

INTRODUCTION

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Dave Barry, *Dave Barry's Money Secrets*

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Whether you recognize it as such or not, you have been making career moves for some time. Decisions about whether and where to go to college, the choice of a major, whether to join a fraternity/sorority, serving as captain of a sports team, being active in student government, internships and jobs accepted and those turned down, and even whether to read this book—each are moves that may impact your later career opportunities. Some of these moves may have been what we will call *career refining*—incremental efforts that sharpen your qualifications and focus your résumé. Other moves may have been *career defining*—these are the successful big swings that create positive disruptions and sharply accelerate your career progress. Still other moves may be blunders that produced terrible results and threaten to set back or stall your career. We call these moves *career ending* or *career limiting*—moves that could require you to leave the game or simply send you back to square one. Which one is the case will be a function of the blunder’s impact on the company, your previously earned reputation, and the power and influence contained in your network of relationships. These protective factors—reputation

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Myriad books aimed at providing career guidance already have been published. The majority of these books encourage readers to engage in a process of reflection, which in turn should lead readers to increased self-awareness and a sense of what matters to them in a job, a company, and a career. The individual, now clear as to what he or she should be looking for, is sent forward to do just that—look. This book is different. We believe that by recognizing your career as a game and by applying concepts developed by scholars working in the arena of game theory, you can develop a game strategy that will increase the likelihood of realizing your career goals. In some ways, this book is designed to begin where the work that encourages reflection stops—we presume that you have a sense of where it is you want to go. Playing off the title of the perennial best-seller, you first must determine the color of your parachute. We further presume that your desired destination is likely viewed as attractive by others. As Dave Barry's quote at this chapter's outset drolly points out, you then need to understand how you might position yourself to successfully compete for that destination. In all, we contend that understanding how to prepare to win in the competition over desirable opportunities has a dramatic impact on individual careers. Winning in competition is assisted when actions are guided by thoughtful strategy. A well-crafted strategy is an adaptable plan that takes into account your own objectives, resources, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as those of your competition. This strategy must also consider the condition of the playing field, the rules, and the time structure of the game.

In the pages that follow, we demonstrate how game theory—an economic theory in which the metaphor of a game is applied in order to model how interdependency and interconnectedness among parties should influence decision making—can help you understand how to best and proactively take charge of your career strategy. Game theory has been applied in efforts to understand a wide range of phenomena, including business strategy and decision making. For our purposes, we first show how game theory is productively applied to helping you learn how to manage the interdependencies and interconnectedness among coworkers, managers, and others in a manner that supports your personal career efforts. Second, we show how you, now understanding

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As a part of the research for the book, we conducted interviews with a number of people. Two were selected for their reputations as thought leaders in understanding career issues. Tammy Erickson has written extensively on the way different generations experience work. She offers fascinating insights into how Gen X, Gen Y, and the millennials each frame and then play the career game. Understanding how members of these generations are likely to approach the game can help you be ready to play with them as a manager, as a coworker, or as a competitor for an open position. Keith Wyche, president of Operations at Pitney Bowes, is widely recognized for his work as a mentor to minorities in the workplace and is the author of *Good Is Not Enough*, a book intended to help minorities understand the key to career success. In our conversation, he elaborated on the way the career game is experienced differently by minorities and how, as a result, they may need to play differently.

The majority of the conversations recorded in this book are with people who were selected because they, themselves, are in the midst of experiencing remarkable careers. We hope that these conversations will shed some light on

how others have played their career games, as well as on how game theory can be used to interpret the moves of others—and that the conversations will ultimately help prepare you to make your own career moves. We tried to choose a diverse set of individuals in a range of career stages in a variety of industries. For example, Ursula Burns (Xerox) and Charlene Begley (GE) have had long and successful careers within large companies. Pasha Federenko and Bryan Bell are in the early stages of their career games, both having just accepted positions at Bain & Company at the time of our conversations. Chris Klaus, the founder of Internet Security Systems, has experienced great success as an entrepreneur. Marius Kloppers (BHP Billiton) has experienced a very fast rise to the C-suite of one of the world's biggest companies. Bill Perez (William Wrigley Jr. Company) has spent the majority of his career in leadership positions in family-held companies. Finally, Liz McCartney (CNN's 2008 Hero of the Year) is an example of a social entrepreneur—she left her career in Washington, DC, to move to the New Orleans area to assist in the post-Katrina recovery effort. After each conversation, we offer a few specific examples of how—even if the subjects did not label it explicitly as such—game theory principles were present in their career decisions. We hope you will find the conversations useful in their own right, but we also encourage you to consider how well even an implicit game theory approach served each individual—and how it might serve you as you make your own career decisions.

Together, our hope is that the material we offer in each chapter along with the lessons from the conversations we report will be useful to you as you continue to make moves in your career game.

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the “game,” can become a player. The key to learning how to play the career game is a concept we have labeled *career agility*—in short, we posit that agile individuals are better game players.

Of course, achieving career success is not merely the result of planning or ability. These tools cannot substitute for demonstrations of competence over the course of a career—what it does do, instead, is help you leverage what you’ve got. We agree with President Eisenhower that, while plans may be useless, planning is indispensable. What we hope to offer is a new and more useful frame for that planning exercise. Of course, in order to realize the value of a career game plan—as is the case with any other plan—individuals must also faithfully execute their responsibilities and deliver results. In that regard, we favor the view of Samuel Goldwyn, who reflected on his remarkable experience as an immigrant in the United States by noting that the harder he worked, the luckier he became.

As we initially envisioned this project, the primary audience we had in mind was made up of early-career people—those in their mid-twenties to early thirties who are starting to question whether they are on the right path. This stems largely from the fact that the first author spends a great deal of his time at Georgia Tech with people in precisely this predicament. As noted above, many books are designed to help individuals test this question. We set out to offer this group a strategy for acting on its answer. Once we began, we realized that the lessons contained in a game theory approach to career management certainly apply to individuals at all career stages. For early-stage players, all that is required is a sense of the desired end state. Once a destination is in mind, the tools and concepts we present in the chapters that follow can be applied immediately to charting the best course forward. Later-stage players have, by definition, fewer moves left in their games. Consequently, making the most of each of their remaining moves is of the utmost importance. We think that the game theory approach we offer will help ensure that players do just that. Although we focus our examples on successful business people, we are confident that the lessons herein will be useful to *anyone* who is seeking an opportunity that is also desired by others and where outcomes are impacted by interdependent players. People who want to earn desirable volunteer opportunities, for example, are also engaged in a version of the career game.

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