

Maybe You Need a Break

It's hard to live your life thankfully, to smell the roses and relax when you are watching your life savings, home equity and other reserves dwindle away to help you pay the bills and survive. Although we should be very thankful for what we have, it can still be painful to watch neighbors; friends or relatives take vacations, buy cars, go out to dinner and lead a seemingly normal life while your world and your net worth are disintegrating. We have all been socialized to get a good education and do our best at our jobs to get ahead and have a secure life style. The convergence of the tech meltdown, recession, 9/11 and business globalization/outsourcing have changed this. Someone deleted our rule book and now no one knows what the new rules will be. Members have commented on occasion that they advise their daughters and sons not to pursue an IT career. Others ask me, what should I tell my kid to do? I don't have any answers for this one. As the father of a teenager, I am trying to help her discover her passion. I'm hoping that she along with a higher force will take it from there. Our present economic state may be temporary, but we've endured it for about three years, which seems like an eternity. Not knowing the outcome creates a lingering sense of hopelessness, futility and despair.

Recently the stock markets have been heading in the right direction. Some people say that this is the first sign of a recovery. Whether this is true will be revealed in the future and some randomly lucky economist will get to say, "I told you so". It reminds me of a Wall Street "guru" who received notoriety for accurately predicting the Crash of 1987, but who has not called anything right since. They're still getting a paycheck, however.

We can't change our world around us. This includes all of the geo-political and business conditions we are facing, along with SARS, globalization, deflation and every other problem we can imagine. Some pundits comment that this is the worst economy and job market since the early nineteen eighties. Others attempt to compare it to the Great Depression. While our present condition is unlike anything anyone can remember a study of history reveals that others who came before us in centuries long ago endured times of pestilence, political turmoil, economic upheaval, war and worse. I am confident that their world was every bit as scary to them as ours is to us.

While we can work for change, we can't force it to happen. I'm sure that in the past all of you have endured vendor pressure at the end of a month or quarter to make a buy decision. This is merely the sales representative's effort to make her or his "numbers". Judging from comments that some of you are sharing with me, many job seekers are of this same mindset continually. One member shared a vignette from a networking event where he witnessed another participant, obviously under stress, who as agitated and overeager to hear every scrap of information and jump on every lead, acting almost like the Mad Hatter in Alice in Wonderland. No amount of anxiety, exertion, pressure, constant follow-up or micro management will cause conditions around us to change. When I first entered the search business twenty-seven years ago, my trainers urged me to learn to control my clients and candidates, in an effort to close deals. I became a top producer only after I learned that they were wrong. Business relationships can be ruined by overly aggressive and assertive behavior. While buy decisions must be made at some point, they must be encouraged with finesse and proper timing. Unreasonable delays and the inability to make

a decision are decisions in themselves and must be accepted as such. When you encounter such behavior, move on to something else and perhaps check back in a few months. I learned very early in my career that all I can control is my personal attitude, effort and activities. While I can be persuasive, it is impossible for me to control the thoughts and actions of others. My success was based upon consistent, professional behavior and not arm-twisting.

How do you keep your sanity and balance through all this, much less focus on finding your next position? There are no easy answers here but you may wish to consider some of the following ideas:

- Finding a new job may be a full time job, but you also need some down time. Pace yourself, get some physical exercise, take a walk, play golf or tennis, but do whatever you enjoy doing to recharge your batteries. Many find doing volunteer work, running a networking group; leading a TENG Chapter or performing some other form of outreach is a stress breaker that gives them a needed feeling of fulfillment.
- Networking is not a one-shot effort. Follow-up with people previously contacted. Some of our members have landed this way because they jogged someone's memory. Others, who delayed in follow-ups, have missed good opportunities. Your contacts are busy themselves and may forget your conversation with them. They may have or hear of the perfect job for you, but may assume that you have gone off the market because they haven't heard from you. If you are not sure how often to check in with someone, ask them, "May I call you again to discuss my search? When would be a good time frame for us to speak next; would thirty days work for you or would you prefer something else?" While weekly contact is overkill, depending upon the contact, every thirty to sixty days may be appropriate. In other cases, a six-month follow-up may be suitable. Plan and schedule these calls via whatever means you prefer. Someone recently described networking as building a web. Check with any spider and you will see that it wanders all over its web repeatedly.
- Practice self-screening and avoid forcing yourself on companies and recruiters. Allowing "checkbook pressure" to influence your behavior does not work, whether you are a sales representative or a job seeker; and when you are in transition, you are both. Your sense of urgency and the stress will only damage your reputation and future candidacy. You can't force a company or recruiter to consider you. The overused line from an old deodorant commercial still applies, "Never let them see you sweat".
- Accept that this is one of your life's challenges. Thankfully, we have witnessed the recent landings of numerous members. I can only imagine how difficult it must be for those of you still in transition to observe this. While reading the success of your peers offers some inspiration to go on with your search to find your reward, it must also trigger some feeling of "why them and not me?" It's almost like watching someone else win the lottery. Cancer sufferers probably ask this question in reverse.

The only real answer is to keep networking and keep things in perspective. Good luck in all your efforts.

At the suggestion of a member of TENG Boston, I would like to remind you that this and all past TENG Newsletters are posted on our Web site. Go to <http://www.brunerconsulting.com/articles.htm> Please feel free to read them at your convenience.

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