

When the going gets tough

As they say in the classics, the tough get going. More and more frequently over the past several months I have been working with people who have been retrenched. I don't know of an industry which hasn't been affected by recent and ongoing economic events. There's a lot of anger, frustration and blame out there. People who were in what they thought were secure careers with a bright future are suddenly without security and the future seems bleak. Retrenchment packages offered by many employers are only enough to keep people afloat for a few months or, in many cases, a few weeks. And because of this, competition for the jobs that are available is getting more and more intense and the need to get back into work quickly is paramount in people's thoughts.

Although the financial impact of suddenly losing your job is tough enough to endure, the psychological impact can be even deeper and more enduring. People are finding that it's taking longer to get a job, that they are having to accept jobs which they don't really want and that they are having to work in organisations and locations in which they don't want to work. The longer a person is out of work, the more frustrating it becomes and the bigger the potential impact on a person's self worth. People start doubting their abilities and begin to wonder whether things will ever get back to the way they were.

So, what are people who are finding the going tough doing? Over the past few months I have quizzed clients who have found themselves suddenly out of work to find out what's working for them. Here are some of the strategies they are adopting.

Focus on the present and get busy.

Looking back at how things were is a big mistake because it's instantly depressing when you compare it with your current situation. Trying to look into the future is equally problematic because it all looks too gloomy. Trying to be positive when you are depressed is near on impossible. Therefore, they accept what has happened, understand that it's not their fault, realise that they couldn't have seen it coming and focus their energies on doing what must be done now.

People tell me that one of the biggest issues when they are suddenly faced with 40 or 50 or more hours of "spare" time a week and no commute to work is that they either go crazy or start shuffling around the house aimlessly or become addicted to day time TV and Tim Tams. They therefore fill their days with meaningful activities that make them feel that they have accomplished something worthwhile. Although it's not always realistic to spend 8 hours a day looking for a job, there are plenty of other useful things they do to avoid getting into a rut.

Make a list of contacts.

Now is the time to leverage your networks for all they are worth. There are still jobs out there and a high proportion are not advertised: they are often filled by people who are recommended by others. People tell me they often find career opportunities where they least expected them.

Make a list of everyone you know, irrespective of whether you think they can help you directly or how well you know them. Just about everyone wants to help someone else when asked. Make sure you let people know you are in the market. Like that old ad for Northern Territory tourism said: "you never never know if you never never go." And besides, it fills in the time with something useful.

Once people know you are in the market and know the skills and experience you have, you will be surprised at what comes out of the woodwork. I have heard of dozens of instances where someone who knows someone who is a cousin of their hairdresser's ex wife calls them about an opportunity. It's basic network marketing: if you know just 10 people and they each on average know 10 other different people, there's a chance that one of those 100 people might be able to help. Or, they might know someone who can.

Contact the people on your list.

If you're the shy type or just don't feel comfortable knocking on doors or calling people, that's why god created email. If you can get the email addresses of 10 people, send them your resume with an email that simply says something like this: "I just thought I'd let you know that I'm looking for (insert type of job) in the

(insert industry or area of work). Just in case you know of anyone or come into contact with someone who could be interested in talking to me, I've attached my resume. Thanks for your help."

You can dress it up a bit if you like and add personal bits depending on how well and under what circumstances you know them, but keep it simple. Use the Goldilocks approach: not too humble and not too assertive.

Just like you, most people will try to help. Even if they can't help directly, they might know someone who can. Your resume could end up being sent to dozens of people, some of whom might call or email to ask to meet you.

Make the most out of funerals.

When I asked a client to tell me the strangest place where they got a job opportunity, they told me that it was at a wake following a friend's funeral where they got into a conversation with someone they hadn't met before who was a colleague of the departed. The topic of conversation turned to "what do you do" and the client casually threw in that they were pursuing career opportunities. Business cards were exchanged, a meeting was arranged with a colleague of the friend's colleague and a job offer followed.

Now this is not going to happen every day, nor am I suggesting that you become a funeral junky just to hit on people for a job. I am suggesting that if you are in the market, make sure everyone you engage in conversation at social events knows about it. You just never know. Remember, even people you don't know want to help and they just might, if they know you need it.

Talk to people who have been there and done that.

Chances are you probably know other people who have been retrenched or who were retrenched a while ago. Find out what they did and what worked for them. While doing exactly what they did might not work for you or be appropriate for your circumstances, picking their brains might spark some ideas in yours.

Reframe the meaning of the word 'retrenched'.

Whoever coined the phrase that "sticks and stones might break my bones and words will never hurt me" had never been retrenched. It's an ugly word. To be retrenched means you have been removed, deleted or omitted. How savage can it get? Redundant isn't any better: it means you were excess to the organisation's requirements. How does that make you feel? Baggage?

When talking to others about their employment situation, some people say they are in between jobs or searching for better opportunities and so on. Some people say that being retrenched could present them with new opportunities they might not otherwise have. Others say that they were thinking of leaving anyway and this just gave them the impetus to do it. Some people blame their employer and many blame the government or the former government.

To paraphrase Anthony Robbins: something has meaning only in the frame or context in which we perceive it. Pretty deep, huh. I wish I'd said that. I think he was saying that if we can assign a different meaning to something, we can see it in a different way. And, if that new way of interpreting something is more useful, then walk around with that new meaning.

It's like when some people see a 500ml glass with 250ml of liquid in it they see it as half full, while others see it as half empty. Both are correct. One might be more useful than the other. There are also those sickeningly optimistic people who actually believe that problems are opportunities in disguise. All strength to them. And you know what? They are right.

The point is that it doesn't matter how you do it: what matters is that you find some way of removing the negative meaning and replacing it with a positive. Whatever works for you.

I'm not suggesting that this is a way of not facing reality or of deluding yourself that things are just fine and that everything will work out. I am suggesting that a positive approach sure beats a negative perspective when the going gets tough. Just talk to or read about people who have overcome adversity we can't even imagine. They will all tell you that a positive frame on the situation was absolutely paramount.

Keep things normal.

Doing whatever they normally used to do before leaving for work helps prevent some people from getting into a rut and helps retain the discipline and organisation associated with going to work. Some people even dress as if they were going to work. Some people think this is going a bit far because being at home in your suit or overalls or uniform just seems a bit over the top. The point is, keep doing as many of the things you used to do as is sensible in your situation. Many people tell me that it keeps them focused and energised and stops them from getting into bad habits.

Get your mind into shape.

Borrowing from the past seems to be a useful strategy to get your mind into the state it needs to be in to overcome obstacles and face challenges. Many clients have told me they found that when they thought about challenges they successfully faced in the past, how they approached them and how it felt at the time, it gave them more energy and motivation to move forward. If you've succeeded at something in the past – doesn't matter what – you know you have the ability to succeed again. Getting yourself into the right frame of mind seems to be a key ingredient to successfully overcome the obstacles you face. Being in a negative or despondent or frustrated or angry state of mind can cause you to sit there like a stunned mullet or watch day time television.

Get your resume into shape.

OK, so here's the sales pitch. Obviously I have been talking about people who have come to me for help with their resume. In the process, I have found out a bit about what they have done or been doing which seems to have worked for them. All of them thought it was important to get their resume into a state where they gave themselves the best chances in this ultra competitive environment. They thought it was important enough to invest in engaging me to help them and they thought that my services were well worth the investment.

Now more than ever, you need a resume which gives you every possible chance.

You can read about my services and approach on the rest of the web site and you can be confident that I can help you from the testimonials many clients have sent me.

I've reduced my fees significantly to encourage you to engage me to help you advance your career. I know the situation many people are in and I've been there myself a couple of times.



Get your resume overhauled by emailing Tom Hannemann at tom@advance-yourself.com.au

Or go directly to www.advance-yourself.com.au and purchase a resume makeover today.