

## Sharon's Experiences

One of the shaping forces on my life was working on a farm. One learns there is a time to plant and a time to harvest. One learns the value of hard work and doing the right things in the right way. One can't change nature but you can work with nature to produce good results. But one also learns that nature can wipe you out or bless you -- so it must be studied and learned from continuously.

See Covey et al - The Nature of Leadership

WSJ 12/7/99

# MANAGING YOUR CAREER

By HAL LANCASTER

## Take On Tough Jobs, Assess Your Own Work, And Other Life Lessons

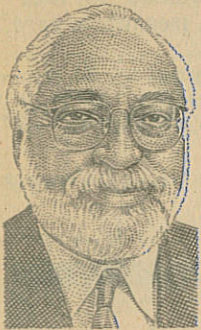
**JOE BOOKER'S CAREER** hasn't been a slam dunk. He was often the youngest and most inexperienced guy on the job—or the only African-American. He took jobs for which he hadn't been trained. And he was rarely handed any of the high-profile, career-making assignments.

But that was just fine with him.

Instead, he asked for the toughest jobs, the ones nobody wanted. If he could do those well, he reasoned, he would be recognized. "Some of them were risky jobs," he acknowledges, "but if you succeeded, the payoff was high."

That strategy has led to a highly successful high-tech career in Silicon Valley for the 58-year-old Mr. Booker, who is currently vice president of operations for Alteon Systems, a computer networking company.

Here are some life lessons he learned along the way:



Joe Booker

**LESSON 1:** "Understand what you're up against and put in place a strategy to win."

Mr. Booker was the only African-American at an Air Force school in Mississippi, studying electronics, about which he knew nothing, with a

teacher who talked derisively about "Yankees" and ignored him when he raised his hand. Rather than quitting, he worked harder and aced the final exam. "When the teacher had to read my name off first as tops in the class, the class cheered," he recalls.

He says he also wasn't welcomed warmly at his first Air Force assignment at Keeler Air Force Base. Since a cushy assignment wasn't likely, he asked for the base's most difficult job. Nobody liked to work on Doppler radar, he was told. He became a Doppler radar expert and a star at the base. "It really opened doors," he says.

**LESSON 2:** "Don't sacrifice understanding for speed."

In 1966, Mr. Booker started his post-Air Force career in manufacturing at IBM because there was less competition in that unglamorous field and results were measurable—and irrefutable.

When he transferred to engineering, he initially lagged behind others. "Management was saying, 'We had high hopes for you, but you seem a little slow,'" he says. "I said, 'I'm spending more time understanding what I'm doing rather than going at breakneck speed.'" Mr. Booker eventually leaped over many of his peers. "I had to bail people out because I was the only one who understood the technology," he says.

**LESSON 3:** "You have to think of where you want to go and does this take you there."

As he drove to work one day, he decided he wanted to be in management. "I wanted to work with people and not look into oscilloscopes all day," he says. But IBM had a surplus of managers at the time, so he waited. He even turned down two technical promotions that "didn't take me where I wanted to go."

In 1969, he jumped at the chance to follow his boss to Memorex, which wanted to get into the computer business. "The boss said, 'Come with me and I'll make you a manager,'" he says. He eventually made it to the director level, even though he lacked the needed educational credentials.

**LESSON 4:** "If you set the bar high, even if you don't reach it, you end up in a pretty good place."

At weekly production meetings, Mr. Booker volunteered for jobs that were behind schedule or involved introducing a new product in a tough market. "If people were saying this is something we can't do, I'd say, 'I'll do it.'"

Once, he bet his boss he could meet a seemingly impossible deadline for introducing a new disk drive. He forged an alliance with the engineering project manager to minimize the interdepartmental political hassles that had been plaguing the project and won the bet (his boss had to bake him a cake).

**LESSON 5:** "You have to be brutally honest with yourself about what you know or don't know, what you can or can't do."

"When you do a job well, ask yourself, 'How do I expand?'" Mr. Booker says. "What skills do I need to take this next step?" Example: He started taking finance classes to help him run a factory better.

Every year, Mr. Booker delivers his own performance appraisal. His 1981 self-review concluded that he hadn't accomplished much because he spent too much time debating the company's direction in meetings with managers from Xerox, which had acquired the company in 1978. So he left to start his own company, Vertex Peripherals.

Mr. Booker eventually sold Vertex to Priam Corp. and served as president and COO of the merged entity until 1988. He left after a disagreement with the board on restructuring strategy.

**LESSON 6:** "The work is more important than titles."

He is often asked why he isn't a CEO. "When I left Priam, my ego was shot," he explains. He made a list of job requirements: a job where he could be successful ("I didn't want to be one of those guys whose career spirals down"); people he enjoyed working with; a company that would make money; a growing experience so he wouldn't be bored; and an executive position.

After agreeing to be CEO of Network Computing Devices, Mr. Booker stepped aside when a potential CEO with a life-giving capital infusion came along. The company still wanted him on the team, but he feared he would be seen as a falling star. So he went back to his list. "It didn't say I had to be CEO," he says. He stayed with NCD for six years.

He was faced with a similar situation in 1997. The company he had joined after leaving NCD was acquired by a larger company, Bay Networks, and he was offered an executive vice presidency. But he turned it down for a chance to join another start-up, Alteon. "Over the years, I felt I was a better builder than fixer," he says.

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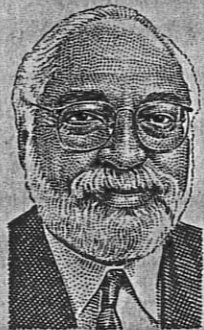
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## SHARING EXPERIENCES

- ✓ → Fundamental belief in Equality + Liberty
  - ↳ but let people choose, let markets (consumers) decide.
  - ↳ see Economist - p16 9/11/99
  - ↳ see Sawelli → The Vision of the Anointed

- ✓ → Ability to synthesize & summarize
  - ↳ HBS → they so had to do wrapping
  - ↳ always take notes
  - ↳ always try to pull things together

- Creative Mktg Strategy → teamwork

Chief Adika

} County / territory

Chief Olowofajana

} name of county

ARK → jokes (JOK) + sayings / quotes (QU)

↳ Even if you're on the right track, you'll  
get run over if you just sit there. (WILL ROGERS)