Based on the May 12, 2010 keynote address to

The 2010 graduating ECE class at Carnegie Mellon University

Hirable for Life™
A Consultant’s Perspective on Finding and Keeping Work
Very Hirable

The 2010 CMU ECE grads

Impressive!
This Talk is NOT About

Resume writing
Job search strategy
Salary negotiation
Some hard facts for students
The Truth

Nobody owes us a job

What we love to do must be (and remain) relevant to those who will pay for it
Some hard facts for us
“The Great Recession lost many more jobs than the past few recessions, and it's recovering much slower.”

My Engineering Problem

Be hired for 1 to 3 new R&D or business development jobs each year

For Life!
Utilize the greatest engineering tool:

The worked example!
Why are New Engineering Grads “Very Hirable?”

Up-to-date skills

Good value

“Recommended” (GPA) by someone they trust (the university)

Demonstrated results (graduation)

Easy to find
Hirable by Whom?

A different group within your company

Another company

Another industry

A venture capitalist (to invest in your new business idea)

Your same group – would they re-hire you?

Yourself
During Every Downturn

The phone calls come

Some had warning
Most get severance
Few are surprised (in hindsight) or angry
All are concerned

Among them, top engineering school grads who started careers as VERY HIRABLE, too
US Unemployment Rate by Education Level

Source: The Atlantic 9/9/2011
College Education’s Shelf Life

A lifetime?

About 10 years?

When is “mid-career?”
A Recent Job Posting on the Web

Location:  San Diego, CA
Job Type:  Full-Time/Regular
Level of Education:  BA/BS
Salary:  Negotiable
Job Level:  Mid Career (2+ years of experience)
Date Updated:  06-23-2009
Number Of Openings:  1
The Great Recession is/was Tough

Senior engineers
Managers
Directors
VPs

Even Senior Fellows!

When your company goes away, your job goes away
“Fully 45% of the unemployed have been out of work for more than six months, nearly twice as disastrous as any post-war recession.”

Lesson of the Steel Mill

Source: Pennsylvania State Archives
South Works, Carnegie Steel Company, South Sharon, PA, circa 1910
“You Are FIRED.”
Forever Industries?

- Video Games
- Internet
- Credit Cards
- Semiconductors
- ... 
- Cell phones
- Energy
- Pharmaceuticals
- Universities
- Crime
- War
- Poverty ...
“The only thing that is constant is change.”
Change is Accelerating

Consultants are among the first to see it

My suggestion:
We all must be good at refreshing our “hirability”

Repeatedly and Rapidly
% of Workers Who Are Temporary

Source: The Atlantic 9/9/2011
“Micro-Careers”

Old: 1 or 2 employers over a 30-year career

New: 10-20 employers over a 50-year career

We must be **Hirable for Life**!

Note: a different “employer” may be a different group within the same company
Change is Swift, for Products and Personnel

HP’s TouchPad cancelled after 2 months on the market

HP’s CEO, Leo Apotheker, to be replaced after 1 year?
Note

Hirability ≠ Higher Salary
Hirability ≠ Higher Salary

Hirability =

More security, options, enjoyment
The Unspoken Universal Business Plan

Revenue, Profit vs. Time
Realities of the (Bachelor of Science) Engineer’s “Business Plan”

Realities of the (MS, PhD) Engineer’s “Business Plan”

Realities of the Consulting Business Plan

Revenue, Profit

Time

Hirable for Life: IEEE IMS 9/22/2011
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Change is Accelerating

Experienced engineers must compete with new grads and outsourcing today

However, the new grads and lower-cost labor of today will face similar competition in the coming years

Only FASTER!
Actually, We’re All in this Together

We will ALL compete with

Automation
  Working around the clock
  Always getting faster (e.g., Moore’s law)

Cloud computing
  Instant
  Free
  Fun
“Online gamers have solved the structure of a retrovirus enzyme whose configuration had stymied scientists.

The players were adept at a computer game, Foldit, that allows players to collaborate and compete in predicting the structure of protein molecules.

After scientists repeatedly failed to piece together the structure of a protein-cutting enzyme from an AIDS-like virus, they called in the Foldit players. ... “

Source: Drug Discovery and Development 9/20/2011
Another Lesson from the Students
What’s After “Very Hirable?”

Very hirable again, 3-7 years out

Industry experience
  Results
  Contacts
  Know-how

Skills: mostly up-to-date

You are still a good value
  But, you are competing with the WORLD

Harder to find
After That?
Look to the Derivatives

College: Rate-of-change of knowledge is extremely high

Typical employee
Rate-of-change of knowledge decreases
Rate-of-change of experience is high
  This decreases, too
Rate-of-change of productivity (efficiency) increases
  But, it can level-off

If the rate-of-change of knowledge, experience, efficiency goes down
  Future value to the company, relative to newer-hires, goes down
5 Keys to Remaining Hirable for Life

• Continue to rapidly acquire new knowledge
• Continue to gain new experience
• Demonstrate your capabilities and share them
• Be easy to find
• Remain a good value
5 Actions to Take to Remain Hirable for Life

• Be really good at what you do (become an expert)

• Focus on the customer

• Network effectively

• Make people want to find you

• Be financially able to wait for the opportunity of your choosing
In the Time We have Today

We’ll focus on one of the actions:

Be really good at what you do

(the slides are included, but we’ll have to skip to the end)
Be Really Good at What You Do

For the students ...

Continue your formal education

First Job choice
  Options, training, mentor, and resources
Be Really Good at What You Do

For the rest of us ...

Maintain or increase the rate-of-change of your knowledge and experience

Become an **Expert** in your field

- Experts can explain things clearly (e.g., to a bright high school student)
- Experts don’t know EVERYTHING!
- Experts know the “4 corners” of a field
- Experts know the **right questions** to ask

Expand what you consider to be “your field”

- Narrow core expertise, but broad application
Be Really Good at What You Do

Actions You Can Take Now

Ask better questions

Identify and analyze everyday experts around you (How would you like them to behave; how do they behave?)

Write up an explanation and non-trivial worked example for something you like and know well

  Revise it many times!
  Could YOU understand it as a high school senior?

When you are satisfied

  Publish it, post it, record it, translate it, extend it, improve it, make it faster!
Be Good at What You Do: The H4L Goal

Deep expertise that is broadly applicable
How Can You be Sure You’re an Expert?

Explain such that others can explain

Always know the next step (specific action) to take
Experts, Take Note

Who is served by these phrases?

“It depends”

“It’s trivial”

“It’s complicated”
Set a Reminder: Expertise
6 Months from Today – March 22, 2012

What was the best explanation you gave over the last 6 months?

How did you measurably deepen your expertise?
  - How has this helped your customer?
  - How has this helped your employer?
  - How has this helped you?

What is your plan to extend your expertise to a new area over the next 6 months?
  - How will they (people in that area) know?

**Derivative:** How will you increase the number of people who consider you an expert?

The Other 4 Actions to Take to Remain Hirable for Life (will have to wait!)

• Be really good at what you do

• Focus on the customer

• Network effectively

• Make people want to find you

• Be financially able to wait for the opportunity of your choosing
Looking for Volunteers

Will you help me refine the Hirable for Life™ training program for engineers and scientists?
Life is Long, Time is Short

After thousands of years, ...

Wright brothers’ first flight
December 17, 1903

Man landing on moon
July 20, 1969

~66 years from first flight to landing on the moon
(look to the derivative!)
Thank You!

The future remains bright!
Align your efforts with the needs of your customer (and those of your NEXT customer!)

Economic cycles come and go
As we say in Texas, ...

Dig your well before you’re thirsty
Please Stay in Touch

To receive updates, please register your email address at

www.HirableForLife.com

Additional thoughts or suggestions

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Let’s expand our networks:

LinkedIn:  www.LinkedIn.com/in/ChuckSobey

Twitter:  www.twitter.com/ChannelScience