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Mid-career blues and crises, and preparing for transitions in the MOGI industry

The Crisis

It is not uncommon to find people stuck in a mid-career crisis in the Mineral Oil Gas Integrated (MOGI) industries. As the name suggests, the mid-career crisis is a fairly common event among executives between the ages of 40 and 55, affecting the married, divorced, those with children, and regardless of whether they have enjoyed professional success, how much money they have made, or their nationality. The pandemic, technology change, downturns and uncertainties due to war have aggravated the problem many fold. Take the case of Shankar Singh. Mr. Singh has made up his mind to retire from the oil field job which he joined 13 years ago. Mr. Singh, 39, put in his papers with good many years of service left, and he was relieved and anxious. "I was becoming emotionally weak and felt saturated because my job has become routine, with no technical change and left only with repetitive man management functions. My two daughters are growing up, and they miss me and I miss them, too. It is very painful now to remain separated from my family. Moreover, the management does not listen. New management is less responsive to the earlier and insisted on more of the same, which got to me," says Mr Singh, who is now toying with the idea of opening up a company or to start a job closer home, while also anxious that the available closer-to-home jobs will not be good for his responsibilities and mortgages. Opening up a new entrepreneurship is not a piece of cake, either.



What and Why

Mid-career crisis, like a mid-life crisis, doesn't necessarily have definite triggers. It can be a result of an individual's emotional needs, the environment he/she operates in or a combination of both. Feeling switched off at 30 something, losing sense of focus at work and feeling unchallenged are some common problems people face. This happens when career goals aren't aligned with life goals and money is the prime motivator.

"It's usually the bright guys who face this. They get either quick promotions or feel losing out, but reach the threshold too soon and start questioning themselves,". And such people find it hard to resolve the issues as they have more stakes attached thanks to their age. Their risk taking appetite could be low, they may have loans to repay and the social framework they operate in could be a deterrent to change.

The mid-career bug sets in when for an individual his/her capability requirements seem to be larger and these require new skill sets which people think they haven't picked, and remain in the comfort zone. Another reason for feeling switched off could be when an employee stops feeling wanted may be with newer folks joining the organization. For a sensitive person, to realize that his or her education,

knowledge and experience is stacked against a younger person, can be source of such blues. Many organizations have the system of mentoring and coaching whereby these people guide the newer lots and feel engaged. Employee engagement at this level also involves rotating the employees among various departments and giving them cross functional experience. Take the Wipro's example: they have people who move across functions after a duration of two-three years.



So what's the way out

Research has shown that career satisfaction bottoms out when employees are in the middle of their careers. But ignoring them means companies lose valuable knowledge and experience.

A well-planned mentoring programme or a lateral shift is thus necessary for every company's HR manual. Mentoring can be an informal, private arrangement between two people, but a formal programme, overseen by the employer, can ensure that nobody gets left out. In their book, *Escape the Mid-Career Doldrums: What to do next when you are bored, burned out, retired or fired*, Charles A Buck and Marcia L Worthing say people in mid-life crisis do not have to completely reinvent themselves. They just have to get over their preconceived notions about what is possible. The worst thing is to feel "It's too late now, I'm too old" or "I don't have the right personality to do what I would really like to do".

In his bestselling book, *Breakthrough the Framework for an Inspired Career* Ashutosh Sinha writes

- (a) Pause and Reflect – why are you really stuck? Blaming your organization or colleagues is easy. But what's been your part in it?
- (b) Assess – how are your experience and skills relevant to the rapidly changing environment and expectations? Don't forget the soft skills, they are often discounted but are equally important such as "empathy" – this has



become the most sought-after leadership attribute during the crisis.

- (c) Plan – figure out what are you good at, not what you feel has your stamp of expertise but what others (who receive your expertise) feel about it. And plan to rectify the rough edges. You will be surprised there could be many. Often our view of ourselves has been seen to be much larger cutout than who we really are. That's how we are built as humans which can at times lead to a false sense of confidence.
- (d) Act – knowing is doing! Don't brood over your situation. It can quickly lead to depression. Push yourself to build a positive mental attitude, even if you need to get a coach. The best of athletes, career professionals and successful business owners have known to enhance their performance when they have a mentor or coach to bounce thoughts, almost like a neutral sounding board you can trust.
- e) Heal yourself – find your “me” time. Meditate. Discover your “sense of purpose”. It will rescue you from weak thoughts and give the courage to think fresh.



3 More steps on the pathway

1. Stop and look within - A lot of the fear and panic that we experience comes from comparing our path to others, feeling left behind or stuck. Changing your mindset is key to overcoming this feeling. Rather than looking at external factors or others, we need to look within. At the factors that are within our control to regain our sense of purpose and direction. To identify our strengths and get back to the elements we love.
2. Re-build your boundaries to re-energise - Additionally, this panic and sense of crisis can come when we are feeling burnt-out and simply can't imagine moving at this same pace for another 5 years. The way to regain your

energy and your spark is to create clear boundaries that help you create a sense of space between your work and your personal life.

3. Create real clarity - The final step is you need to get laser focused on where you DO want to be in 5 years' time. The mid-career crisis offer happens when we get excited by shiny things or promises that are too good to be true (trust me as the partner of a chef who opened a café & coffee shop it is a lot of hard work and may even be more stressful than your current job if you don't fix the first two things I mentioned above). So, creating a clear plan of growth and development for yourself both in a professional and personal capacity is vital for breaking out of crisis mode and back into a more conscious and measured approach to evolving your career path.

What a MOGI professional can do

Ask yourself these questions. Provide honest answers.

1. Can I see myself in this role in 10 years?
2. Do I regularly ask myself “is this it?”
3. Will this mining job exist in the future?
4. Do I feel like I have not learnt anything new in the past few years?
5. Do I still feel challenged in this mining job?
6. Am I enjoying the work or do I no longer feel motivated?
7. Am I seeing the company losing out on opportunities and relevance?
8. Am I seeing one person, not a group or committee, calling all the shots?

What can you do? Consider the following:

- Are there other opportunities within my team, department, site, or company that appeal to me?
- What roles could I progress to from my current mining job?
- What training could I do to build on my current skill set?
- What is of interest to me? (Whether it's in mining or not)
- Do I have qualifications that I am not using and what else could I do with them?

To help identify a new opportunity, consider the following:

- (a) What are my income requirements?
- (b) What lifestyle do I want?
- (c) Is this a job that interests me?
- (d) What would I need to do to secure that job?
- (e) Finally, what choice surely is going to make me happier?

It's normal to feel restless in your career – especially when you hit a midpoint. But there's no need to be scared or confused by it. Instead, it's a wonderful opportunity.