

“You can’t make someone else’s choices. You shouldn’t let someone else make yours.” This quote by Colin Powell echoes the Kwanzaa principle of Kujichagulia (koo-gee-cha-goo-LEE-yah) – SELF-DETERMINATION. This principle says that we are to define and name ourselves - to create and speak for ourselves, instead of having others defining, or determining our paths or selves.

You have only to reflect on the lives of your children or grandchildren to see evidence of our innate desire for self-determination. One of the most critical and recurring signs of healthy development is when our toddler, then our adolescent and then our young adult assert his or her desire do “it”, whatever it is, without our interference. As good parents, we strive to develop and support our children’s goal for true self determination – from the time they take their first step through the time we help them move into their dorm room at college.

If only we worked as hard to develop our own professional self-determination.

According to Wikipedia, a career has traditionally been seen as a course of successive situations that make up a person's worklife - the series of jobs or positions by which a person earns money. It tended to look only at the past. However, as the idea of personal choice and self direction picks up in the 21st century, the idea of a career is shifting from a closed set of **past** achievements, to a defined set of pursuits looking **forward**.

With a forward looking mindset about professional and career development and an insecure job market, it is even more important that we each search for the cure for what some in the HR world call “Career Management Deficit Syndrome.”

The first step in curing CMDS is to determine whether you have it. Look for the following symptoms:

- You work hard, perform well. You keep your head down and ignore your company’s mergers, acquisitions and reorganizations. Why should you care about those things, everyone knows you’re a hard worker.
- You ignore calls from head hunters and recruiters, you use the classifieds to house train your dog, and you have never visited Monster.com. Why should you? You’ve got a job!
- You stop looking for opportunities to broaden or deepen your skills or learn new things. That college kid they just hired can take care of all of that “techie” stuff. After all, you don’t have time to surf the net doing research or make pretty presentations – too much “real” work to do.
- Even when you attend conferences, dinners or other events outside of the company where you might meet new people, you choose not to “network,” sticking close to your friends and colleagues. You have enough friends and all that chit chat about nothing is

Does any of this sound like you?

Even if you find yourself suffering from the mildest case of CMDS, consider this a wake-up call. You need to get yourself some kujichagulia! Catch next month’s column to learn the 10 Step Program for career management.