



## Stanford eCorner

### Making Lemonade: Coping Strategies for Corporate Stresses

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Carol Bartz, CEO of Autodesk for many years, underlines the silver lining for many stagnating issues in the workplace. Making a plan for yourself is a good idea, but don't let it limit your scope. By bringing value to the organization, you are the one to benefit most. Learning is the most critical aspect of any job; if you're not growing, it's time to uproot. She also points out that bad managers are great teachers, as they are instructive in what not to do when you finally get to fill their role.



#### Transcript

When somebody asked me what did I do out of college and how did that change, well, let me tell you: the first thing I did out of college is try to figure how in the frick I'm going to pay all these debts back. So what I really worried about was just making money. And I made \$725 a month. And I realized that wasn't going to work. Even though it was a lot of years ago. I never had a plan. In fact, one of the things I loved about Ed McKracken at SGI is he always said, "If you do a plan, you kind of limit what the possibilities are." It's not quite that simple. I mean, that's like saying there are no plans in the world. It doesn't work. But the spirit of what he's saying is correct.

You can hinder yourself by saying, "I'm only capable of doing this, and this is my next step, and this is my next step, and this is my next step." That's kind of a boring concept. What I always figured out is if I was really fascinated by something, and I could kind of pick up on it and run, that I would get noticed. And I hate people that come in and say, "What's my next job?" My answer usually is, "Your next job is somewhere else," because, first of all, I don't have time... Let me give you a tidbit. This is a tidbit. Nobody gives a shit about your career but your mom. And you. Seriously. Your manager doesn't, because your manager is worried about his career. His manager doesn't.

Nobody else does. You have to worry about it. That doesn't mean you go asking everybody what your next career job is because they're worried about their stuff. So you know what? Just do it. Get ready for the job. Do the next job. Prove yourself capable. I always got the next job because they always sort of figured somehow I've sort of done it. "Gee, Carol's kind of taken that leadership role and we're going to put her there." So the first thing you always have to do is do a good job at what you're assigned to, and then see how you can help. How can you help the corporation? Get on task force.

Assign yourself to other groups. Do something that shows people that you're interested and that you're there for a viable asset. So the way I sort of thought--by the way, this wasn't formulated at 21, so I'm not being that stupid, but I always sort of thought it's kind of that thing you have you kind of learn in school, which is, if you get good grades, people think that's nice. And you get attention if you get the A's and you're doing a good job. But that's not the way in business. You don't have to toe the line and be a 'yes' person. But you're doing a good job, you're interesting, you're thinking about things, and you're just trying to help the organization out. Because if you do that, you know who the biggest beneficiary is? You. And it isn't about somebody else helping you manage that. And so I don't think I actually changed that much during the time.

I never in a thousand years thought that I'd be a CEO. I mean, the town I grew up in had 800 people; my company has 6,000. So there you go. So I didn't have that--I call that the 'male dominant' gene. You have to run something. I didn't have that. That was supposed to be funny, you guys. Maybe you have another era. Maybe it doesn't work anymore. No wonder I'm retiring.

So it's just more of, make sure you're learning. If you're not learning, then you better move on because you're the one hurt. That means you won't be an interesting person because you're not learning. So if you're really not learning, go find something else to do. Don't beat yourself up. But don't get confused by another--I'm getting into my little rules here. Don't ever get confused by a bad boss. Bad bosses are really good for you because they help you understand what you'll never do when you're a boss. You don't learn as much from a good manager as you do from a bad manager. Because with a good manager, things are kind of going well and you don't think a whole lot about how it's happening.

With a bad manager, you figure out pretty fast. It's got to be that way with your professor. If you have a bad professor. If you have a good professor, you just feel good, right? It's that concept. So don't mix up a learning curve and a bad manager problem. You could still be learning with a bad manager. Stay there. If you truly aren't learning, go someplace else. That's the biggest piece of advice I can give you on that.