career Path column in the *ACC Docket*. It helps me shape my intuitions, feelings, and more or less well-founded practices into tangible advice. I also appreciate the reach that publishing in the *Docket* gives me. Thousands of readers read my articles. And many thousands more will find them. But, until a couple months ago, *ACC Docket* readers did not have an easy way to give feedback to authors or comment on an article [Editor's note: Links connecting readers to James are now included at the bottom of all Career Path articles. Or you can click here].

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For this reason, I also share some of my thoughts in other places where posters and readers can engage with one another. For professional topics, I find LinkedIn a good venue. So it was that I found myself responding to a commenter there.

She was reacting to my article on Things That May Be Hurting Your Career and thanked me for sharing it. I responded that I wasn't always able to give good advice in a timely way when I was in

my management role, and that I was happy to do so now.

Quiet, strategic thought time can make you great

We're busy at work, and we have many demands on our time. I've found it takes quiet time and reflection to tease out meaningful learnings from our chaotic days. While working, I knew the importance of carving out time for strategic thinking. I told my team that regularly making time for strategic thought was one of the things that distinguished great in-house counsel from merely good ones.

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So we devoted time to strategy. But it was almost always business strategy, or rather legal strategy in pursuit of business goals. Only now with some time and distance from my general counsel role do I see some pretty big gaps in where I spent my time and where I might have invested more time.

Lessons learned later in life

I learned a lot over the years about managing a team and being effective. But I wasn't always effective at consolidating those lessons and then sharing them with my colleagues. I find myself saying often these days, "Boy, I wish I had spent more time exploring this idea with my team when I was working!" (See, for example, the article Sit Down and Stay a While.) I just didn't have the time because of the press of daily work.

Honestly, I don't think any active manager has the time for considered reflection on many non-core topics. When I look at how much time I invest now in organizing my thoughts and summarizing ideas, I am alternatively amazed and depressed. I think I'm pretty efficient, and I can write quickly and well. But many are the days that I look up to find 10 hours have passed with my face still lit by a screen and my hands poised over a keyboard.

To be fair, I am writing about many topics beyond those here in the *Docket*. Stoic philosophy and how to live a good life. Economics, politics, and psychology. Junk science and the march of human progress. And no one is holding my feet to the fire. Writing down interesting ideas engages me, as does the idea of helping other people in a way that I would have appreciated when I was younger.

My point is simply this: Getting better at anything takes time, practice, and reflection. Although most of us learn to implement well by necessity, we can do so comfortably without also developing a philosophy or working model that explains and guides our actions. The bigger picture, if you will, comes only upon reflection.

With this in mind, here's another thing I can tell you was a great use of my time when I was working, even though many consider it non-core: Reading widely. It was because I religiously read the *ACC Docket* and other professional journals that I was able to keep up on so many topics.

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Few people are experts on lots of topics. The good news is we don't have to be. All you need is access to a few good experts on topics that interest you. The *ACC Docket* and other publications sift and sort these experts and share their lessons. True, the attempt is sometimes more and sometimes less successful. But these authors took the time to reflect deeply on an issue and share their thoughts.

If I'm a better manager now that I'm out of the job of managing, I hope I can help you be a better manager now by sharing with you my learnings. What you do with those learnings is up to you.

Be well.

PS – If you want to give feedback or interact with me, here's how: Connect with me on LinkedIn, check out my blog at www.klugne.com, write to me directly at James@klugne.com, or click the link below and drop me a note.

Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau about this or other columns.

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Bellerjeau served for two decades as group general counsel for Mettler-Toledo International Inc., an S&P 500 company with its worldwide headquarters in Greifensee, Switzerland. He then led Mettler-Toledo's global Sustainability program for several years through June 2021.

Bellerjeau shares thoughts on how to live a good life at Klugne. You can also follow him on LinkedIn.