

INTRODUCTION: LIVING IN QUAKE COUNTRY

Is This You?

Do you have a boss who's not the CEO? Do you have direct reports? Does their success depend on you and your success depend on them?

Welcome to The Middle—perhaps the most crucial location in the world of business. The Middle is more often defined by the questions surrounding it than by the value it creates.

On any day of the week and sometimes weekends, your job in The Middle is tough. Add to that the familiar challenges you face outside of work—the pressures of family life, a kid who needs help with math, a dog that wants to play catch, the new diet to start, eldercare, prescriptions, finances, 401(k)s and 529(b)s. More to do at work. More to do outside of work. You feel trapped by the confines of time.

To cope with the new realities, you work eight hours a week more than your parents did and sleep two hours less a night than your grandparents. (It's not your imagination—we have the survey figures to prove it.) Everyone is looking for ways to save time, collapse time, expand time. Those who can't do it sacrifice sleep, to the detriment of their health. Otherwise, they increasingly fall behind.

Is this you?

If so, you're not alone. There are 5.4 million managers leading teams in more than 30,000 U.S. firms. They spend each day pressured from above and below, searching for the answers that matter.

But for too many managers the existing answers fall far short. In a national survey of middle managers (Fall 2005), Accenture found that the level of satisfaction that managers reported with their companies had collapsed from 67 percent in 2004 to 48 percent in 2005. In a more recent Accenture survey (Fall 2006) that included managers in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, and Australia, the numbers remained unchanged. Managers are at risk and the output of this collapse is reflected in their actions. According to Accenture, 58 percent of U.S. managers are open to changing jobs and 30 percent are currently looking to make a change. In other words, more than half of the managers leading teams today are ready to walk out the door—leaving their teams, their companies, and for some, if necessary, their homes and communities, behind in hopes of making a fresh start elsewhere.

This came as shocking news to some business leaders. But many managers had seen it building for years—years in which managers in The Middle have been displaced by technology, de-positioned by consultants, handcuffed by red tape, distracted by mergers, spoofed in the media, and denigrated as low-value bureaucrats. No wonder so many managers lost their way and (worse) lost their desire.

Is this you? If so, welcome to Quake Country.

~~Quake Country~~

~~Today's managers no longer live on safe, high ground. Instead, they live in Quake Country, where the land has been eroded, squeezed, and shifted like the ground surrounding the San Andreas fault. It's a place where, as one manager told us, "It seems as if every time I get some forward momentum, the ground falls out from under me."~~

~~In Quake Country, technology, competition, innovation, and social change are all in a continuous state of hyperdrive. No wonder the business shocks are coming with greater frequency than ever before. We see the effects each morning in *The Wall Street Journal*, with some companies~~