



Career Transitions and Working Modes

Whenever I am advising clients or protégés, I often find myself using a **car analogy** to describe what might transpire during the span of our careers.

Particularly if we started off as employees in a large company, it's not unusual to develop an **employee mindset** in which we do not ever learn to "drive" the company car.

In fact, we might not even be able to **see through the front window** of the car — much less turn the steering wheel — if the organization does not somehow involve us as workers in making business decisions. That's the only way we would ever gain experience navigating the road.

Based on my own experience and what I've observed in others, I believe the car analogy helps us compare different **career transitions** and **working modes** in our lives. These modes may repeat and even overlap extensively. But they are all essentially neutral, since each avenue we pursue can serve us well at the right time. The point is that during these transitions, our **mind-sets** must evolve to keep pace with the demands of each metaphorical scenario. For example:

- **Employee mode** can feel in some situations as if we are "**locked in the trunk of the car,**" unable to perceive where the enterprise is headed. We can become conditioned to a feeling of passive security, where others make all major decisions. In job interviews, we're expected to reflexively respond to questions based on a relatively passive marketing tool, the résumé.
- **Contract mode** is the next stage in the progression where we take on work that others have outsourced. Since we're independent, we must at least be able to see out the "front window" of our figurative vehicle, even if we do so primarily from the "**back seat.**" In addition to a résumé, we might begin using brochures, a Web site, proposals, and other marketing aids.
- **Consulting mode** puts us even closer to being in full control of the car because we are now in a trusted advisory role with our clients. This positions us symbolically in the "**passenger's seat**" where we can see a client's challenges clearly and may even be doing the navigating. We might rely more heavily on proposals, Web sites, white papers, and custom marketing.
- **Entrepreneurial mode** places us squarely in the "**driver's seat**" of the car, particularly if our goal involves building a self-propelled, turn-key operation that hires employees and can eventually function without our day-to-day involvement. In this mode, we and our team are making all risk-reward decisions based on a business plan or similar strategic planning tools.

