

Queuing up at the T-Junction of Life

Popular fact always seems to say that at some time in your career you come to a crossroads, and you have to choose where the hell you're going: straight on, left, right; or for those not at all ready, backwards.

Got news for you. It isn't true. There's only one thing out there, coming at you FAST. A T-Junction. Yeah, in the supposed world of multiple-choice questions for everything, I've just narrowed it down to two. You go LEFT you're a winner, you go RIGHT you're a loser. Or is it the other way around? Either way is better than straight ahead, that's the brick wall. Hit that and you stay on the sidelines, crippled corporately, forever.

My goodness, this IS gloomy stuff. Where has the usual jollity and devil-may-care-ishness gone? Well it IS still there, you just have to look for it. Trouble is we need to take the 50-50 gamble at the T-Junction first.

What do I mean? Well, if they are being honest your friendly, sitting-up-there-on-the-fifth-floor, close-to-the-corridor-of-power, professional HR person should be able to tell you. But the betting is that he or she won't. The reason they won't is that they are still working it out for themselves.

"What are you going on about?" I hear you cry. Well, it's simple. As business revs and ramps up, we are going to be faced with making one, crucial, very quick choice. And, yes, it WILL take place at the T-Junction.

The choice is going to be, "do I GO, or do I STAY?" There's no in between. No get-out-of-jail-card-other-route, like at a crossroads. This is simple. Stay with the firm that had you rowing 60 hours a week in turbulent waters in the modern day equivalent of a Quinquireme from Nineveh¹ or say "Sod it, I'm outa here."

Yes, this IS the new T-Junction of life. It really is down to who goes and who sticks around to get more salt water poured onto those open, festering sores of resentment.

"Oh come," you say. Surely it isn't as bad as that? Well, sadly it IS. Over the last few months I have been quartering the globe. Well, at least a fairly large part of it. And there is one common theme to what you hear. Employers (more about them later) everywhere are just waiting for you and you pals to pass the last lay-by on the corporate freeway to nowhere.

And waiting around the next bend is that stark choice, left or right at the T-Junction; GO, or STAY.

If you are an employee reading this, sometime in the next six months (and this is a sure fire prediction), you are going to HAVE to make THAT choice. Because it isn't just greenhouse gasses that are creating global warming, the economy is warming up too. And it won't take long to boil over. At that point – unless you have

managed to camouflage yourself so successfully (to avoid getting terminated) that no one knows where you are – the phone will ring. It will ring in your office, it will ring on your mobile/cell/gsm, whatever you call it, and it will ring at home. Believe me, headhunters will become more annoying than those "you owe yourself a new kitchen" salespeople, who call just as you are getting the children off to sleep.

And what are you going to do? GO, or STAY? I mean, how did they really treat you these last few years. Did they replace the person you used to work with? Did they give you a bonus for all those EXTRA HOURS you worked? As things improved, did they come along and say, "Well done?"

As a colleague of mine said last week, "problem is, we treated the people we let go, better than those that stayed behind." So are you and your pals going to reap a terrible, bloody revenge come the upturn? Most sensible organizations think the answer to that is a resounding YES!

So, employees, here's the story again. THERE IS NO CROSSROADS, it is now a T-JUNCTION. The choices are GO, or STAY. What are YOU going to choose?

Now, as some of you know by now, we like to end these columns with a little *dénouement*.

In America, the fount of all things good and corporate, there is a firm that tracks the sale of shares by directors of publicly quoted businesses. Now let's just stop here and say, that if you are a DIRECTOR of a BIG corporation you are just possibly PRETTY DAMN SMART. And so, these people they know, like you do now, that there is no crossroads waiting the faithful toiler at the corporate salt mine. It's just LEFT or RIGHT: GO or STAY.

And what have they chosen. Well judging by the action on traded shares by American's finest (the directors of quoted corporations) they seem to have chosen GO. Why? Well if we go back to May 2003, we would see that share trading by those self-same directors was running at a level of 10 shares sold, for every one bought. By October 2003, this was 32 to 1, the highest level in 15 years. "Oh goodness," I hear your shriek, does this mean THEY have sold out? Well, yes, it looks that way, doesn't it?

Gracious me, by the time you take that decision to GO, there may well be a multi-car pile-up, or at the very least slow traffic. So when you turn left and GO, as we ALL know you are going to (go on admit it), take care on your journey: and buckle up, you know it makes sense.

¹ A five deck slave galley, as featured in the poem by John Masefield, "Cargoes"