

Me, Inc.

Acting Self-Employed

Change occurs so rapidly these days. It can be hard to keep up with all the advances in science, communications and other technology.

You can expect your work life to change often, too. Jobs and even careers will come and go. To succeed in this environment, you might think of yourself as your own private company, offering your services to different employers over the years.

You have to accept that no matter where you work, you are not an employee; you are in a business with one employee—yourself.

Andrew Grove
CEO, Intel



à Quote à

You Really Are Self-Employed

You may actually own your own business. You may work for someone else. Either way, acting as though you're self-employed gives you the vision, power and flexibility to succeed in a world where job security no longer exists.

You are the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), sole owner and only employee of a one-person company called "Me, Incorporated" (**Me, Inc.**). Of course, you can replace the "Me" with your own name. It's Jessica, Inc. or Juan, Inc... You fill in the blank.

Management expert Tom Peters agrees, advising you to "think and act like an Independent Contractor." He suggests you be a "brand" in the same way that Tiger Woods, Oprah Winfrey or Kellogg's are brands. He even wrote a book on the subject, called *Reinventing Work: The Brand You 50 or Fifty Ways to Transform Yourself from an "Employee" into a Brand that Shouts Distinction, Commitment, and Passion.*

Companies no longer offer people careers... people create their own careers.

William Morin, Chair
Drake, Bean, Morin



à Quote à

You're in Charge of Your Career

When you act as though you run **Me, Inc.**, you take responsibility for your working life—your education and training, your job performance and your career advancement.

You have to direct your career because no employer will do it for you. And most US workers wouldn't believe employers who tried. Years of "downsizing" have taught them to distrust their employers. One study cited in *7 Survival Skills for a Reengineered World* by William Yeomans found that 64 percent of workers didn't believe what their management told them.

You are both boss and employee... Like any other boss, you need to make sure that things get done. And like any employee, you need to survive the job.

Charles Cameron and Suzanne Elusorr
TGIM: Thank God It's Monday



à Quote à

When you don't trust your employer, you have to look out for yourself. You must make sure that you can land on your feet if your employer goes under or your job becomes unnecessary. In other words, you've got to run **Me, Inc.**

You Have to Deliver a Quality Product

Like any company, **Me, Inc.** has a service or product to provide and customers who pay for it. **Me, Inc.**'s product is you—your skills, knowledge and experience. **Me, Inc.**'s customers are your employers, coworkers and your employers' customers.

Like any company, **Me, Inc.** has to constantly work to attract and keep customers. You do this by delivering a quality product. Over time, your customers count on you to do excellent work in the same way that you count on Heinz to produce excellent ketchup.

The New World of Work

In the past, people didn't have to think of themselves as *Me, Inc.*, but times have changed. Some people don't realize how much has changed and may try to prepare you for the way it used to be. Unfortunately, applying yesterday's beliefs and training in today's world doesn't work. Knowing how it was in the past, though, can help you recognize those ill-guided efforts to help and lets you put them in perspective.

How It Used to Be

In the 20th Century United States, workers (mainly men) toiled in one profession—often one company—their whole lives. Most had only a high school education but many found steady, well-paying manufacturing jobs. They worked hard and were loyal to their employers.

In exchange, their employers provided decent wages and benefits that often increased over the years. They also offered job security: they rarely laid people off. Finally, they helped develop the employees' careers. Workers could "move up the ladder" in the company, gradually increasing their status and responsibilities under the company's guidance.

How It Is Today

The U.S. economy has shifted from manufacturing to service and knowledge. As a result, workers must be more highly skilled and educated than ever before. In fact, the most important job skill you can have today is the ability to learn quickly and effectively because the type of work you do will likely change often.

Although employees work hard, employers don't hesitate to lay them off to increase profits. Workers often must change jobs to increase their wages and advance in their fields because annual "raises" rarely occur and "career ladders" often no longer exist. Workers must guide their own careers—often without their employers' help.

How the World of Work Has Changed

The world of work has changed dramatically in recent years, as the table below reveals, although you can still find exceptions to these general observations.

Despite the many changes, however, some facts remain true.

As always, the best way to:

- hunt for a job is to ask friends, family and acquaintances if they know of any openings.
- get a job is to be skilled, prepared and have a good work history.
- keep a job is to be honest and productive.

How It Used to Be	How It Is Today
Work hard and be loyal; receive income and security from employer in exchange	Work hard and look out for self; receive income and training in exchange
See your employer as your caretaker	See your employer as your customer
Work in one profession or career your entire working life	Work in several careers and have many jobs during your working life
Increase income and responsibilities in a predictable pattern, often guided by employer	Create unique career path; may change employers to increase wages and responsibilities
Stay with one employer to get best possible retirement benefits, which employers base on length of service and highest earnings	Take retirement portfolio to new employers without losing benefits; be responsible for investing for your own future
Face lay offs rarely, if ever; see them as a sign of financial crisis	Face lay offs routinely as employers constantly try to streamline operations
Need to use job hunting skills rarely	Need to sharpen job hunting skills constantly
Change jobs rarely because employers don't trust those who change jobs every few years	Change jobs every few years because employers don't trust the skills and initiative of those who don't
Compete locally for jobs	Compete globally for jobs
Have a former supervisor recommend you as the best way to land a new job	Have a former coworker recommend you as the best way to land a new job
Perform manual labor in the manufacturing industry (e.g., work in a factory)	Provide customer service or technical work in a service or knowledge industry
Hold a job with a specific title and duties	Hold a flexible and project-oriented position
Work full-time	Work full-time, part-time, temporary or contract
Do exactly what your employer tells you to do—and no more	Do exactly what your employer tells you to do—and much more (take the initiative)
Obtain only a high school diploma; any college degree is a bonus	Obtain at least one post-high school degree, but choose wisely: certain advanced degrees are more useful than others

Advantages of Running Me, Inc.

There are many advantages to thinking of yourself as Me, Inc. Underlying all of them is the fact that, as Me, Inc., you actively decide your own future without waiting for an employer to define it for you.

You Relate to Others as Equals

As CEO of Me, Inc., you work for others but as an equal. As William Yeomans, author of *7 Survival Skills for a Reengineered World*, puts it, "You are not dependent on one employer to look after you for the rest of your life, and therefore you can feel more like an adult."

You soon discover that "working for yourself" really means working for the most difficult and demanding boss of all—the customer. To please your customers (your supervisor and coworkers), you have to listen to them, follow through and deliver results faster and better than expected.

With the Me, Inc. perspective, you treat supervisors with the complete respect you give all valued customers. But they seem less like parents and more like coaches. You honor their authority but know that you "joined the team" voluntarily and can leave any time. You also know that they can "trade" you any time they don't like your performance.

You Find Greater Fulfillment in Work

When you run Me, Inc. you can choose work that you find fulfilling—if you have transferable skills. Since you don't expect to have the same customer (i.e., employer) forever, you can "shop around" and find the type of work and environment that suits you best.

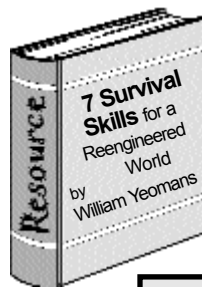
Your parents or grandparents may have been forced to "trade security for boredom" when it came to their work but you don't, notes Yeomans. Since no job offers real security, why not do what you love? At least you'll enjoy the work while you have it.

You Keep Growing

In the past, many employees went to work, "punched the clock," shut off their minds and did as they were told. As Me, Inc.'s CEO, though, you see each day on the job as an opportunity to learn and grow. To stay competitive and keep your customers, you constantly try to improve your skills, increase your knowledge and build relationships with others.

You must be flexible and able to adapt to an ever-changing work environment. As Tom Peters notes, your job, like everyone else's, will undoubtedly "evaporate... or... be redefined beyond recognition" in the not-too-distant future. You must be able to transfer your skills to different types of work.

Unlike most people around the world, as an American, you can choose your work freely and change your mind many times—go back to school, start your own business, begin new careers. In fact, you *must* change if you are to succeed.



[Y]ou will have to manage your own career and your own life. No one will do it for you today, or even help you very much. That is both challenging and liberating.



William Yeomans
7 Survival Skills for a Reengineered World

à Quote à

You Define Yourself

In the past, your job defined you. You were an oil worker or bus driver, for example. Today, you define yourself because you probably won't have the same job—or type of job—for your entire working life.

Your role as head of Me, Inc. helps you define yourself. Your jobs may change over the years but Me, Inc. remains constant. And like any company, Me, Inc. has a story of how it came to be and how it has grown.

Defining yourself as Me, Inc.—rather than letting a particular job define you—is empowering. It's the difference between saying "I was a house painter and then I was a carpenter and then I was a drafter" and saying "I'm good with my hands and I've put my skills to use over the

years in painting, carpentry and drafting." Which sounds more powerful? Telling your own story—Me, Inc.'s story—in this way puts you in charge.

In a more self-reliant world, you must be able to sell yourself / tell your own unique story.

Tom Peters, *tomspeters.com*



à Quote à

Thinking of Yourself as Me, Inc.

The advantages and disadvantages are really just different sides of the same coin.

Advantages

- See coworkers and supervisors as customers who require excellent service
- More fulfillment
- Continued growth
- Define self

Disadvantages

- Must provide excellent customer service to coworkers and supervisors
- No security
- Continued growth
- No longer defined by job



Possible Disadvantages of Me, Inc.

Some people dislike the Me, Inc. attitude for the very reasons that others like it. That's too bad because if you don't think of yourself as Me, Inc., you may find yourself a casualty in the battle for fulfilling, well-paying work.

Being in control of your work environment is [like]... freedom... the limiting factor is that whatever you want to do must benefit others as well.



Richard Germann,
Diane Blumenson and Peter Arnold
Working and Liking It

à **Quote** à

You Must Provide Great Service

Running Me, Inc. requires you to provide outstanding customer service, which demands a lot of effort.

Gone are the days when you could go to work, clock-watch until 5 PM and then go home. If you are lazy, uncaring or disrespectful, you will not fare well in the work world, though a booming economy may temporarily disguise that fact.

from a Texan

Would you hire you?

Ken Ryder, Director
Product Development Engineering
Sulzer CarboMedics, Austin



à **Quote** à

When the unemployment rate drops very low, even slackers can find work. But when the tide changes, as inevitably happens, those who don't deliver quality service will find themselves the first to be let go.

If you're not a good worker, Me, Inc. is not for you!

You Admit that You Have No Job Security

To run Me, Inc., you have to admit to yourself that job security no longer exists. Your employer may go out of business or lay you off. Another company may buy your employer's company and "restructure" you out of a job. Technology may change and make your job unnecessary.

No company can guarantee that it will continue to have customers or a product that's in demand.

Security is mostly superstition... Avoiding danger [doesn't work]. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.

Helen Keller



à **Quote** à

Thinking of yourself as Me, Inc. forces you to face the truth. It may be scary to realize that you must fend for yourself but at least it gives you a fighting chance.

Still, some people don't want to face the facts about their lack of job security. They act surprised by layoffs and say they're "unemployed and unable to find work" if they can't find a position exactly like their last one. They aren't flexible and willing to transfer their skills and experience into other arenas.

Despite their denial, these people still lack job security. Because of their denial, they often lack jobs, as well.

You Must Grow

If you hate learning, the 21st century – and the Me, Inc. concept – are not for you. You need energy, curiosity and effective learning skills to succeed in today's labor market. And you must constantly update and increase your skills and knowledge to stay marketable.

Sure, you can still find jobs that require few skills, but they are disappearing or dead-end. In a self-serve world, even the grocery store checker may soon go the way of the gas station attendant.

When you do find a cushy job that requires little effort, you usually find the compensation is not so cushy. And it certainly won't increase over time. These days, refusing to learn amounts to refusing to earn.

You Must Define Yourself

Running Me, Inc. makes it difficult to pick a profession and never think about your career again, which some people want to do. As William Yeomans states in *7 Survival Skills for a Reengineered World*, "You are in charge of you. You may not want that responsibility, but it is there."

It can be a challenge to plan, follow-through and manage your own career. It takes effort. It demands risks. While many find it exciting, others do not. Unfortunately, there's no returning to the days when your job or your employer defined who you were and where your career would lead.

A Texan Story

Kim worked construction in Denton. Like most construction workers, he regularly faced layoffs. Unlike many construction workers, however, Kim didn't live at the mercy of the local contractors.

Instead, he took charge of Kim, Inc. He studied carpentry and machine repair and started a side business of his own. When construction work was scarce, he was still employed—and getting paid.

How to Run Me, Inc.

So, you've bought into the idea of thinking of yourself as *Me, Inc.* — or at least you're considering it. What does it mean in every day terms? What do you do if you're the head of your own company? There are several practical ways to apply the *Me, Inc.* philosophy.

Stay Employable

To succeed as *Me, Inc.*, you must consciously — and repeatedly — let go of the idea of job security. Instead, aim for lifelong employability, not lifelong employment.

Employability means you can readily find a new job when needed, that employers want to hire you. It requires that you:

- know how to job hunt effectively.
- have the skills, knowledge and experience that employers want.
- know how to please customers.
- can transfer your skills to different types of jobs.
- learn quickly and effectively.

When you are employable, you don't need job security. You're free to embrace the risk and adventure of real life.

MOTIVATE

To run *Me, Inc.* effectively, do everything detailed in the acronym MOTIVATE:

- M** - Manage your own work life; you're responsible for your career.
- O** - Options and Opportunity: be aware of them and ready to seize them.
- T** - Training never ends; keep learning about your field and others.
- I** - International mind set: value cultural differences; learn geography and how to work well with others.
- V** - Value all work; it shows that you value yourself.
- A** - Achievement: do the best job possible; set and realize goals.
- T** - Technology: become fluent with computers and stay current with advances.
- E** - Economics: understand how the economy shapes the labor market in general and your field in particular.

Build Your Customer Base

As head of *Me, Inc.*, you are constantly looking for new customers and improving relationships with the old. In a sense, you are job hunting.

Being employed is just a part of the job hunting (customer-getting) process. You can build your customer base of coworkers, supervisors and others who may help you land another job — and get paid to do it!

To build your customer base:

- **Think of your job as temporary.**
Act as though your job will last only one year (though you may stay ten). "Being a temp" reminds you that you always need to be job hunting.
- **Always do your best.**
Remember that people are watching you — people who may be in a position to hire you someday. Constantly prove yourself to them.
- **Learn, learn, learn.**
Seize every opportunity to improve and add to your skills, especially if your employer pays for the training.
- **Practice job hunting.**
Even if you love your job, hunt for another one. It sharpens your hunting skills and puts you in a powerful position. Since you don't need the work, you can let employers compete for you. And you don't have to accept any offer.

When you build your customer base in these ways, you take control of your career. If you suddenly lose your job, you're OK because you know of other work opportunities already.

In school, you knew there would be exams, so you studied. When you get in your car, you know there might be an accident, so you put on your seat belt. Chances are one in three that your job will disappear in the next few years... why not be prepared?

Williams Yeomans
7 Survival Skills for a Reengineered World



Quote

Take Action

You can embrace the *Me, Inc.* concept by taking action to decide your own future.

Most people react to events, rather than taking the initiative. They see their employer having difficulties, for instance, but they don't look for a new job until they are laid off. If you run a business that way, it won't last.

To succeed as *Me, Inc.*, you must look ahead and actively:

- seek new career opportunities, new clients, new ways to grow.
- pay attention to labor market trends so that you know your field's future.
- set goals for yourself and work to achieve them.

If you do these things, *Me, Inc.* will be a very successful venture indeed.

A Texan Story

Tony, the manager of a successful auto repair shop in Austin, has a very smart approach to employee hiring. On a regular basis, he asks his current employees about other mechanics they know or have heard are good.

He invites these people to lunch, maybe more than once. He develops a relationship with those he likes. When one of his employees leaves, Tony easily fills the position because he already has a number of candidates in mind.

Tony is proactive, not reactive. He doesn't wait for a crisis ("Someone quit!"); he plans for it.

The people Tony "interviews" are also proactive. They know that developing relationships with employers pays off — even if no job offer arises immediately.