

Another Patton Associates S-M-A-R-T Briefing! **My Pivotal Career Moment**

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I was so afraid I was shaking. My bride of less than a year had her arm around my shoulders as I clung to her while sobbing on the sofa of our first apartment as newly-weds.

It was April 5, 1966.

Karen was doing her best to comfort me as I blubbered my uncertainties about what I should do. I sat there, quaking, at the potential consequences of my first and, arguably most pivotal, career crossroads in all my 24 years until then.

I had struggled with this terrible decision, internally, most waking moments over the last six months. At least, those moments when I was not distracted by more pressing matters.

And in many of those moments of indecision, I knew in my heart of hearts that I was in the process of making an awful mistake.

I had suspected I was making a terrible mistake soon after I had stood as a practise teacher in front of my first class of Senior High School students six agonizing months before. And the terror of working at a job I might grow to hate grew as I struggled with the thought. Such pain, I felt. Aweful!



"How can I turn back now?" I blubbered to my wife who was terrified by the sight of a frightened husband of less than one year. She looked lovingly back at me, clearly not knowing what was the right choice either.

"Could I renege after so many years of planning and hard work?" I continued to wonder, but out loud for the first time? The result of verbalizing that question terrified me even more.

How could I decline the prize, after so many years of planning and hard work, of a high-paying, High School teacher's job at the height of the baby-boomer crush in every Canadian High School from coast to coast? "The Toronto Boards of Education are not only short of teachers," I reminded Karen as I swept the detritus from under my nose with the back of my hand. "They're desperate!"

And in their desperation, they were bribing prospective new teachers with only a three-year BA to come and work for them without any teacher training. Those who also had a

four year Honours Degree were being offered lots of perks. And there were even more enticements for the one prospect in the entire country, the one written about on the Section Two front page of the Toronto Star newspaper, who not only had the "dream credentials" every High School Principal wanted but, also, a Masters Degree to boot.

I was "a much-desired male", among mostly women, who was about to graduate from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) with A+ marks in both his academic and practise teaching assignments.

That one person in all of Canada! That incredible catch!! That ideal candidate ...he was me! And I was terrified to turn my back on what I had worked so hard for.

"Wasn't it to me," my pride reminded Karen, "that the Principal of one of the top schools in Canada had offered a promotion to History and Geography Department Head, within two years, and to Vice-Principal within five years." He could do so because those teachers were retiring leaving positions for which I was qualified. This is what my prospective employer had explained to me the prior December.

That High School Principal had hired me 5 months before he was legally allowed to "under the table" and against Board and Ministry of Education policy. He did so because of the "teacher hiring crunch" he wanted to get a jump on and not lose the "pick of the crop" with top qualifications as I was called behind my back by my Professors at OISE.

And there were not only those advantages in coming to his North Toronto Collegiate to teach he pointed out to me when I had practise taught at his school the prior December. In addition he explained as he orally guaranteed me a position on his History Department staff, there were rewarding and publicly-honoured careers as Principals opening up every years because of retirements. In addition, there also were highly-paid positions as a bureaucrat in the public education field in the long term for someone with my qualifications as an educator.

"That has been my plan since about Grade 11 in High School", I wailed at Karen.

"How can we turn our backs on two months of summer holidays plus two weeks off at Christmas plus another week at Easter now ...especially after all that work to get those special qualifications?" I asked my new wife. "Don't you remember that is why you, jokingly remind me, that you married me?" I reminded her.

And in my heart, as I rocked in agony back and forth on that sofa so may years ago, I remember regretting that I had resisted the temptation to take my trip to Europe after getting my General BA three years before. I had promised that planned reward to myself for staying the education course for almost 10 years.

It was the \$350 intended for that trip, which had gone to buy my new, life-partner's, Karen's, engagement ring. I had scrimped and saved that \$350 out of the dubs and drabs left over from vacation job earnings after seven years of paying my University tuition and buying my school books. I'd invested the same amount of education time as a surgeon invests!

Who in the business world, that I now suspected I should join, would hire me with an MA in History? Let alone one that specialized in the period from 1860 to 1870 surrounding Canada's Confederation. "All that work! It will be useless to us", I shrieked at Karen as I sobbed harder.

"Why did we make the stupid choice after my MA not to teach immediately," I whined. We had decided together to do what so few prospective teachers did then ...take a full year to actually learn how to teach at Teachers College. "It will all have been a great waste of time, effort, and money," I painfully admitted to the wife who had worked while I continued doing university graduate work 10 months earlier following our marriage.

My extended education had been expensive and I had incurred a lot of debt to get it. In addition, we would not have the unrecoverable loss of three years' income to our new family. "Because I could have gone to work in business three years earlier," I lamented to Karen.

Three years previously, before my MA or Teachers College, I first had toyed with the idea of the dramatic shift in career direction we were now, in a crisis situation, trying to make.

The scary thought that maybe I did not want to teach after all had first arisen after my first summer job with BA, now Gulf, Oil at their then yet-to-open, new Research Centre, near Clarkson, Ontario, on the edge of Toronto in the Centre's important Shipping and Receiving Department.

I had been hired to assist the Shipper/Receiver because the company's President had put a push on getting the long-delayed Centre open by September 1st because he'd promised the Prime Minister of Canada that it *would be open* then. I was hired to be Assistant Shipper-Receiver, my first real job at age 22. Then, three days into my first experience in the marketplace, the guy whom I'd been hired to assist had a heart attack.

I was left running the Department by myself. "If you can just hold down the fort for a few days, we'll get some one in to take over", the Centre's General Manger said to me. Three months later and still without ever getting any help, while the person I had been hired to assist recuperated, I shook the B.A. Oil President's hand.

The big boss was touring the Shipping/Receiving/Stores area that I had had a ball running, single-handedly, all summer. (I chuckle when I think about it because this was the first of many times Karen & I were taken advantage of by more senior executives in

my years in the corporate world. Remember, I was a university kid hired originally to help someone with over 25 years experience to do what I had done alone all summer. Eventually, we wised-up and became entrepreneurs in 1987 ...about 20 years later.)

Running that department successfully and without help had been so exciting. And such a challenge.

That was when I first felt the lure of the marketplace as a more compelling draw on my spirit than the prospect of teaching High School kids. I was, from that President's handshake and personal compliment, very unsure that I any longer wanted to teach.

The sixteen to seventeen year old young people that I had practise-taught during Teacher's College did not seem to care much about Canadian history ...no matter how creatively I taught it.

And working under the constraints that the Ontario Ministry of Education was placing on teachers by means of its new, student-rights legislation was very unappealing to me. My discomfort was because many education experts were suggesting that the Government was in the process of "turning the asylum over to the inmates" and going to "dumb-down" Ontario's education system. (With the benefit of hindsight, many Ontario parents would agree both prophesies were more right than wrong.)

Those student-rights changes were the early mistakes made in a long, hard-fought battle for control of the Ontario Secondary School Education System between bureaucrats and the real educators in the classroom. They were the first of a continuing series of bureaucratic and political bunglings from which Ontario never has recovered as statistics and anecdotal evidence from parents would seem to prove.

But despite what I suspected about "the system's" problems, I procrastinated after getting my degree in 1965 making the pivotal decision I would have to make in May of 1967, two years later because I had planned to be a High School teacher for so long. (For the same reason, I turned down a crack at a Rhodes Scholarship to do a PhD in England after finishing my MA and before heading for OISE. I'd had enough with school!)

That final, awful, hour of painful indecision was on the day I had to go in to sign the contract for the long-planned-for job that had been promised at North Toronto Collegiate the prior December.

Karen pledged to support me in whatever I decided as I got up from the sofa. I did go to school that day. But, I refused to sign my life away and declined the choice plumb of a job I suspected I'd not enjoy.

Did I made the "right choice" in that first and pivotal career decision of my now 68 years of life? In retrospect, I've come to realize that it was [the finger of God](#) that was pointing the way in a changed direction.

Within one month of walking away from a teaching career, I was offered three great jobs. And during my tremulous search for a job in business, I discovered that no prospective employer seemed to be concerned that I had planned to be a teacher for almost 10 years. Or that I had an MA covering only eight years of Canadian History. (It was the late 60s when MBAs were king. And there were not enough to fill demand. So, my MA turned out to be an asset still.)

I accepted a job in HR at Maple Leaf Mills (MLM) Ltd. I began my career in the business world as a Personnel Assistant rather than in the Management Trainee position in Branch Administration, at IBM, or the same position in the Credit Department at Shell Oil.

I left MLM after about seven years as Assistant Director of HR to set up the Human Resources Department at ITT Grinnell Ltd., also in Toronto. After two years I started my 10-year, new career as a Management Consultant with three international firms. I also had a 2-year detour back into corporate management life as Benefits Manager for BA Oil before returning back to consulting to make sure that was the career and the stress I wanted for the rest of my working life.

Finally, in 1987, I decided, much to Karen's satisfaction, that I had my ladder against the wrong wall. April of that year, was another pivotal decision-making month for us. That month we made our 8th major career change to that point. (There's been many others since then.)

That month, we set up our current business, Patton Associates, People Development Coaches and Consultants. We have not looked back since.

Oh, there have been lots of troublesome times over the last 25 years of entrepreneurship and multipreneurship. But, God has led us and been with us ...each step of the way.

"Did you ever regret leaving teaching?" you ask. I have wondered again and again throughout the years about the 'rightness' of that pivotal, first career decision that has



brought me to where I am today, a multi-preneur with 45 years of business experience in people development.

But, regret leaving High School Teaching, I never have. And yes, I did do some management workshop training during the years.

But guess what? In late 1999, after four-plus years of being unable to work because of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, I took a part-time job to ease myself back into the work world and earn some desperately needed money.

That pivotal new job was at Toronto's Seneca College AS A TEACHER!

Since then, I have taught human resources management and customer service to working adult managers, in organizations, or teenage plus working-adult students in Colleges and Universities around Toronto, part-time, most semesters since then as an Adjunct Professor.

As a result, I have discovered my calling is as a business / life coach and part-time teacher. And I love it.

The wheel does turn. But, it grinds exceedingly slowly.

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