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Bringing Work to Life

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## Welcome

Welcome to our latest quarterly issue of Bringing Work to Life.

Our recent book: *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, (Praeger, 2014), describes why, when, and how to create an inspiring and practical nontraditional, entrepreneurial career path from more than one source of income: <http://www.abc-clio.com/product.aspx?isbn=9781440831584>

This complements our three previous books:

*Business Behaving Well: Social Responsibility, from Learning to Doing*, (Potomac Books, Inc., 2013), which provides a rationale and roadmap for organizations to incorporate socially responsible practices, building on principles of social justice:

<http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/Business-Behaving-Well,676586.aspx>

*Building Workforce Strength: Creating Value through Workforce and Career Development* (Praeger, 2010), which describes the application of workforce and career development principles and practices to strengthen organizations:

<http://www.abc-clio.com/ABC-CLIOCorporate/product.aspx?pc=C3236C>

*Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization* (Praeger, 2003), which describes leadership approaches to integrate individual needs with organizational needs for the benefit of both:

<http://www.abc-clio.com/product.aspx?isbn=9781567204360>

This newsletter contains two articles: *Becoming*, and *Facts about Our Society*.

## Becoming

In retrospect, I can see connecting threads from working first as a chemical engineer to presently providing career counseling and organizational consulting. It's a stretch



Ron Elsdon, Ph.D., is founder of *Elsdon Organizational Renewal*, which focuses on supporting organizations enhance effectiveness through revitalized workforce relationships and leadership practices. Prior to establishing his practice, Ron held senior leadership positions at diverse organizations. Ron is also co-founder of New Beginnings Career and College Guidance, which provides caring and personalized support to individuals in career guidance and coaching.

Ron is author of *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, which describes why, when and how to create an inspiring and practical nontraditional, entrepreneurial career path from more than one source of income; editor of *Business Behaving Well: Social Responsibility, from Learning to Doing*, which provides a rationale and roadmap for organizations

though and it certainly wouldn't have been an obvious future path in those early days. The process of becoming in a work sense evolved through many new beginnings along the way. It included good times and doing good, and it involved challenges and missteps. Bill Bridges calls those points where shifts occur in our lives, transitions. Internal responses to external changes, described by the three stages of an ending, a neutral zone, and a new beginning. These new beginnings added together are our becoming. Carl Rogers in *On Becoming a Person* observes "Life ... is always in process of becoming." In this article, we look at what this means for our work lives.

We can explore this evolution, this becoming, by considering three aspects - building self-understanding, personal development, and advocacy for the common good. These aspects reflect an awareness of the need to honor ourselves, to honor organizations that we create or with which we affiliate, and to honor our communities. Let us look at each of the three aspects of becoming in turn, starting with self-understanding.

Much of our formal learning focuses on content knowledge in disciplines or crafts. This is an essential foundation for our contributions; indeed, investing our time wisely in such content learning is important in building expertise and credibility. This is our marketable capability, our core area, and it can take many and varied forms, from the creative, to the practical, to the analytical. There are also other aspects in addition to content knowledge that are important in allowing us to take control of our path forward. Self-understanding is central to this. Components of self-understanding include values, personality preferences, interests, skills, and learning from past experiences (approaches to gaining insights into self-understanding are described in *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path*.)

This sense of self-understanding is like a compass that helps guide our decisions and direction based on personal purpose. Personal purpose forms a cornerstone for our career path. For example, is that path for personal fulfillment, financial reward, mitigating risk of unemployment, giving back, or creating a legacy? Or perhaps it is a combination of one or more of these aspects or something else entirely. We may find that the primary purpose shifts over the course of our work life, with, for example, creating a legacy more prominent at later stages. Clarifying this sense of purpose affects the emphasis and structure of our career path. In my case that emphasis evolved from using technical knowledge in a large organization, through business and leadership roles, to founding organizations in the career and workforce development fields, with volunteer activities sprinkled throughout. Moving ever closer to that sense of vocation described by Frederick Buchner as "the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need."

Let us now look at the second aspect of becoming in a work setting, that of personal development. It was one of those cold, late winter days in Chicago in 1978. About twenty of us filed rather sheepishly into a hotel conference room. We were there for a three-day workshop on public speaking for engineers. A root canal paled in comparison to the prospect of this experience. My supervisor at the time encouraged me to go. He recognized the need, though probably not the extent of my fear about public speaking. That lack of confidence started many years earlier in elementary school in England and was reinforced by the English equivalent of high school. I had reached the erroneous conclusion by that winter day in Chicago that public

to incorporate socially responsible practices, building on real-world examples from contributing authors, and principles of social justice; editor of *Building Workforce Strength: Creating Value through Workforce and Career Development*, a book that describes the application of workforce and career development principles and practices to strengthen organizations; and author of *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization*, a book describing leadership approaches to integrate the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization for the benefit of both. Ron holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in chemical engineering, an M.A. from John F. Kennedy University in career development and a first class honors degree from Leeds University in chemical engineering. With his co-author he was awarded the Walker Prize by the Human Resource Planning Society for the paper that best advances state-of-the-art thinking or practices in human resources.

speaking was a gift given to only a few at birth and the rest of us, particularly me, would never be able to do it. However, I was willing to give it one last, painful try. Three days later, after what was a transformative workshop experience, I was able, for the first time in my life, to approach the prospect of public speaking not with terror but with the knowledge that this was possible and might even be enjoyable. This transformation was no mean feat and a great credit to the workshop facilitator, Jeremiah Goldstein. This is a good example of developing a skill that might have seemed out of reach but was actually close at hand. And that is true for much of our on-going development, for as someone once observed “we have gone from a four-year degree to a forty-year degree.” Development always means individual growth. Examples include building the skills and characteristics for a nontraditional, entrepreneurial path described in *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path*, building leadership attributes described in *Affiliation in the Workplace*, or addressing approaches needed to prosper in an organizational setting described in *Building Workforce Strength* (for example, the chapter by Michele DeRosa and Cynthia Brinkman Doyle, “Acknowledging and Addressing Components of Career Fitness”).

The third aspect of becoming is that of advocacy for the common good. As described in *Business Behaving Well*, since the 1980s our earlier foundation of social good in the United States has been eroding, threatening the economic and social fabric of our society. Our economy almost collapsed because of rising inequality and a move to take from the many, including future generations, to benefit a few wealthy individuals. There is a physics experiment that involves connecting two soap bubbles of different sizes by a tube and then opening a valve between them to see what happens. It turns out that the larger bubble grows at the expense of the smaller—the very thing that happens in our society if we allow special interests and those with economic power to define our economic path. That path leads only to greater inequality. The larger bubble gets bigger. And now we face dire threats in the United States from a regime dedicated to enriching only those already wealthy, and to compromising our healthcare, diversity, environment, and sense of community. Now, particularly, advocacy is needed from each of us built on:

- Staying informed about emerging social, business, and workplace issues so we can decide where to best commit our time and energy.
- Influencing public policy by supporting candidates who speak to the needs of all in our society, not just the wealthy and powerful, and engaging in legislative campaigns and direct action in this regard.
- Becoming well informed about organizations and their approach to social responsibility so that, based on their performance, we can decide to engage or not, whether as employee, contractor, supplier, investor, or customer.

There is much to this sense of becoming. In Carl Rogers’ words “This process of the good life is not, I am convinced, a life for the faint-hearted ... It involves the courage to be.”

Parts of this article are extracted from, or based on concepts from, *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path* (Praeger, 2014), *Business Behaving Well* (Potomac Books, Inc., 2013), *Building Workforce Strength* (Praeger, 2010), and *Affiliation in*

*the Workplace* (Praeger, 2003).

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## Facts about Our Society

I wrote the following on November 12, 2016 soon after the U.S. election. “It is with a heavy heart that I write these thoughts about the recent election. They come from my perspective as an immigrant, here with my wife for more than forty years, and an American citizen. They come from my perspective of having two lovely grandchildren who have a joint English/Taiwanese heritage. They and their parents, our special children and their spouses, are American citizens as they were born here. My thoughts come from a perspective of having two other lovely grandchildren who have joint American/English heritage. Our younger grandchildren are not aware of, or concerned about, differences of language or background. They simply welcome people whom they meet. Our elder grandchildren, unfortunately, may just now be beginning to sense prejudice in others. My thoughts are affected by my parents who fought forces of darkness and hatred in the second world war. Their sacrifices contributed to my generation not having to encounter the horrors of world wars that engulfed the previous two generations. My thoughts are affected by brave souls like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Dorothy Day who struggled to right the wrongs of different forms of oppression, one political in Germany and the other economic in the United States. So I wonder what words of hope I can offer my wife, my children, and my grandchildren when those same dark forces of racism, bigotry, and oppression that engulfed Germany in the 1930s are born again here, propelling a bigot to the presidency, and are celebrated by odious, extreme right wing groups.

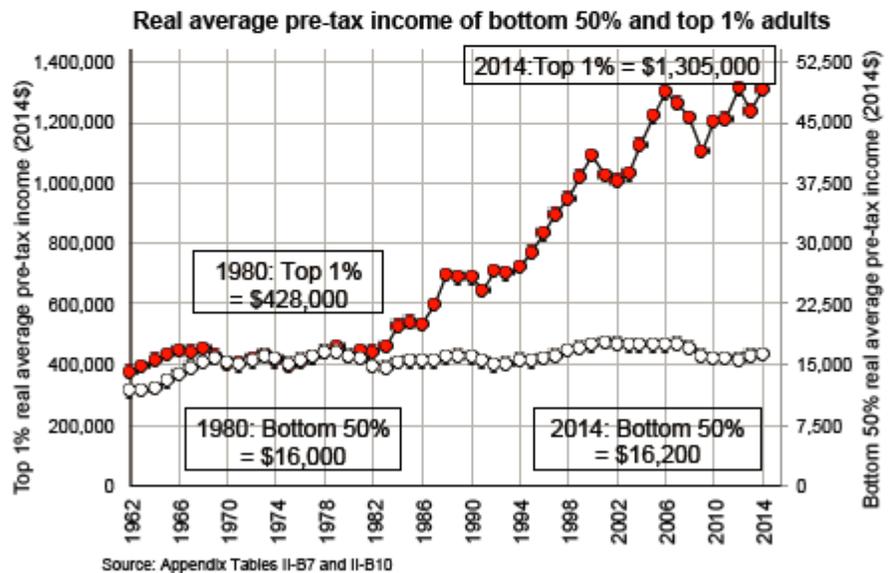
I am concerned that the response from some quarters is not to repudiate these odious ideologies, rather to appease their proponents. This catastrophic mistake was made in Germany in the 1930s and it led us into a conflagration. We are now at a dangerous time and place where placating such forces of evil can sow the seeds of destruction for our society, just as surely as it did for Nazi Germany. So my reaction is to say about such forces, I will not support them, not now, not ever. Indeed, I will do whatever it takes to resist them, for resist them we must for our future generations. I don't know if it will be even possible to write words like this openly a year from now, with the FBI pandering, even before this election, to the republican party. I would simply echo these words of Martin Niemoller who spent seven years in concentration camps, ‘First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.’ So now it is time to speak out, for as Joan Chittister observed so eloquently ‘Courage is coming to realize that what does and does not happen in the world does so because of what you and I fail to say – not when silence is right, but when we fear the cost to ourselves of speaking out.’ It is time to speak out, to support those who build on a foundation of inclusion, respect for all, and economic equality, and resist those who don't.”

Unfortunately we have seen ignorance and bigotry taken to new levels by those now in power in the United States. This includes flagrant lying. Perhaps most encouraging is the enormous, consolidated resistance that has emerged. This needs all of our support. In the spirit of communicating facts, here are some facts that

speak to the state of our society.

Since the early 1980s the top 1% in the United States have prospered at the expense of most in our society as shown in the next two figures:

Figure 5: Bottom 50% vs. Top 1%



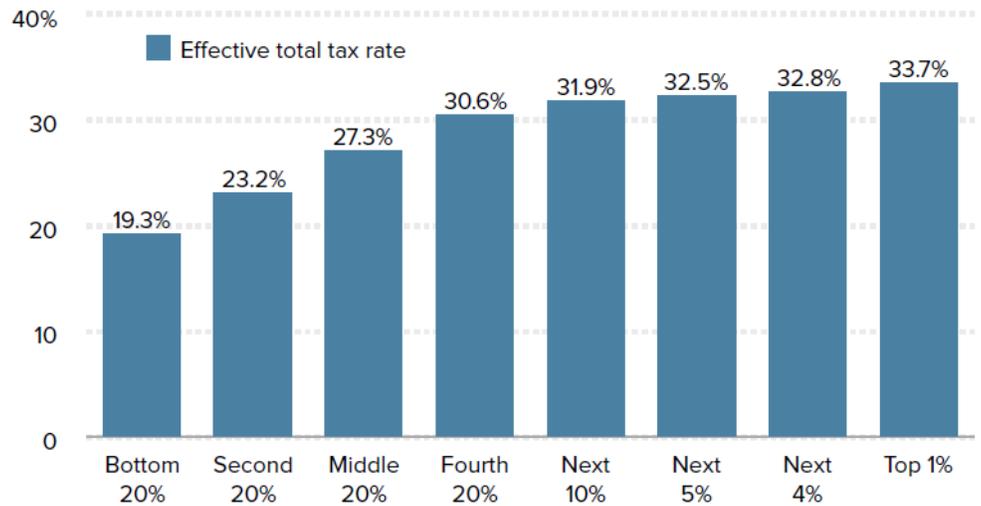
Notes: The figure contrasts the evolution of the top 1% vs. the bottom 50%. The top panel plots the top 1% pre-tax income share and the bottom 50% pre-tax income share since 1962. The bottom panel plots the top 1% real average pre-tax income (on the left y-axis) and the bottom 50% real average pre-tax income (on the right x-axis). The unit is the individual adult and incomes within married couples are split equally.

Source: Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, Gabriel Zucman, Washington Center for Equitable Growth, Distributional national accounts: Methods and estimates for the United States, December 2016.

This is driven partly by a regressive taxation system that does too little to progressively tax those at high income levels as shown in the next figure:

### Progressivity of the overall tax system flattens near the top

Total federal, state, and local effective tax rates in 2016, by income percentile



Note: Figure is adapted from CTJ report (<http://ctj.org/ctjreports/taxday2016.pdf>).

Source: Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) Tax Model, April 2016, and Citizens for Tax Justice (CTJ), April 2016

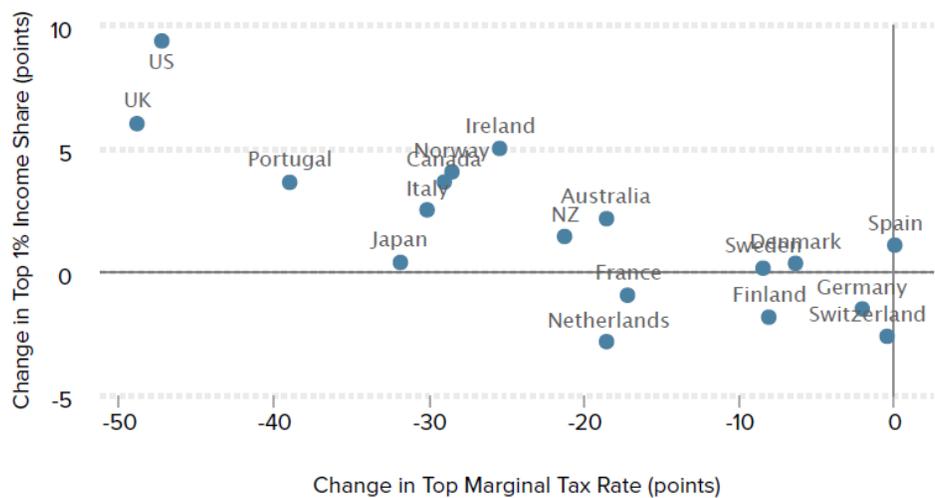
Economic Policy Institute

Source: Josh Bivens, Hunter Blair, Economic Policy Institute, Financing recovery and fairness by going where the money is, November 15, 2016.

Not surprisingly as top marginal tax rates fall, inequality increases as shown in the next figure:

### As top marginal income tax rates fell, inequality rose

Top 1% share and top tax rates 1960–2009

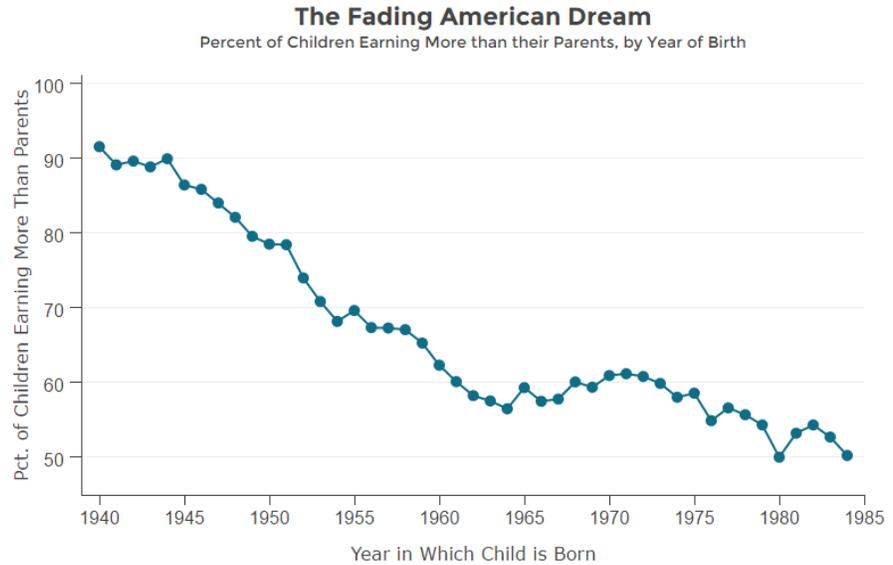


Source: Piketty, Saez, and Stantcheva (2014)

Economic Policy Institute

Source: Josh Bivens, Hunter Blair, Economic Policy Institute, Financing recovery and fairness by going where the money is, November 15, 2016.

And we are seeing an erosion of economic mobility as shown in the next figure:



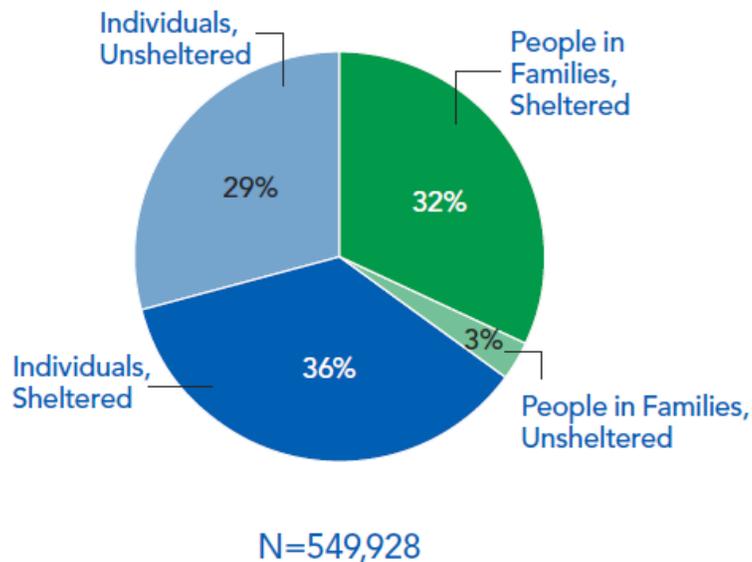
Click to display figure notes ▾

This figure plots the fraction of children earning more than their parents ("absolute mobility") by the year in which the child was born. Children's and parents' pre-tax incomes are measured at approximately age 30 at the household level, adjusting for inflation using the Consumer Price Index.

Source: The Equality of Opportunity Project, <http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/>

In our wealthy society, it is awful that there are more than half-a-million people homeless as shown in the next figure:

### Percent of Homeless People By Household Type and Sheltered Status, 2016

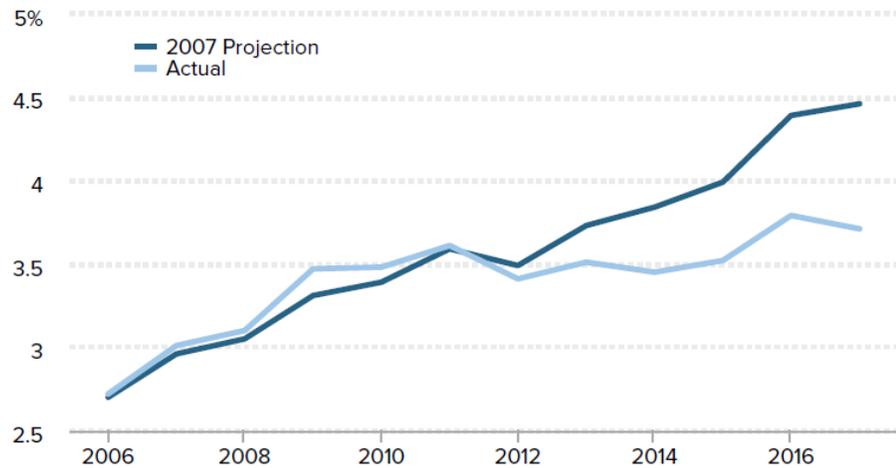


Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, The 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness, November 2016.

It is also awful that we do not have universal health care coverage that citizens of other developed countries enjoy. Even what we do have is under attack. There is a bright light, namely Medicare, which is effective in providing good and broad coverage, while holding costs in check, as shown in the next figure. For the future, it will be important to move to a Medicare-for-All approach and eliminate the costly, inefficient, private insurance bureaucracy.

### Rapid fall in health care cost growth provides large budget cushion

Medicare spending as a percent of GDP, 2007 projection vs. actual, 2006–2017



Source: Author's analysis of Congressional Budget Office data (2007; 2016a)

Economic Policy Institute

Source: Josh Bivens, Hunter Blair, Economic Policy Institute, Financing recovery and fairness by going where the money is, November 15, 2016.

Looking globally, it is encouraging to see how much migrants contribute to the global economy as shown in the next figure:



Source: McKinsey Global Institute, People on the Move: Global Migration’s Impact and Opportunity, December 2016.

Now more than ever we must resist the forces of darkness, greed, and bigotry that have taken over our government, and move our society to one of compassion, inclusion, and support for all.

**Quote**

“The way to do is to be.”

*Lao-Tzu quoted by Carl Rogers in On Becoming a Person.*

