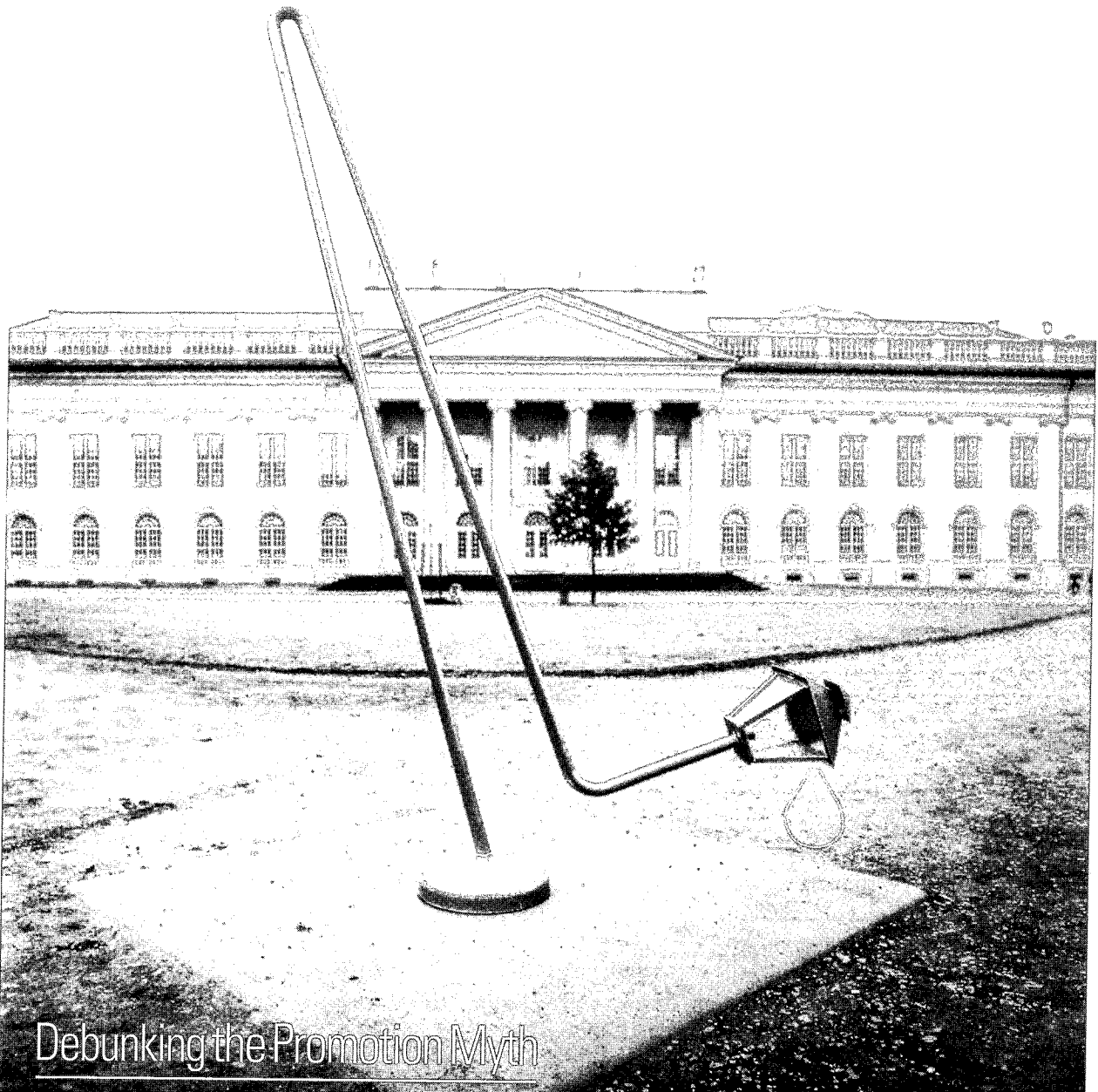


DECEMBER 1998 • VOL 10, No 3 \$3.95

# EDGES

NEW PLANETARY PATTERNS



Debunking the Promotion Myth

**Finding a Destination for the Career Path**



JOHN EPPS

# Debunking the Promotion Myth: Finding a Destination for the Career Path

*The old myth was about climbing the career ladder. The new myth is about endowing career with purpose and joining the vocational journey.*

## APPROACHES TO THE CAREER CRISIS

The popular story goes that people work to be promoted, "to get ahead." One works towards a position with authority enough to make a difference and gain prestige. Promotion is a reward for peak performance, and the better you perform, the more powerful a position you attain. Supposedly the person who does the best work ultimately reaches the top, i.e., becomes CEO of the organization. In this scheme, the career path has a clear destination, although only a few reach it.

Of course, it's rarely as simple as that. There are many routes to the top, and the cynic can name them all: relationship to the owner, back-biting, boot-licking, educational advantages, wealth, family position, political pull, luck, etc. The fact that these routes are frequently taken, however, does not sway purists from their myth about how things ought to be. "There are exceptions, but the myth is right! Part of the fascination with Scott Adams' *Dilbert* cartoon is the way he turns the promotion myth upside down. In his schema, it's the *in*-competents who are promoted to management positions—to get them out of the way.

## The End of the "Getting Ahead" Myth

Nowadays the whole structure of organizations is changing. The drive for positions of higher authority has less meaning. As organizations "flatten out," there are far fewer positions of higher authority than before. In many cases, you can't be promoted because there's nowhere to be promoted to! So what do you do—change companies? Change jobs? Keep on doing the same old thing until you retire? How can you continue to grow and advance when the opportunities for promotion don't exist? In this increasingly normal situation, the myth that promised promotion for labour doesn't work any longer.

The crux of the question is lasting motivation. If I cannot look forward to gaining a high position in the organization with increasing influence, then why should I continue to work hard and improve myself? What's the destination of my career path? Companies have undertaken three main approaches to addressing this question, but all three fall short. Something deeper is required. Let us look briefly at all four responses.

### 1. Professionalism

One answer has to do with commitment to a profession and its skills, rather than to any particular organization. A marketer is a professional who can work for many organizations, and can have a variety of experiences practicing the profession in different environments. The same is true for an accountant, a systems analyst, a civil engineer, a chemist, a secretary. Virtually every field of expertise has its professional associations, journals, conferences, standards. While the old guild structures of the Middle Ages have fallen into disuse, the ideal of professionalism they fostered is still appealing. Even when promotional opportunities are limited, you can be committed to a profession. You can upgrade your professional skills. Even though your new skills may not directly benefit your company, you open up other employment opportunities.

You can continue to increase expertise in a particular field throughout your career. There is no such thing as getting so good that learning stops. Most fields require continued learning just to stay abreast of new developments, and most organizations try to encourage continued learning among staff. The "learning organization" is a hallmark of our times.

But all this "professionalism" is really a little abstract. You aren't a banker in general. You are a banker in this particular bank, which may be quite different from that bank. You aren't an accountant or an engi-

neer in the abstract. You keep these books or build that bridge. The problem with the story of professionalism is its failure to take account of what you actually do. You have no alternative but to do it in connection with some organization and therefore to support the values and directions of that organization. The whole question of motivation arises precisely where you ask what you and your organization are accomplishing in society—what difference you are making. While you may be a good professional in your field, the question of what difference it makes still arises. The moment you look beyond personal skill and satisfaction to what you are really supporting, then this approach falls short. What's important is what you're fostering with your expertise.

Despite the genius of Harman and Horman's work on portraying the dilemma, and the work of Nelson and Burns in their epoch-making "High Performance Programming," (John Adams, ed., *Transforming Work*, 1984), both assume personal development will be sufficient motivation for people. It will not. People are lucid, finally, about the fact of their impending death, and therefore the ultimate worth of their lives. So the question is deeper: "to or for what shall I commit my life? Answering that requires a "life purpose" that goes beyond the self.

## 2. Company Loyalty

You can also try to retain energy and productivity through commitment to the organization for which you work. You identify with their philosophy and mission and commit yourself to putting them into action. In this approach, you seek "alignment" with the company's purpose and "attunement" with its operating values. You believe in the service rendered by the organization as worthy of your time and effort. You also believe in the way they operate to deliver the services.

Some organizations seek to serve noble ends, and some working environments encourage participation, creativity, and self-development. You may look to find a suitable "fit" for your own personality, and once you find it, you may stay with it through thick and thin. The Japanese, known for their lifetime identification with one organization, most often typify this loyalty. Their training, development, home life, and culture assume and enhance company loyalty. From the viewpoint of the organization, this is a nearly ideal. If people can identify with corporate aims and values, there is more creativity and energy towards realizing them and less "sloughing off." The company can also avoid frequent turnover if people see it as their "home."

Many organizations try to promote corporate loyalty through a variety of rewards that enhance the quality of life—pension plans and perks aplenty—so that your standard of living depends on retaining connection to the company. Many companies also use participation in decisions as a means of enhancing loyalty. You not only *belong* in the organization, you *own* it, i.e., you have some significant say in its direction. You may also own shares. However, if this approach is perceived as "golden handcuffs," it may promote a cynicism that prevents creative contribution.

Unfortunately, the recent turn to "Business Process Reengineering" has made downsizing a hallmark of the 90s. "Corporate liposuction," one noted consultant called it. Economic forces are requiring even Japanese organizations to make do with fewer people. Downsizing causes trauma throughout the organization, not simply for those who are released. The organization shows itself to be dramatically unworthy of loyalty. People seem to catch on quickly. Rewards and participation lose their significance and can be tossed aside, if not easily, at least with some sense of liberation.

## 3. Job Enrichment

Faced with the abstractions of professionalism and the final dissatisfaction with organizational loyalty, many people have undertaken the "job enrichment" approach, that is, looking for a variety of experiences and responsibilities within the organization. A career might include time in marketing, data processing, administration and personnel, for example. By experiencing the business from a variety of viewpoints, you might expand your skills and perspective. Though you remain at the same "level" in the company, you can still enjoy a career with diversity and challenge.

Where role rotation occurs periodically, teamwork is enhanced. People appreciate each other's work, since they have firsthand experience in it. The organization becomes a sort of learning centre for the benefit of its staff. People may be rewarded for their acquisition of new skills. On-going training may become an expectation of everyone.

Immense energy is now expended in organizational training programmes. In the USA, the private sector spends more on education than does the entire school system. And who would doubt the pressing need to promote R & D or knowledge enrichment? Continuous learning is here to stay as part of an organization's agenda. But curiously, this approach to career-crisis management is self-defeating. Who wants to work for an organization whose aim is to

give me a well-rounded experience of its operations?

The whole point of the vocation question is to find something worthy of my life's experience, energy and expertise. Enriching the potential of that life or adding to its experience side-steps the basic question: "FOR WHAT?" What's being called into question in the career myth crisis is the basic aim of your work—what are you accomplishing in history? Towards what are you moving? Soldiers in the Saudi desert said that they weren't willing to die for cheap gasoline. Business managers are saying that they aren't willing to die (or live) for a per cent of market share. *Fortune* Magazine featured stories of people discovering this vocation issue and described the trauma it entailed. (See "Breaking Away," *Fortune*, April 1991.)

So what *do* people find worth living and dying for? That's the question that the promotion myth was designed to answer. Its evident inadequacy provides the opportunity to probe deeper. What is an adequate destination for a career path?

## 4. Life Purpose

An answer to this question depends on recognizing the deep "sea changes" taking place in society, for they are altering people's basic assumptions. These changes have to do with new perceptions of reality as more than material, of relationships as more than immediate, and of life as more than a game of acquisition. So long as job satisfaction is thought to derive from personal enrichment, gratification or financial rewards, then the various programmes devised to achieve it are doomed to fail.

Life Purpose is designed to point "beyond" jobs to that to which you decide to commit your life. Once you clarify your basic purpose, then you have multiple options for significant work. For example, you may say, "My life is about promoting a healthy lifestyle. I am now selling insurance both to support my 'real' aim, and as a vehicle through which to meet people and to encourage healthy practices. I also belong to a health club and volunteer time with a local clinic."

As the example shows, a life purpose permits considerable latitude in choosing a job. The important factor is whether the job supports the value you've chosen as your life purpose. The more it does, the more commitment you will have. But even if the support is minimal, the job has meaning by virtue of that support.

Having a life purpose undergirds professionalism, company loyalty, and job enrichment. These gain value as they support your life purpose. None is valuable in itself, or because it benefits you. But they help

you to pursue your purpose with greater effectiveness. Your purpose, not some job, is the focus of your vocation. You don't leave it when you take a vacation or when you retire. How could you retire, for example, from promoting a healthy lifestyle? The form of your engagement will alter, but that for which you are living will not.

We all need an opportunity to think through our life purpose, for it is the source of meaning in our work. Periodic occasions to assess your position, your past, and your opportunities are as important for individuals as they are for organizations. Just as companies create strategic plans and long-range mission statements, so also can individuals. In fact, we must do so to contend with the debilitating vacuity of culturally promoted destinations for the career path.

There is always a gap between the lofty sounding purpose for which you live and the nitty-gritty jobs you perform. When that gap becomes excessive, a split occurs. The point is to keep the gap as narrow as possible, using every opportunity to rehearse how your work contributes to the whole, and how the whole organization is performing a valuable service for society.

So what are the dynamics of living with a life purpose? That is the content of the new myth that is emerging.

### ***THE NEW MYTH: AN ON-GOING JOURNEY WITH A LIFE PURPOSE***

The phrase "career path" suggests movement. In pursuing a life purpose, one undertakes an endless journey. Numerous programmes have been developed to help people identify their appropriate vocation. They range from intensive testing and counselling to disclose your "aptitude" for a range of jobs, to evangelistic promotion of some cause purporting to enrich humanity. In one of the more effective (and brief) counselling techniques a discussion leader asks participants to name the three greatest problems in the world. Then the announcement is made: "If you're not spending your life dealing with what you listed, then you're living inauthentically!" Most vocational counselling tacitly assumes that once the "right" job is found, you may expect a continuous climb up the ladder of success. It isn't so simple.

#### **The Vocational Journey**

The issue at stake is deeper than simply finding a job. It has to do with finding a purpose. This is not a simple, single event that once done, is resolved once and for all. Pursuit of your purpose is a lifelong jour-

ney. Despite all its variables and roller-coaster ups and downs, there are three discernible dynamics of an authentic vocational journey: Recognition, Crisis, and Persistence. These phases require a bit more elaboration. This is a rough sketch of the vocational journey. For a fuller presentation, see Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Little wonder that the book and video tapes of Campbell's work have been so impressive to business people! The myth they disclose rings far truer than the old myth of ceaseless promotions.

#### **A. Recognition: Identifying Your Life Purpose**

The first phase of the vocational journey is related to recognizing one's life purpose. The old legends say that great heroes were "called" or "commissioned." Stories about leaders from Moses to Gandhi describe situations in which the central figure was yanked into a new orbit by forces over which he had no control. Moses had his burning bush, Gandhi, his imprisonment in Africa. The selection process was not a pleasant experience, but one in which people struggled to escape. It happens to us that way, too.

In some fashion you get selected. It may be through a traumatic event or unavoidable attraction. Our first response is always *resistance*. It's never what we sought for ourselves.

Yet the cause will not go away. Choosing your life purpose closes off other desirable options. It often requires considerable soul-searching. Most people avoid it as long as possible, trying instead to hold all values and fulfill all dreams. Finally, however, circumstances make continued "floating" more problematic than deciding. Whatever excuses we give or however unprepared we seem to be, the purpose draws us like a magnet until finally we surrender our alternatives and take it on.

And what a maelstrom it turns out to be—something new around every corner, ample freedom and responsibility, plenty of room to use whatever talents and resources we bring, and most important, a deep sense of satisfaction. We seem to have come home, to have found our niche, to have reached the goal of our vocational pursuits. Once committed, however reluctantly, you will likely find that the purpose itself seems to take over—to have chosen you and to be furthering itself through your efforts. At first your new vocation may bring heady times when focus and direction are clear and victory seems just ahead. It seems to be "as good as it gets."

And just as we settle in and begin to reap the benefits of the situation, it all falls apart.

#### **B. Crisis: Surviving Betrayal**

It is always a surprise. No amount of lucid analysis or even cynical anticipation prepares you for the event that takes the significance out of your enterprise. It can be as minor as a toothache or a less than glowing performance appraisal from your superior. It can be as major as losing your job or discovering an unknown medical defect. For a friend, it was finding his name on the office to which he had just been promoted was in a sliding holder! The external event is inconsequential. Whatever it is, its impact is devastating.

An inevitable step in vocational authenticity is betrayal. At some point, you feel that the thing to which you have devoted your time, talents, resources and energy—that for which you have sacrificed fame, fortune, and family—or fun, fulfillment or freedom—does not appreciate, reward, or recognize you. The purpose or those who represent it find you totally expendable. Suddenly life has no more meaning. You see the triviality of your accomplishments, the thoughtlessness of your colleagues, the pettiness of your cares, the futility of it all. Most of all, you are alone.

Described in modern literature as "mid-life crisis," this experience is portrayed by popular psychology as something to overcome. Doctors prescribe various kinds of therapy, from exercise and diet to counselling and medication. No doubt most of us could benefit immeasurably from them. But for one who has been betrayed, they are irrelevant.

The only path through this experience involves the classic stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, and accommodation. It is useful in this period to identify the value you held that has proven untrustworthy. And let yourself lament, but avoid placing blame. After all, it is no one's fault that you were living in illusions of security and significance. We all do. And life continues to confront us with reality. So lament, but do it discreetly. Privately is best. In fact, no one can help you, and most comments anyone makes will only confirm your awareness of pain. Art can be a medium of release—music, painting, literature, movies, even TV. They all offer expressions by people sensitive to the "downside" of life, and participating in them can be cathartic.

You survive by knowing that this experience is no mistake—that it is part and parcel of authentic vocation. The experience of disillusionment comes with being in tune with the human condition, and is wholly right. Furthermore, were you to select some other "cause" or vocation to follow, it too would reach a stage of crisis. Life is just made that way.

### C. Persistence:

#### Keeping On Keeping On

At this point, you either change commitments, and start the journey over again, or you persist—this time with no illusions about benefits coming your way. Should you persist, your efforts are a continual struggle, but one in which humanity derives benefit. Ironically, you come to be identified with that purpose, even though you yourself know its shortcomings intimately.

It is difficult to continue with business as usual when your sense of meaning has gone. The Stoics are said to have excelled in it, but stoicism is not the answer, Stoicism is a defiant selfishness with heart for nothing but its own emptiness. The real aim is to invest your seemingly unworthy cause with all the passion, energy, creativity and enthusiasm that you can muster—even when you know it is trifling in the cosmic scheme of things.

When you grind into your consciousness the utter and complete worthlessness of what you are about, so that never again can you be devastated by betrayal, then you absolutely forget it! You never let anyone know that you know it. It becomes a

deep secret that you guard with your life. And you treat the work and the colleagues as though they were the most outstanding and significant realities in the universe.

Something happens that makes this possible. While you struggle with life's meaninglessness, it suddenly becomes clear that, if nothing is significant, then everything is. The paradox of being transforms your existence. It works like this: once you see your life and work in its ultimate context, then it is trivial along with everything else. But this very context of ultimacy pervades everything and renders it meaningful.

In fact, you become fascinated with the capacity to perceive meaning. Every relationship virtually shimmers with the potential for transparency to its ultimate context. In this third phase, your life is about perceiving, relishing, and disclosing significance in the details of life and work.

And you begin to notice that people seem to benefit from your efforts. Not that it matters, for they too are fallible; but there seems to be a new effectiveness in your work, whatever your job. Perhaps it's because of your attention to minute detail.

### The Spiral Journey

The dynamics of recognition, crisis and persistence occur over and over. It's as though the three were dimensions of a spiral on which your life moves.

This is what it means to have a life purpose and to take the vocational journey: to expend yourself in pursuit of the unattainable and, in the process, to disclose the value that lies in life. This is the role of the hero, a role played by Moses and Gandhi and Mohammed and Jesus and Eleanor Roosevelt and the rest of those to whom we look as people of authenticity.

As long as you stay aware of the journey itself and your place on it, then you assume a certain passionate nonchalance about the particulars of your work. Whatever it may be, it is both unfulfilling and deeply meaningful. It is worth doing well and passionately but not the source of your significance. ♦

As director of LENS International in Malaysia and Singapore, John Epps consults with companies on the subjects of strategic thinking, customer service and leadership development. He has been conducting an on-going think tank on "Technology of Meaning" for the past four years.

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# The International Association of Facilitators



**F**acilitation is a profession rapidly taking its unique place alongside those of consulting and training.

The International Association of Facilitators was formed by a group of professionals desiring an avenue for interchange, professional development, trend analysis and peer networking. A formal association was proposed and adopted at a networking conference in Alexandria, Virginia, in January, 1994. Over 70 people signed on as charter members. Since then the IAF has grown to more than 1000 members in over 20 countries.

The IAF encourages and supports the formation of local groups of facilitators to network and provide professional development opportunities for their members. Regional groups from around the world are invited to become affiliated with the IAF to help promote the profession of facilitation as a critical set of skills in the global society of the 21st century.

Since 1994, North American annual conferences have been held in Alexandria, Virginia; Denver, Colorado; Dallas, Texas; Tulsa, Oklahoma and Santa Clara, California. In 1999 the conference is being held in Williamsburg, Virginia on January 14-17. Each conference is a showcase that delights, intrigues, challenges and supports facilitators around the world.

## **IAF 2000 in Toronto**

Toronto has been selected by the board of IAF to be the venue for the IAF annual North American conference, with ICA Canada as a major co-sponsor. A task force convened on October 17 in Toronto, with email participation from across Canada, and recommended "Gifts of Change" to be the theme for IAF 2000.

It is estimated that with the combined contacts of the IAF and ICA Canada about 20,000 facilitators will be sent invitations and around 700 will attend the event.

### **WHAT MAKES AN IAF CONFERENCE UNIQUE?**

A conference for facilitators by facilitators has to be the best conference around...exciting, fun, challenging, intimate, valuable and participative. These are highlights.

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**IAF 2000**

## **The Art & Mastery of Facilitation: Gifts of Change**

**April 28-30, 2000  
Toronto, Ontario**

ICA Canada is delighted to host IAF 2000 in Toronto. Facilitation can help every profession and every sector of society, as business, industry, health, education, government and technology undergo dramatic transitions. From the risks of change come the gifts of change.

We are looking for volunteers and co-sponsors to help with the event. Those who join a conference task force to help prepare for IAF 2000 will meet new people and gain new knowledge and insight by working with peers. We already have several task forces underway and are looking for leadership in Sponsorship, Marketing, and Social Events.

In early February 1999 Requests For Proposals (RFPs) will be sent out to thousands of facilitators across North America and around the world to make presentations at IAF 2000. Members and non-members alike can help select the best presentations through the IAF peer review process.

There are a number of challenges that open up practical ways for you to help.

1. What will it take to make a big conference intimate? Join a prep team at the hotel in Toronto, to generate ideas. (The more people, the merrier!)

2. Do you know facilitators who might offer to make presentations to their peers? Send us their names and addresses so we can send them a Request for Proposal.

3. Which potential exhibitors or sponsors would like to reach 20,000 facilitators across North America? A prep team needs your ideas.

If you would like to help call Bill Staples,  
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*Here are three immediate ways to help out with IAF 2000:*

- ☐ Help us find conference presenters from across Canada. Send us names, addresses and emails of anyone you think might be interested.
- ☐ Join a prep team at the hotel in Toronto to generate ideas on the look, feel, decor and ambiance on February 13, 1999.
- ☐ Help out with the IAF2000 booth at the IAF99 conference, January 14-17, 1999 in Williamsburg, Virginia.

*There are many other ways to offer your gifts and talents:*

- ☐ collect and compile potential presenters for a city or a province
- ☐ read and help evaluate proposals from presenters
- ☐ develop conference invitation lists
- ☐ look for conference sponsors or exhibitors
- ☐ write articles on facilitation
- ☐ research tourist activities for international visitors
- ☐ write and distribute press releases
- ☐ find conference scholarships
- ☐ research grant opportunities
- ☐ work on conference ambiance
- ☐ liaise with associated professional groups
- ☐ coordinate regional media activities
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(other things that you think of)

You can fax, mail, phone or email us or call toll free 1-877-691-1422

# For ICA members

## Wavemaker

Members are invited to participate in a new ICA program now available via the Internet, centred on the focused conversation. It is called Wavemaker. Using Wavemaker, registered guests and participants will be able to build and run their own focused conversations on-line. Visitors will be able to click on a button to view, learn about and/or participate in ongoing conversations.

If guests have any questions about anything in conversations, they can click the "Ask Us" button at the bottom of any page. Replies to your "Ask Us" questions will appear on the home page. Using "Ask Us"

registers you with Wavemaker. There is no charge to register.

When you register for Conversations, you have access to facilitators, mentors and other participants. Registered Guests, and Participants can send an invitation and log-in instructions to their friends and colleagues to see and use Wavemaker. Simply inviting someone pre-registers them on the system.

Try the Web address:  
<http://206.239.206.99/>

If you run into any problems, let us know. The program is still in Betatesting.

## New Books in the Works

The ICA Canada staff are working on two new books. The first book will be available in September 1999. This will be a philosophical look at the foundational understandings behind ICA's work.

The first draft is already written. We are floating titles like *Giving a Radical Damn*, *Radical Living from Your Own Backyard*, or *The Pyramid of Wisdom*. The book has four parts: the Relationship to Life, the Relationship to Self, the Relationship to the World, the Relationship to Society. Each of the twelve chapters describes one of the stances related to profound living (or giving a radical damn) as follows: Everyday Care, Disciplined Lucidity, Continual Affirmation, Self-conscious Reflection;

Secular Depth; Profound Vocation; Comprehensive Perspective, Historical Involvement, Inclusive Responsibility; Social Pioneering, the Transformational Posture, and Signal Presence.

The book is intended to present the wisdom of ICA in a fresh way to parents, educators, professionals, CEOs, and community development practitioners. The progress of the book has been assisted and monitored by a wide range of advisors, both within Canada and internationally. The author is R. Brian Stanfield.

The second publication will be a highly practical field book, a complete compendium of ICA methods, tools and practices. This will be available in 2001. ♦

## Other Publications

Course grads and members will be pleased to know the new *Group Facilitation Manual* is now available, as is the Top™ Workbook

on the *Historical Scan*. The refined manual on *Facilitated Planning* is almost ready for publication. ♦

International Association  
of Facilitators  
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# EDGES

NEW PLANETARY PATTERNS

Published by Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs

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*Edges: New Planetary Patterns* is published three  
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Cdn\$15 or \$10 with membership in ICA Canada.  
Elsewhere annual subscription is US\$15. Libraries  
and other institutions US\$20.

Please send subscription orders, changes of address  
and undeliverable copies to ICA Canada, 579  
Kingston Rd., Toronto, Ont., Canada M4E 1R3. Tel.  
(416) 691-2316, Fax (416) 691-2491. Return postage  
guaranteed. Printed by Britannia Printers, Toronto.  
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Printed in Canada.

Date of Publication—December 1998

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