

Opinion

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O&E Monday, May 7, 1984

Move with job or stay put?

"THIS IS your decision day."

My friend laughed a little nervously as he accepted the kidding of a buddy. But the comment hit close to home.

That Sunday was an important day in his life. He was among approximately 200 department store executives told they would have to move to Minneapolis when Hudson's announced the closing of its corporate office in downtown Detroit.



Nick Sharkey

The next day he would have to tell his boss whether he would accept the transfer. If he agreed to the move, he had to be in Minneapolis by the weekend.

"Corporations are told to move fast when they transfer people," he said. "It's suppose to make it less painful."

On the day that I talked to him he was still making up his mind.

CORPORATE TRANSFERS are common in this area. They are a way of life for many executives, especially

in the automobile industry.

Hudson's was fair in the terms it set for my friend.

If he accepted the transfer, Hudson's offered a promotion, an increase in pay, \$2,500 in relocation expenses and the purchase of his house at market value.

If he refused, Hudson's would pay severance of seven months' salary plus \$3,500. He also could compete for limited jobs in stores closer to Detroit such as Flint and Toledo.

But regardless of the terms, there is a human side to every transfer.

MY FRIEND has spent his entire career commuting between the northern suburbs and Hudson's downtown offices. It has been a struggle as he put several children through school. He has lived from paycheck to paycheck.

He is 48. His life is settled, yet it's unsettled.

The settled part is that his older children are now through school. His wife has started to work part time to supplement the family income. For the first time, he's pleased with the grade school his youngest son is attending.

It's unsettled because his youngest son still has many years before he's an

adult. His wife recently put braces on her teeth, no small item in considering a transfer.

He has no solid job leads.

HE WAS philosophical about his life:

"I'm not sure I know what real happiness is. But I feel very comfortable with my life. I have great neighbors and friends. This is where all the relatives of both sides of the family live."

"I talked to a corporate vice president the other day. He told me he had been moved many times in his career. One time he went six months without seeing his family. That's not a life for me."

He and his wife went to church Sunday morning. They prayed that they would make the right decision.

In the afternoon they went for a ride in the car, so they could get away from the distractions of friends and relatives. They talked about their future life together.

As I wrote this, I didn't know his decision, only his anguish. His choice was so personal that I couldn't offer advice. I only hope he will be pleased a year from now with the results of his "decision day."

Computer vs. worker

DID YOU KNOW that introducing automation into offices may stifle creativity and productivity?

You may be aware of that if you've ever heard of Phyllis T.H. Grummon, Ph.D., Senior Consulting Associate, General Systems Inc., Ann Arbor.

Grummon maintains that if management doesn't address the issue of creativity and problem solving in white-collar jobs following introduction of automation, they may find white-collar workers will reduce the risk they're willing to take. "Reduced risk-taking usually leads to loss of initiative with the result that the company may lose the competitive edge which innovative and motivated people create," Grummon explains.

I'm not sure what that means. But since this newspaper has been equipped with Delta Data Systems Corp. visual display terminals (VDTs) it seems staff members take more risks than ever.

There's always the danger of the computer knocking out on deadline day. When the VDT is dead, you can't write a line. Another risk is losing an entire 40-inch story just by pushing the wrong button.

When that happens, all the creativity, innovation and motivation in the world won't save the mammoth opus (literary masterpiece) you so laboriously produced. That's stifling.

YOU MAY be inclined to take a little more risk writing a story because you can always blame your mistakes on the damn computer. Thankfully, computers can't defend themselves or tell tales on their operators. And offended readers can't bowl out a VDT.

Grummon says new technologies may eliminate jobs. And, she adds, this dilemma may in-

hibit the full participation of many employees in quality-of-work programs.

Computers are machines which are designed to communicate with people. But they can't write a complicated budget story, a grim crime tale, information about garbage pick-ups, dog licenses and chuck holes and all the other stuff of which local newspapers are made.

But we're not all that complacent about our jobs. In artificial-intelligence research, the object is to find out what intellectual activities a computer can carry out. And artificial intelligence is a hot field.

Then there's a thing called "knowledge engineering" which has burst on the American scene. Its aim is to sort out the expertise of leaders to find out how they make their judgments, then to codify the information so computers can make decisions by emulating human reasoning.

THE THEORY is that in every organization there's usually one person who's really good and whom everybody calls upon for advice. That person is usually promoted so he doesn't use his expertise anymore.

Knowledge engineering is designed to protect that expertise if the person quits, dies or retires and to disseminate it to a lot of other people. That's a creativity and productivity stuffer if I ever heard one. But then I'm not the expert who makes decisions.

There are health and safety aspects of automation, Grummon maintains. When you start seeing little green spots flashing on and off in your sleep, that's not healthy.

Grummon talks about psychological factors in retraining, socio-economic implications of automation and the older worker and technological advances.

All this hits too close to home. How do you get a computer to lie about your age if the darn thing still can't think for itself? I don't mind having my creativity and productivity stifled a tad by a machine. But the "older worker" bit really hurts.

oral quarrel

Few callers on Tiger question

This week's Oral Quarrel question asked Farmington and Farmington Hills residents: Come October, what will the Detroit Tigers have to show for their play during the 1984 baseball season?

Following are the responses:

At least pennant winners and probably series winners. The pessimists miss all the fun of

being enthusiastic.

Detroit needs a winner. They have good talent, good team corporation and they have a super chance for the pennant. Go Tigers go.

Yea Tigers, boo Panthers.

discover Michigan

by Bill Stockwell

DID YOU KNOW that Michigan once had a "king"? He was "King" James Jesse Slag, who set up a "kingdom" on Beaver Island in Lake Michigan.

Strang, who split off from the Mormons, ruled his colony for nearly 10 years, until he was killed by two of his subjects in 1856.

DID YOU KNOW that Lathrup Village was created by a woman? Louise Lathrup dreamed of and brought into existence a community of homes built of brick, stone or masonry having attached garages. The development was noted for its attractive lots. It was first known as "Towansite" and later as "Bungalow Village."

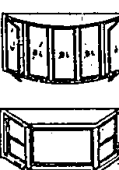
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