



# Finding Your Own Diamond Mine

*Your future may be brighter right where you are*

By **David G. Jensen**  
Contributing Editor

THERE IS AN OLD FABLE THAT has made its way around the world many times over. While I've seen versions of this same story come out of cultures ranging from Israel to Hong Kong, the version that radio commentator Earl Nightingale made famous back in the 1950s had its roots in a true story about an African farmer. Earl called this tale "Acres of Diamonds," and Sunday sermons and motivational speakers have been using it to get their message across for more than half a century.

Earl's story is about an African farmer who had become quite bored with his life and the rocky soil he had chosen to till. He had read that diamonds were being discovered in abundance and the idea of finding millions of dollars worth of diamonds got him so excited that he sold his farm and headed out. He wandered all over the African continent; the years slipped by as he searched for the diamonds and wealth that he never found. Eventually he went completely broke and threw himself into a river and drowned.

Meanwhile, the new owner of his farm picked up an unusual looking rock about the size of a country egg and put it on his mantle as a sort of curiosity. A visitor stopped by and told the new owner of the farm that the funny looking rock on his mantle was just about the biggest diamond that had ever been found. The owner of the property told him that ". . . the whole farm is covered with them - I've been kicking them out from under my mule."

That homestead turned out to be the Kimberly Diamond Mine . . . the richest the world has ever known. The original farmer had been literally standing on "Acres of Diamonds" until he sold his farm in pursuit of something else entirely.

## Where Are Your Acres of Diamonds?

During my years as a headhunter, I've had countless calls from those who, like the African farmer, have heard about the "riches" being seen by others in the form of stock options at startup companies. Others hear about how great it is working at that big pharma company down the street. It's just a case of the "grass is always greener" syndrome, actually.

While making an employer change has been the best career choice for some people, I've seen a fair number of people who in hindsight should have stayed where they were. The best advice that I can give you is not to listen to a colleague, or a recruiter, for that matter. Sit down and listen to your inner voice.

Develop a plan. Ask yourself some very serious career

review and planning questions. Here are a few to get you started. Whether you are thinking of leaving soon, or just preparing for your annual performance review, these questions will get you in the right frame of mind.

## Suggested Questions for Annual Review or Career Planning

- Have you helped to increase efficiency in your company? One of the biggest contributions that you can make to any company is increased productivity or efficiency. If you've been in this enviable position at your firm, it can either be a great talking-point for you in interviews, or it can become a part of the reputation you are building at your present employer. Where is your accomplishment more likely to benefit you: as a talking-point for your next career move, or as a building block for a reputation inside your current firm?
- Have you instituted a new system or procedure in your company? Why? What problems led to the change that you made? Has your recommendation gone on to be adopted by any other divisions?
- Have you ever identified an overlooked problem in your company? What was your solution? Why was this solution overlooked until you came up with it? Your answer may show that you have the persistence and creative ability to solve weightier scientific or engineering problems.
- Have you represented your company and presented your ideas at an industry-wide event? What was the outcome? Did it lead to any collaborative ventures or corporate prestige? Did it result in any new industrial partners that might further your company's progress?
- Have you trained anyone? Did you develop a training technique? The best way to make it up the ladder is by having a replacement ready in the wings. Show that

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you are an excellent trainer and you are more likely to be recognized as a person worthy of promotion.

- Have you suggested new R&D programs for the company that were adopted? What were they? Why do you think that they were adopted? Will they lead your company to new products or entry into new market segments down the road?
- Have you helped to establish any new goals or objectives for your department? Did you arrive at these goals by any new or unusual thought processes? Did you persuade management to adopt the goals you established?
- Have you saved money for your company? What were the circumstances? Do you know what the savings were? A manufacturing engineer who selects hardware, for example, can save thousands of dollars by customizing that equipment to avoid unnecessary frills.
- How have your successes changed the nature of your

job? Did your responsibilities evolve during this time, perhaps redefining the position?

- Did you ever undertake a project that wasn't a part of your job because you were intrigued by the problem? Did this "extra" assignment lead to positive results for the company? Engineering and scientific people are constantly looking for new challenges. Has something caught your interest and worked out to the company's advantage?

Your goal in answering the above questions—and the many others that you'll come up with which are specific to your situation—is to eliminate the tendency to make job changes based on "gut feeling," or to stay in one job only because of the fear of change. Instead, draw upon that analytical perspective that all technical professionals have in spades. Use it to analyze your scenario, remembering that it doesn't always require a move outside of your current employer. Your own "diamond mine" may be right under your bench! ■