

Don't Burn Your Bridges

The job market seems to be improving, albeit slowly. More TENG members have accepted new positions in the past few weeks than in the previous three months. You have not seen all of the success stories yet because I am either awaiting member permission to make an announcement, a few members have requested confidentiality, or the announcement is on my "to do" list. The news of members being hired is the best news of all, but lately it has raised some concern for me. Some newly hired people are asking me to remove them from the TENG distribution list. Not everyone is making this request, but enough are doing it to have my attention and it puzzles me somewhat. Perhaps some of their reasons are included in this list:

- For some, looking for a new job is like buying a car or a house or anything else. Once you make the purchase, you no longer need to look at anything else.
- Maybe they are afraid that they will see a lead for a job that is better than what they just accepted. The period of adjustment in any new position is very challenging and full of ups and downs. An intriguing job lead could be tempting if it shows up on a bad day. Not knowing about it helps to reduce the potential for buyer's remorse.
- Everyone is being bombarded by Emails that clutter their inbox. A few members have commented that they don't wish to deal with the Email volume. This is another form of information overload. New job demands and busy schedules leave little, if any time for reading what may seem to be non-essential Email.
- Others may feel that TENG doesn't offer sufficient value, or they may not have been a member long enough to fully understand membership benefits.
- Some have short memories or are in denial that they will be in transition again.

Everyone is free to do as they please, and that is not in question. I also understand that we will have some turnover in our membership. I recall someone once said, "You can't please all of the people all of the time". TENG is a living organization, which like any other, has good and bad qualities and since I created it, I am at the center of them. While I accept responsibility for all the negatives, I would still like to think that the good outweighs the bad.

Some members may be missing the whole point behind TENG membership. It is for senior IT executives in transition and for those who are actively employed. The idea is for members to move from Active to Associate Member and back to Active Member status as their situations change. The "life cycle" of most senior IT executives is very short, averaging eighteen to thirty-six months. In the coming years we can assume that the volatility of these positions will remain at present levels and may worsen. The odds are high that anyone accepting a new job now will be reentering the job market again in about two years. Advance warning signals in the guise of top management changes, business reversals, pending mergers, acquisitions and Enron-type scandals should be taken seriously by any senior executive. Many people wait for someone else to be let go, and refuse to believe it can happen to them. Others are in denial, thinking or hoping that this will be the job they keep for ten or fifteen years. I find this to be somewhat bizarre in light of the fact that even CEO's are fair game for getting fired and according to a recent Business Week article, are getting axed in record numbers. This shortens your life

expectancy on the job even more. If the CEO is fired five months after you've been hired, her or his successor will want to hire a more loyal team and you will be history. The newspaper, USA Today reported on Tuesday, May 7, 2002, that the CEO and CFO of software maker, Peregrine Systems, in San Diego, stepped down following allegations of \$100 million in wrongly booked revenue, audited by Arthur Andersen. I suspect that any Peregrine senior executive must not feel very secure at this time. In polite parlance, "stuff happens" and when it hits the fan, innocent people get dirty. While you may not have advance warning of all the negative forces at work in your company, part of your job now is to be ready for them, nonetheless. As the Boy Scouts remind us, "Be Prepared".

Many of you have "gotten religion". Some of you are so shaken by your recent experiences in transition, that you have promised to stay networked forever. Hopefully you will do so. The business world is a much different place than it was when we started our careers. It is more harsh and less forgiving. It will become more so in the wake of corporate scandals, shareholder anger and government investigations. IT executives are in an excellent position to become scapegoats or at best victims of "collateral damage" in military terms.

Let's review some membership facts:

- TENG membership is free of charge.
- It is a growing organization with a growing national focus.
- It is changing. Growth will help to shape future change. We have chapters in Boston, Stamford, NJ, Atlanta and Dallas. More will be added. We have launched TENG-Discussion Group on Yahoo Groups. We are considering special interest groups such as financial services, retail, etc. We may change our job lead distribution channels. But please understand that I have a full time job too. My employers are very generous to allow me to use company time, equipment and resources to operate the TENG, but I do as much as I can on evenings and weekends at home, on my time.
- All you have to do is receive Emails. You may delete them, as you deem appropriate.
- TENG membership allows Associate (employed) Members the opportunity to maintain a passive, no-risk confidential window on the job market. This involves less physical effort than reading the Sunday want ads in the newspaper. You can save them for future reference much easier than making a scrapbook from newspaper classifieds.

As discussed in our last newsletter, when you land in your next position, it won't last until retirement unless you're almost there. Being in senior management and earning over \$200,000 per year does not guarantee you anything other than a mandate deliver value added every day. It is also your responsibility, to manage your career. That is an ongoing, permanent process, not something you do when you are out of work. It is time to adapt a mindset that is more like that of a mutual fund portfolio manager and to keep an eye on your career, where it's going and how you are growing. You need to benchmark yourself. To do that, you must review at least annually what you have accomplished and learned. If you are receiving the Emailed job leads via TENG, you then have a constant national snapshot of the senior IT executive job market. You will then always know what skills and experience are in demand and at what price. The TENG can't share every job available in the market, but we will see enough to have a representative sample. Why anyone would want to disconnect from this is difficult to comprehend.

Once you start your next position, consider doing all of the following:

- Maintain your TENG membership as an Associate Member. Nominate new members. As the TENG grows, the quantity of leads it shares grows with it. This will make it more effective the next time you need it. Interact with our discussion group. Offer help and advice to Active members. They may be in a position to help you in the future. If TENG has not fulfilled your needs, then find another network group that will.
- Join the Society for Information Management (SIM), if a chapter exists in your local area. SIM is another successful vehicle for building contacts and staying current with IT and business issues.
- Review and update your resume at least once annually. Compare your accomplishments and experience against job profiles either shared by the TENG or found elsewhere. Determine whether your skills are in demand. Are you going stale? Should you mount a job search before the axe falls?
- Answer all phone calls, Emails and other inquiries from executive job seekers. Share as much as you can with them. They may hold the key to your next job and will be glad to return a favor.

Unless you are independently wealthy, your career is your primary revenue stream and it must be managed and protected. You can no longer trust your employer to give you the career that you think you deserve. The age of entitlement is over when it comes to employment. Mergers, acquisitions, corruption, investor pressure, global competition, technology and rapidly changing business models have taken care of that. Human capital, while very essential to a successful enterprise, is increasingly regarded as a commodity and senior executives are no exception. Add in the frequent misperceptions of IT executives by CEOs and your career has all the volatility of a powder keg. But you can assume some control, if you deal with your career management proactively, rather than waiting for the next corporate shakeout. You are in charge of your career, not your employer or some recruiter. Ultimately you are solely responsible for any career decisions you make. Make them carefully and thoughtfully.

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