



## 1st Quarter 2015

In this issue:

[What's In Your Learning Plan?](#) | [Tax Changes 2015](#) | [Selected Success Stories](#) | [Thought for the Day](#)

### What's In Your Learning Plan?

We have all heard the advertising question, "what's in your wallet?" The implication is that what's in your wallet affects your personal financial situation. There's something else (not in your wallet) that has an even greater effect on your personal financial situation and your career: "what's in your learning plan?"

We all hear about the increasing importance of talent development in the corporate environment. In fact, a recent survey of CEOs indicated that talent development was typically a top three priority for their company. We also hear that companies are having difficulty meeting specific professional staffing needs. At the same time, companies have significantly cut training budgets, pushed community colleges to step up their technical training programs, and asked the government to increase STEM and programming training programs in the public schools. While we're waiting for corporate training departments to get re-funded, higher education to reform itself and federal and state governments to develop education programs that send us qualified engineers and programmers, it makes eminent sense to take personal charge and look at your own personal training plan.

As you look at your personal situation, it is clear that the employment market is getting more complex, skill needs are rapidly changing, and compliments of the internet, employers have a short-term focus thinking they can rent specific talent for reasonably short periods as necessary without doing the training themselves.

Obviously, what got you here won't get you there. You must control your own learning program and take immediate action. Start now and plan on future continuous career learning.

The first question you might ask is how many "firsts" did I experience this week? Are you actively learning something new, how much time have you devoted in the last weeks and months to skill development?

Next, think a bit about where you would like your career to take you and the skill profile of people in positions you aspire to. Also, keep an eye on the shorter-term market. There are currently 93,100 positions listed on LinkedIn with the word "cloud" in the job description (this includes one volunteer arts and crafts teacher position for someone who can draw clouds). There are 85,516 positions with the word "analytics" listed, 61,852 positions for "certified big data professionals" and 17,042 positions with the word "Hadoop" listed. Think carefully about what you need to learn to stay marketable in the markets relevant to your career.

Then set up a short, intermediate and longer-term learning strategy. Elements of the strategy might include focusing on challenging, skill-building assignments, especially those that are a bit uncomfortable and risky. For targeted skills, develop a training plan which might include classroom training, online education (Coursera, EdX, Khan Academy or thousands of others), joining professional associations or forming a learning group. One very successful IT executive formed two peer learning groups, one around leadership, the other around change management. Identify and approach potential mentors, particularly those where you can offer them a learning opportunity in exchange for their assisting you.

Start now and you will quickly see how your wallet improves. To quote Mahatma Gandhi, "Learn as if you were going to live forever."

## Tax Changes 2015

As you put the finishing touches on your 2014 tax return, I thought you might enjoy a little preview of the changes for 2015. The good news about the congressional gridlock in Washington is that there is very little in the way of new taxes or tax policy changes. Most of the changes are the result of prior legislation and inflation-pegged increases.

The maximum personal income tax rate remains the same at 39.6%. The rate applies to single taxpayers with income over \$413,200 (up from \$406,750), and increases to \$464,850 (up from \$457,600) for married filers. Itemized deduction limitations (including job hunting expenses) increased to \$258,250 for single filers and \$309,900 for married filers. The federal estate exclusion amount increases from \$5,340,000 to \$5,430,000, so you are smart to defer your demise to this year. Qualified dividends remain at the same rate as long-term capital gains (15%), or 20% for the 39.6 percentage rate bracket.

One notable change is that for those without a recognized healthcare plan, the penalty increases from \$95, or 1% of income (whichever is greater) to \$325, or 2% of income. 401K plan limits increase from \$17,500 to \$18,000 with the older individual catch-up provision increasing from \$5,000 to \$6,000. Lastly, the mileage allowance, including mileage for job search increases to 57.5 cents/mile.

For what it's worth, the average federal tax rate for high income individuals and families has increased by less than 5% over the last 25 years. Now go finish your taxes!

## Selected Success Stories

**Kirit Amin** is Chief Information Officer at US International Trade Commission in Washington, DC.

**Robert Bartholomew** is Director of Financial Planning and Analysis at Kforce Government Solutions in Fairfax, VA.

**Linda Carr** is Principal Technical Consultant at Hitachi Data Systems as part of the Hitachi Managed cloud services team.

**Maureen Desmond** is now with Bloomberg in the Washington, DC area.

**David Farrell** has launched Farrell Advisory Inc. in the Washington, DC area to provide professional and highly customized corporate finance advisory services.

**Matthew Fedowitz** is now Director of Business Development at Technology Advancement Group®, Inc. (TAG®) in Virginia.

**James Firmani** is Human Resources Business Leader at MITRE in McLean, VA.

**Daniel Gallagher** is now with DRS in Arlington, VA.

**Don Grauer** has taken a position as Director, North America Sponsorship Sales for the Gartner Group, a highly-respected information, analysis and consulting firm. His presentation package and interview preparation contributed to his winning the position.

**Mike Greer** has accepted a job with the Arlington, VA-based Council of Better Business Bureaus, Institute for Marketplace Trust to do program development and grant research.

**Ed Gross** is now Senior Payments Specialist & Advisor at Vizant.

**Byron Hardy** is Sales & Marketing Consultant at Sir Speedy BWI.

**Tom Hickey** has joined OTR Global, a provider of marketplace and channel intelligence to institutional investors, private equity investors, corporate and industry professionals. His new position is Chief Operating Officer for the firm.

**Mark Koppersmith** is a Consultant at LeaseAccelerator in Virginia.

**Larry Porter** is now Associate, Strategic Communications at Booz and Co. in the Washington, DC area.

**Eric Schlichtmann** is now at NRG in in Scottsdale, AZ.

**Gordon Sliwinski** is Senior Vice President at The Onyx Group in Alexandria, VA, where he directs and oversees corporate direction and operations for strategic growth on all facets of the organization.

**John Sullivan** has leveraged his extensive operating and consulting experience into a position as a Partner at the Newport Board Group which advises CEOs, senior executives and private equity firms on value improvement, strategy, growth, culture and other senior-level business challenges.

**Richard Wagenaar** is now Lead Associate at Booz and Co. in the Washington, DC area.

## Thought for the Day

It's what you learn after you know it all that's important.

### MDL Partners

**Boston** - 20 William Street - Wellesley, MA 02481 | 781-237-3777

**Stamford** - 6 Landmark Square, 4th Floor - Stamford, CT 06901 | 203-359-5623

**DC/VA/MD** - 2111 Wilson Blvd., Suite 700 - Arlington, VA 22201 | 703-516-6688

**Hartford** - 10 Talcott Notch Rd. - Farmington, CT 06032 | 860-269-0291