



## All the Right Moves

Headhunter **Peter Crist** on when and how to make your next move. And, yes, Churchill.

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**Who he is:** Chairman, **Crist Associates**

**Who he's placed:** David Devonshire, CFO, Motorola; Michael Moskow, CEO, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago; Jeff Campbell, CFO, McKesson

**Currently filling:** C-level positions at American Express, HSBC, GMAC, Omnicare

### How do you determine if a career move is the right one?

You have to be capable of being intellectually honest about your own skill set if you're going to make the right decisions. The people who are most successful are those who have a mental vision of what has worked well for them in the past, both in terms of the size of the company and what I call the "velocity" of a company. Do you work better in a small company or a big company? A slow, plodding bureaucratic environment or a fast-paced, energized organization?

### What's the right pace to navigate your career path?

I think most people have a five-year clock in their hand. If things are going well they're okay, but after five years they start thinking about another play. Let's put it this way: Whether they consciously or subconsciously do this, people think about their existing situation and ask if the grass is greener on the other side. I think it's healthy to acknowledge that all of us occasionally need to be repotted.

### Does loyalty still have value, then?

Companies prefer people who have seen multiple business models, products, and ways of approaching business ideas. That can mean you've been at multiple companies or you've endured at a large company that has evolved over time. I very much respect loyalty. I don't like someone jumping around every couple of years. It tells me the person has a short attention span or there's something wrong with the DNA of the professional. People who make decisions based on the emotion of the culture, the people they're with, tend to stay longer, and that says something positive about the fiber of that individual.

### You meet with four or five candidates a day. What's the most common turnoff?

Talking too much and not listening. When I'm interviewing you, I'm probing you on certain topics, but in the end it's a two-way discourse. I want it to be a conversation, and if the other person is blabbering away and isn't hearing me, I instantly shut down. It shows insensitivity. If you can't listen, you don't have empathy -- the ability to engage -- and that's an incredible talent in business. Without that, I certainly don't want you for the job.

### Any atypical career advice you've stumbled on along the way?

I'm a history freak, and there's a lot to learn from history. Winston Churchill and Abraham Lincoln both displayed instances of seeing a situation unfold when everyone else missed it. With Churchill, it was recognizing that Nazism was evil. In the case of Lincoln, it was bringing together a country that was split apart. Achieving that basic clarity of thought, seeing a situation for what it really is, and acting on it is the best advice I can give.



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