

The Scary “R” Word

An Employee’s Viewpoint

Does the “R” word—recession—have you worried? Do you think it is time to move on?

Don’t panic!

Actually being nervous right now is a good sign that you are probably an eagle. Translated, your company needs you more than ever if the economy slows. However, that doesn’t mean you have to be stupid. This column will focus on what you should be doing routinely to maximize your career potential.

Resume and Networking—Big Mistake

The biggest mistake people make in a career change concerns the resume and networking. Ultimately, you will need a resume. Nonetheless, this “necessary evil” is overwhelmingly abused and greatly ineffective. Although Internet use is rapidly climbing the list, the other major blunder is immediately networking with friends.

As a headhunter, I have viewed close to twenty thousand resumes. Very few were any good. It seems that everybody is following the same bad advice. What is even more perplexing is that an “expert” will correctly emphasize the need for accomplishments but then give templates that don’t have any!

Networking is by far the best method for finding a new opportunity. However, what constitutes a good networking plan remains a secret. Immediately calling friends without proper preparation leads to frustration and disappointment.

Career Planning Needs Routines

Not that we have dispelled with the myths, let’s walk through the Energized Hiring for Individuals (www.UnlockedPotential.com). The first realization is that a career is a lifetime. You do not start brushing your teeth just because you finally decided to see a dentist; it is a daily routine. Maximizing a career means daily, weekly, and monthly routines.

A daily requirement is a Contact Log—a very valuable, networking resource. Every day when you contact someone record in a notebook or a planner: the date, the person’s title, name, company name, contact information, and your discussion. Psychologically, calling

someone from this list although he/she might not even remember you is tremendously easier than calling a total stranger. The key is that *you know* you have talked to this person before. You need these calls!

A weekly plan includes gathering material for your Career Portfolio. As you complete a project or solve a problem, summarize the accomplishment with the emphasis on the impact to the company. Staple this summary to any visual aids that you can use to explain it.

As a monthly networking tool, set up an e-mail list that contains the names of people you would call tomorrow to seek a new opportunity. The goal is to build a list of over 200 contacts. Once a month, share with your network an item of interest like an IBJ article (Use an acknowledged article from their web site). As a career enhancement tool, attach the article to the e-mail and then use a summary as the message. It is simple and takes about five minutes. Eventually when you do decide to pursue a new opportunity, this goodwill should result in more interviews.

Job Search Goes Active

When a job search goes active, the first step is to prepare a Career Portfolio. It is a visual collection of a person's accomplishments. Artists, skilled trades, and others have been using portfolios for years. You must have one to maximize your career!

The Career Portfolio activity naturally flows into putting together an Illuminary Resume.

With these tools—the Career Portfolio and the Illuminary Resume, you are ready to begin Launching a Career Change. We will skip most of the methods and focus on one aspect of networking—calling friends and colleagues.

The problem with immediately calling friends as part of a networking plan is the assumption that your friends fully realize your career potential. They don't! Test this by asking one of your closest friends to describe your ideal job. Normally, it will be substantially less than your full capabilities. Contrast that with an example where a Career Portfolio saved the day. A Big 3 engineer was not being considered for a promotion. Although his boss knew him for over ten years, he was not aware of his full qualifications until they reviewed his portfolio. He got that promotion.

Power Networking

Combining the Career Portfolio with the Illuminary Resume to maximize a network call goes something like this: “Jim, I am not sure if you know what is going on here but I think it is time to explore other opportunities. I need your expert advice. I have, of course updated my resume which I’ll send to you for review. However, I am more interested in your help with a new interviewing technique. I have put together a Career Portfolio, which looks like a tremendous idea. What I like to do is to kill two birds with one stone. Can we meet some time next week where I can try this interviewing technique on you and get your feedback? Who knows, you might have some ideas on who could use me. When is a good day for us to get together?”

That’s an interview, which can lead to other interviews. Just as important, it is establishing commitment from a friend. Contrast that against the normal 5-minute network call, which results in a friend receiving your resume and little else. Invariably, the people using this technique hear: “Bob, I didn’t know you did that.”

The recent full economy was nice from the aspect of job seekers. Although companies were still slow to act, progress has been made with the realization that a company has a name but its people give it meaning. Programs are slowly surfacing to maximize the “finding and obtaining” portions of hiring. It remains to be seen if companies will fall back into the old school of hiring as the economy slows.

No matter what changes, it is still the responsibility of an individual to maximize his/her career potential. Hiring is still a mystery to most. Invest in yourself by learning the hiring secrets. The confidence factor alone will get you through any rough times ahead.