

Job Shock: CHMM Survival Guide in the New Economy

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Abstract:

Objective - To clearly define relevance and value of CHMM Credential and ACHMM Membership in the New Economy.

Scope - Personal job shock career survival guide developed during transition from “Environmental Remediation-based Old Economy Paradigm” to “Hazardous Materials Project Management-based New Economy Paradigm”.

Issue Development - Exploration of relevance and value of CHMM credential in information technology-driven New Economy. Personal testimonial regarding value of National ACHMM Membership and active participation in local chapter networking opportunities during career transition. Selection of personal career niche within New Economy, which *builds upon* instead of *negating* personal skills developed during career within the Old Economy.

Conclusions - Importance of developing “Personal CHMM Job Shock Career Survival Guide”. Recommendations for changing current academy membership perception regarding Academy and Institute Mission Statements
Job Shock: CHMM Survival Guide in the New Economy

Introduction

On January 18, 2001 I came face-to-face with reality in the workplace. On that fateful day, my immediate supervisor informed me that I was being discharged effective immediately without any severance pay. I knew that my employer had dire cash flow problems, which were caused by our operating department's inability to issue and collect client invoices fast enough using our “new and improved” Y2K-compatible accounting system.

I was shocked that my supervisor flew from Tampa to Pittsburgh just to tell me that my employment status was history. Due to cash flow induced corporate travel restrictions, this was only the second time that I had had met him face-to-face.

After hearing the bad news, I immediately called Patrick Dowd (Past President of the Chicago ACHMM Chapter) who is a practicing attorney. After listening to me vent my frustration, he reminded me that I was “employed at will” and thus could be terminated at anytime with or without cause.

In 1999, as General Manager of my former employer's Chicago Operations, I had earned a 5 figure annual bonus. In 2000, as a Business Development Manager, I exceeded my annual sales quota with a signed contract from a client who was in Chapter 11 but had agreed to pay in full within 70 days. I was shocked when senior management rejected my client's signed contract due to our internal cash flow problems.

During the next 8 weeks, all of the business development managers at my former company were terminated, resigned or transferred back to operations. Our planned annual business development meeting, originally scheduled for March of 2001, was cancelled. I was now a displaced worker who had gone from the penthouse in 1999 to the unemployment line in 2001.

Transition from Job Shock

The day after being involuntarily terminated by my previous employer, I fulfilled a previous obligation to speak at the Laurel Highlands ACHMM Chapter in Johnstown, PA. I felt awkward, during the introduction of myself as the guest speaker, having to announce that I was currently then between jobs. My opening remark was to explain the difference between a recession and a depression i.e., the economy is in a recession when your neighbor is out of a job and in a depression when you're out of a job.

Having to stand up in front of my fellow CHMM peers totally shook off any lingering self-doubts or self-pity from my humiliating experience the day before. I then proceeded speak on the previously assigned topics of CHMM Recertification, relevance of the CHMM Credential today, and value of ACHMM Membership.

The topic of CHMM Recertification was relatively easy to handle since I had just completed my third cycle of credential recertification. However because the standards for recertification had been raised, I had to admit to my peers that this was my most difficult cycle of recertification. For me personally, achieving the 20-hours of relevant annual training was the most difficult new requirement to satisfy.

During 1997 and 1998, I worked as a Chief Resident Engineer on a large landfill closure project in New Jersey. I had documentation of 8 hours OSHA Refresher training each year but was unable to break away from my job to obtain an additional 12 hours of training at the 1997 ACHMM National Conference, which happened to be only 40 miles away in Atlantic City. I was able to attend only two local ACHMM Chapter Meetings during this two-year period of employment in the middle of the Pine Barrens of New Jersey.

Due to my difficulty of satisfying the 20-hour annual training requirement, I seriously considered dropping the CHMM credential, which had been a large part of my professional life for 16 years. Otherwise, I was going to just re-take the three-hour CHMM exam. Fortunately after receiving personal encouragement and enlightenment from Bob Teitler (Executive Director for the Institute), I suddenly realized that I had actually exceeded the annual relevant training requirement in 1997 and 1998. As Chief Resident Engineer, I was required to attend every morning at 7 AM a 15-minute tailgate meeting before work started at our remediation construction site. Each tailgate meeting included a safety lecture by either a Certified Industrial Hygienist or a Site Safety Officer. After doing the math to calculate my tailgate training hours, I was then able to submit my recertification application.

Since I was so recently separated from my employer, I wasn't sure during my presentation to the Laurel Highlands ACHMM Chapter where I might finally become re-employed. Thus today's relevance of the CHMM credential was an especially difficult topic for me to address in front of my CHMM peers. I was fully aware in January 2001 that George W. Bush would soon be inaugurated as President of the United States. Given their previous track record, the new Republican Administration didn't appear to favor any growth opportunities for the environmental consulting industry. During the past several years, I become painfully aware that a significant number of personal friends had dropped their CHMM credential and left our environmental industry for greener pastures in the "New Internet Dot COM Economy".

I was definitely at a transition crossroads. Should I keep my CHMM credential or pursue greener pastures elsewhere? Upon reflection, I remembered that the CHMM credential and my ACHMM network of friends had helped me during several previous transitions in my career.

When I decided to leave "Mother Waste Management" in 1989, Ken Manchen (Past National ACHMM President and current Institute Director) helped me get a job as a National Account Manager at Groundwater Technology. After Empire Soils Investigation was sold by Huntingdon International, (I had been President of Empire Soils and Vice President of Huntingdon USA), Juan Salguero and Mark Anderson (Past Presidents of Laurel Highlands ACHMM Chapter) helped me get a job in 1997 as a Chief Resident Engineer for L. Robert Kimball & Associates. After the landfill closure project was completed in February 1999, Dave Klinger helped me get a job as General Manager for Handex Environmental. Note: Dave is not a CHMM but he knew that he could find me by contacting the National ACHMM Administrative Office.

I wasn't sure but deep down I felt that the CHMM credential was still relevant during my current career transition. Thus at the conclusion of my presentation, I challenged my fellow CHMM's at the Laurel Highlands Chapter to start their own career transitions regardless if they were currently employed or not their from the "Environmental-based Old Economy Paradigm" to a "Hazardous Materials Project Management-Based New Economy Paradigm". I also could not resist quoting my favorite motivational guru, Stephen Covey to "Sharpen the Saw" through training and self-improvement activities. I decided then and there to submit an abstract for this paper to be presented at the ACHMM 2001 National Conference and invited all of the Laurel Highland Chapter members to meet me in Chicago.

Personal CHMM Career Survival Guide

After completing my presentation in Johnstown, PA, I headed home to reunite myself with my wife and daughter in Buffalo, NY. I had been a Hazardous Materials Road Warrior, Monday through Friday every week, for the previous 5 years so it was great to be home!

Soon afterward with help from my wife, I started developing my own "Personal CHMM Career Survival Guide". Key elements of my planning guide included:

- Filing for Unemployment (keep food on the family table)
- Apply for a Workforce Development Training Grant
- Obtain State-of-the-Art Computer Applications Training
- Microsoft Certification in Project 2000 Application Software
- Microsoft Recognition as an Authorized Training Instructor
- Obtain State-of-the-Art Project Management Training
- Achieve Professional Recognition as a Project Management Professional (PMP Credential) by the Project Management Institute
- Network within ACHMM at both local and national levels

Fortunately, my wife teaches computer applications classes for the Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Development Consortium. They provide training grants funded by the Federal Workforce Development Investment Act for under-employed and displaced workers living in Buffalo or Erie County. Note: Training grants are also available to CHMM's nationwide through State Department of Labor and approved local Workforce Development Agencies. The funding guideline is up to \$2,500 for under-employed workers and up to \$5,500 for displaced workers.

In a short time, my training grant was approved to obtain computer applications training at IKON Business Solutions. During the next 4 months, I completed 35 day long classes in Windows, Word, Excel, Access, PowerPoint, Outlook, Project, FrontPage, Network Fundamentals and Train-the-Trainer. I especially enjoyed the opportunity to take several classes with my wife who had also received a training grant as a previously displaced worker. Note: IKON Business Solutions provides computer-training classes through a nationwide network of training centers. Their website is www.ikon.com. After passing the Microsoft Certification Test on Project 2000 Application Software, I will be eligible to apply for recognition by Microsoft as an Authorized Instructor. The certification test fee and the Train-the-Trainer course were included in my training grant package.

During the preparation of my Personal CHMM Career Survival Guide, I became convinced that every CHMM should advance his/her project management skills so we collectively can maintain our dominant position of leadership on hazardous materials management projects. In other words, when government, industry or society selects project managers where there is a significant hazardous materials risk a CHMM should be selected over a PE, CIH, CSP, PG, PMP or CET as the project manager.

To advance my personal project management skills, I contacted the Project Management Institute (PMI). They have 135,000 members' worldwide and local chapters nationwide. Their website is www.pmi.org. When I attended their local chapter in Buffalo, NY I learned that the University of Buffalo was offering a 6-week Executive Training Course leading to a Certificate in Project Management. As a displaced worker, I applied for and received a second training grant to pay my tuition for this course.

The textbook for the course was the Project Management Body of Knowledge, which can be obtained from the PMI. Three practitioners taught the course. The lead instructor for the course is a PMI certified Project Management Professional (PMP), who is also Director of Project Management for Praxair (formerly the Linde Division of Union Carbide) a worldwide manufacturer of cryogenic gases.

The local PMI chapter runs a 3-day PMP review course twice a year, which is taught by chapter members before the students take their proficiency examination. Note the similarity to our CHMM Review Course. I plan to take their review course and to also sit for their examination.

During my four month transition period between jobs, I used every opportunity to network with fellow CHMM's. In February 2001, as the guest speaker at the Northeast Ohio ACHMM Chapter, I gave a presentation on CHMM Professional Ethics. In March 2001, as the guest speaker at the Central Ohio ACHMM Chapter, I gave a presentation on CHMM Recertification along with a Past, Present and Future look at the CHMM Program. In May 2001, I attended a National ACHMM sponsored two-day Leadership Workshop in New Jersey.

The final step during my transition period was to secure a job offer before my unemployment insurance and cash savings ran out. Fortunately, once again someone from my ACHMM network of contacts helped

me to re-enter the workplace. This time it was Raja Venkateswar (Chicago ACHMM Chapter Board Member). Raja recommended me to an Executive Recruiter who was looking for a Director of Chicago Operations for ManTech Environmental, a remediation technology provider. I am grateful and obviously looking forward to being reunited with my CHMM Brother in Chicago.

When I had to make my final employment decision, I actually had two job offers. I also had a job offer for a Resident Engineer opportunity for a large landfill closure scheduled to take 5 years next to JFK airport in Brooklyn, NY. I chose to return to the Windy City where many of my closest CHMM friends reside. In 1987, with Gary Okey (Past President Southern California Chapter) we started the Chicago ACHMM Chapter. With Jeff Perl (Past National ACHMM President) and later Steve Sawyer (2001 National ACHMM Conference Chairman), we established a nationally recognized CHMM Review Course. In 1988, as a key member of the ACHMM Chicago Seven, we hosted the first National ACHMM Conference held in Chicago.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper is a personal testimonial regarding value of National ACHMM Membership and active participation in local chapter networking opportunities. Although CHMM credential was created two decades ago in 1984, personal relevance of CHMM credential in 2001 is documented.

It is recommended that every Academy member prepare a Personal CHMM Career Survival Guide, regardless of his or her employment status. After making an annual review of their professional career status, everyone should then develop a proactive plan to "Sharpen the Saw" through training and self-improvement activities. The Institute's 20-hour training recertification requirement should be viewed as an investment in a career insurance policy not as an onerous omnipotent requirement arbitrarily imposed by a Washington D.C. based higher authority. Computer applications and project management training should be emphasized in the transition to the "New Hazardous Materials Project Management-Based Economy".

Note: If you are still reading the conclusion to this paper, I extend an offer to assist you in the preparation of your Personal CHMM Career Survival Guide and to critique your resume. I can be contacted at ManTech Environmental 17W 727 Butterfield Road Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181. My phone number is (630) 678-3402 and e-mail address is richard.cartwright@mantech.com.