



Stanford eCorner

Pyramids, Not Ladders

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/1410/Pyramids-Not-Ladders>

In this clip, Carol Bartz points out that young workers needn't be afraid of a lateral career move. Ambition often focuses only on upward motion, whereas well-rounded experience in a number of departments - sales, marketing, or customer service, just to name a few - gives a career a solid foundation. Ladders are unstable, Bartz says, but pyramids have depth, safety, and strength.



Transcript

Being a salesman is a great learning experience. Being out there and carrying your quota and convincing somebody to buy your product and service is a fantastic learning experience. I think every engineer should do it. I think every finance person should do it. That's usually pretty much a stretch but you should do it. I mean, it doesn't mean you're going to make that your lifetime profession but understanding what it takes to represent your company and your product and services to the public and to your customers is a huge, huge deal. And I did that with Deck, I did that with 3M and I did that with Sun. I have this concept of the pyramid for your career. Don't be afraid of doing a lot of lateral things. A career as a ladder is a very unsteady concept.

Doesn't that look more unsteady than a pyramid? And people think, oh, I got to get ahead. I got to get ahead. I got to get ahead. Guess what you get up here, you have no foundation. You have two little things on the ground. That is no foundation. Don't be afraid of lateral moves. Don't be afraid even taking salary decreases. You got 40 freaking years to work. You don't have to accomplish everything in the first 10.

In fact, you'll bore yourself to death if you do. So the point to the matter is go do a lot of lateral things. I mean, I was in sales, I was in marketing, I was in customer service, I ran an engineering group. The only thing I didn't actually do is the real hands on finance because frankly I'm not qualified. And by the time I got up here to CEO, I was ready. By the way, this doesn't have to be CEO. This could be VP of Marketing. VP of Marketing would be well served by having done sales, by having done customer service, blah, blah, blah. But having done product market, having done the advertising and, voila, there you are, VP of Marketing. So think of the things a little more laterally.