

Bridges, William. (1994). *Job shift: How to prosper in a workplace without jobs*. New York: Addison Wesley.

Reviewed by

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### Biographical Information

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Many recreation educators were born, raised, and found employment in an era when jobs and opportunities for advancement were plentiful. Times have changed, and our students are facing a much different professional and work environment. Like other employment sectors, the recreation field has been undergoing profound structural change due to economic restraint, technological advances, and shifting social and political values. As a result, recent graduates are finding it difficult, if not impossible, to secure full-time jobs with traditional employers. Instead some are moving from one non-permanent entry level position to another, a career pattern that does not build strong resumes. Others, hoping for an upswing in the "bust-boom" cycle of job availability, are delaying the job search process, perhaps by pursuing further education in a related field. Even those fortunate enough to hold full-time positions are concerned about job security because they may become the next victims of "organizational restructuring." What advice can we offer students embarking on careers in recreation during these turbulent times? How do the changes occurring in the workplace alter what it means to be a recreation professional? How can we adapt our curriculums to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences they need to thrive in a radically altered work environment?

While not aimed specifically at the field of recreation, Bridges' book offers an insightful analysis on how individuals and organizations can adapt to the emergence of the "de-jobbed" work world. He cites studies estimating that the North American work force will shrink by 25 million workers over the next decade, and that few of these workers will be re-hired if there is an economic upswing. He also bases his vision on his extensive consulting experience with several hundred clients including major corporations, small firms, education, health care, non-profit organizations, and government. He contends that many Fortune 500 companies, the bastions of the old job paradigm, are in decline, while small companies with flexible project-based work teams are the ones experiencing the most rapid growth.

In 1993, *The Wall Street Journal* listed William Bridges, who is the author of two other bestsellers *Transitions* and *Managing transitions*, as one of the ten most popular executive development consultants in the U.S. Organizational consultants turned authors are making billions of dollars because they have been amongst the first to respond to employee and employer fears about surviving in the new economy (Byrne, 1992). While there are dangers in uncritically accepting the often conflicting and unresearched advice offered by these so-called "management gurus," Bridges raises a number of issues that could certainly form the basis of some lively classroom discussion and debate.

He argues that our concept of "jobs," where people are located in little boxes horizontally and vertically on organizational charts, emerged during the Industrial Revolution when workers were first brought together in large numbers for purposes of production. But technology has dramatically speeded up and altered the work that needs to be done. As a result, workers have to develop new skills and forge new relationships with their employers, and organizations need to modify structures, procedures, and cultures in order to survive.

However, many organizations have tried to adjust to the new post-job world by simply cutting jobs, a strategy that fails to account for the fact that work still needs to get done in order to deliver products and services to customers. Other organizations have focused on restructuring, but these efforts are often poorly planned and create so much stress and disruption that competitive positions are actually weakened, not strengthened. According to Bridges, competence, coordination, and commitment are undermined when restructuring shifts people to unfamiliar jobs, places them on new work teams, or changes their client base.

Other managers have seized one or more of the other "cure-alls" widely being touted in the popular management literature including: empowerment, delayering, reengineering, total quality management, downsizing, and benchmarking. So much time is spent planning and implementing these strategies that some of Bridges' client feel their organizations have joined the "change-of-the-month-club." He contends that the problem underlying all of these organizational remedies is that they all continue to rely on the outdated job paradigm. Organizations constructed around jobs group people according to professional specialties and power relationships, a strategy that slows work and communication processes down and lacks accountability. Thus, jobs and job descriptions have become "a rigid solution to an elastic problem."

So what alternatives are proposed in this book? Bridges envisions a future of contingent or temporary workers brought together for relatively short periods of time to work on self-managed project teams. Work would become more fluid, flexible, and disposable; individuals could work for a number of different organizations over one year; and the self-managed career would replace the traditional job. It might also be possible to work for an organization as a full-time employee, but work conditions would be radically different from those associated with a job. For example, because the emphasis is on output, long and irregular hours might be required to complete a project. Traditional reporting structures would be replaced by project teams who in turn report to larger project groupings. Rather than waiting

for decision making approval from the top of the hierarchy, workers would be given direct responsibility for solving problems. Bridges call this a "no huddle" style of doing business and contends that it quickly becomes apparent who is or is not "pulling their own weight," thus ensuring accountability.

To survive in this work climate, he advises people to recycle their D.A.T.A. (their Desires, Abilities, Temperament, and Assets) into more viable and clearly defined products to be sold to the organizations needing work to be done. In order to become "vendor minded", you must access how your product matches up to unmet needs of organizations, industries, communities, and your own life. Thus, the survivors will be the innovative thinkers who can capitalize on the new work opportunities created by organizational restructuring and downsizing.

Bridges provides an example of how a laid off executive vice president who had always worked in a traditional job, made such a shift. When he analyzed his desires, the executive realized he wanted to control his own destiny by starting an environmentally sensitive outdoor recreation business. He had experience in manufacturing, so he decided to "make something" rather than provide a service. He had built up some equity while in his previous position, an asset that would help him through the start up phase of starting the business. His vendor-minded skills emerged when he took his young sons kayaking and found that the going price for a cheap plastic boat was four hundred dollars, yet the raw materials cost considerably less. He decided to fulfill an unmet need by entering the market at the low end with a high performance boat. To maintain control over the business, he formed a one person virtual corporation with an assemblage of independent suppliers linked together only the product, a business strategy, and a communications system. To lower his costs, he gave each supplier a percentage of the sale price of each boat in addition to an initial fee for services.

While the entrepreneurial activity described in this case is not novel to the field of recreation, it illustrates the types of skills and relationship building that will be needed to decrease reliance on the traditional job model. Bridges contends that women who have run an organization as complex and constantly changing as a household may be especially well adapted to the confusing complexity of the dejobbed world. Perhaps these skills, and dissatisfaction with traditional work environments, helps to explain the rapid growth in the number of women entrepreneurs in North America.

The profile of IDEO, a high tech company in California, provides another illustration of this line of thinking. In this company, no one has a title or a boss or a job description, teams are formed around specific projects, and each team has a leader whose authority lasts only as long as the project.

While Bridges offers some specific advice on how individuals can shift their thinking patterns, he does not underestimate the devastating effects that the transition to a de-jobbed society are having on individuals, families, and communities. Even though "the job" is a relatively recent invention, people's identities, core network of relationships, and use of

time are often defined by the job and provide meaning and order to their lives. To improve one's ability to manage change, conducting an audit of one's expectations, habits, contacts and personal rules is recommended. Outdated personal rules such as: "Don't leave a job when good jobs are so hard to find" or "The best jobs go to those with the best qualifications" need to be evaluated or will limit a person's ability to create new systems of order.

Bridges also offers advice to organizations undergoing change. The new rules of the game are: i) everyone is a contingent worker whose value is based on contribution to results, ii) value is determined by each situation, iii) employees and companies must build mutually beneficial relations, iv) employees must be able to work with people with different mind sets, and v) companies must provide information and training to help people make the shift. Only by undergoing fundamental change, will organizations be able to manage a contingent work force that can reshape itself as the situation demands.

If Bridges' predictions about the inevitability of a de-jobbed world become a widespread reality, there are numerous implications on a political level. For example, political leaders have to abandon the fantasy that jobs can be recovered or recreated by government spending. Instead, policies are needed to create an environment where vendor-mindedness and career long self-development can be actualized.

*Jobshift* would not likely be used as a textbook, but as a supplemental reading to stimulate thinking about organizational change and the meaning of professionalism. The advice presented in the book is not based on systematic research, but there is value in critiquing ideas based on extensive work experience. At the very least, the book will encourage students to consider how the world of work is changing, and how they can "create a job for themselves" instead of waiting for someone to do it for them.

### References

Byrne, J.A. (1992, August). Management's new gurus: Business is hungry for fresh approaches to the global marketplace. *Business Week*, pp. 44-52.