

Message from the Chair
By John C. Macaulay, CMA



So You Think You Can Plan Your Career?

Sometimes you may not get the job you want or your first choice of schools. Don't despair. Something better for you is probably right around the corner.

Visit any bookstore, library, or website and you'll find plenty of books, articles, and how-to manuals on detailed career planning. That certainly seems to be the advice of many experts these days as folks in a difficult economy struggle to control the outcome of their professional futures. Yet if my own experience is any indication, there's much to be learned about the benefits of remaining flexible about the future—of balancing the desire to remain on a carefully planned path with being open to possibilities that you may never have imagined.

Looking back on my own lengthy career (described later in this magazine), I found that although I had a general interest in business and then finance and accounting, I didn't have a clear desire to enter any specific industry or do any specific job. True, I had some geographic preferences: I knew I wanted to remain in the Midwest rather than relocate to the East or West Coast (which is why I chose the Kellogg School in Chicago over an Ivy League insti-

tution for my MBA studies, for example). But those two things—the profession and the location—were pretty much the only general preferences I had.

This open career plan enabled me to work in many different industries doing many different things, including being part of a product development team for new games to collaborating with the Japanese on the formation of a major joint venture in construction equipment to serving as CFO of a teen ministry. I served in jobs that were challenging, exciting, fun—and probably not what I would have planned if you had asked me as a student what I wanted for my career. I met fascinating, brilliant people; I grew in my accounting and finance skills; I developed the ability to lead others and to communicate more effectively. In short, I became a better professional and a better person.

One of the most important things I learned was something you hear from those who have been there but don't really understand until you've experienced it yourself: That often from your worst disappointments and seeming failures come opportunities for greater growth. I can recall

more than one situation where I realized or, shall we say, was helped to realize that it was time to move on. At the time, the rupture seemed disappointing, even devastating. Yet out of these situations emerged other opportunities that were even better—ones that I wouldn't have seen had I remained where I was.

They say that life is lived forwards but can only be understood backwards. Looking back on my career, I couldn't agree more.

This career planning philosophy also shaped my involvement in IMA®, which came about almost by accident. I wasn't a member of a local chapter or council, but I was among those who had taken the first CMA® (Certified Management Accountant) exam back in 1972 and had been corresponding with the ICMA® about getting my official certificate. One day, I received a letter asking if I wanted to serve on the informal CMA exam review committee. I said “yes,” not really knowing what this volunteer role entailed but being willing to serve an organization and a program that I believed in. That was nearly 40 years ago, and I've been saying “yes” to IMA ever since.

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I hope that my experience inspires you to be open to possibilities and to follow your heart when tough decisions arise. I invite you to share your thoughts with me on this or any other subject at jmacaulay@imanet.org. **SF**