

Back to The Future: **Rediscovering The Basics Of Job Search in Tough Economic Times**

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Maybe it's just me.

Maybe there is too much "rah-rah" optimism in my personality for my own good, but I think I see a silver lining peeking out of this intensely dark economic cloud currently hanging over us.

Let me set the record straight. While I am typically an optimist, I am not naive. Nor have I been hiding under a rock. I read the same blogs and tune in to the same media that we all do, but I am convinced that underlying all the chatter is a burning desire to return to what works. That means a return to spending less and saving more.....to fixing things up instead of throwing them out....to bringing our personal values into clearer focus.

As with our personal lives, we must also get back to basics in our professional lives in order to turn things around. Everything I've read about people who survived the psychological mind set of the Great Depression highlights their ability to embrace hard work and commit to making it through intact. Now I realize how tough this sounds, especially to those of you out there looking for work, but part of why times seem so rough is that the legal field has had a pretty good run over the last two decades. Some of you have never even faced an economic slowdown, much less a complete meltdown like the one we are currently experiencing. Making times even harder is the across-the-board nature of this legal recession; the lending crisis has extended from real estate to banking to business in general, slowing down litigation and everything else in its path. No wonder we're all depressed!

SO, where exactly do I see the good news in all this? The glimmer of hope I keep clinging to is in the approach that a proactive, motivated job seeker can apply to the process. From a job search perspective, that means a throwback to old-fashioned work ethics and strategies. Old fashioned adages like "pounding the pavement" and "never give up" have got to become part of the vernacular of every job hunting lawyer. Old fashioned ideals like "no honest job is beneath you" and "the harder you work the luckier you get" have to mean something again. And, at least for the foreseeable future, I envision successful job searchers relying less on the *internet* and more on the *interview*, especially the informational type.

Now I am not saying that modern technology and its corresponding tools like social networking and internet listings have no value, but I am suggesting that hiding behind a computer screen and responding to on-line postings and friendship requests is not enough of an energy expenditure in this economy. This is the time to hone in on interpersonal relationships; to create or recreate bonds that can only come from real-time, real-people interactions.

If you haven't made time to keep in touch with other professionals, start again ASAP. (Re)join your local Bar Associations. Take an old friend out to lunch. Show up at a neighborhood block party and actually talk to the neighbors. Introduce yourself to the person next to you on the plane or train or in the bleachers at your kids' basketball game. Volunteer your time at a local charitable organization. Take on project or part-time work to keep your skills sharp and your name in front of people. Buy into the statistics that prove the best odds of finding a job derive from your own efforts at cultivating interpersonal connections.

Once you inject this kind of single-minded focus on hard work and self-reliance into your job prospecting, you are bound to increase your chances of success. And here's a bonus: not only will the networking make you feel good about your job search efforts, it will make you feel good about yourself. The more effort you put into preparing for and meeting with others, and the more you learn about what is "out there" job-wise, the more determined you will become about garnering one of those spots for yourself. Although you may feel a bit beaten down right now, remember that, as lawyers, we have historically comprised some of the best and brightest minds in our communities. No matter where you studied or in what area of practice you specialized, you have thinking, analyzing, issue-spotting and organizing skills "*par excellence*." Lawyers are communicators at their core: writing, speaking, persuading and negotiating are all part and parcel of your transferable skills package. Advising, counseling and instructing are as much of your daily routine as eating, drinking and sleeping. It is these skills, these talents, that can be your ticket to job (or even career) transition.

What does all this have to do with good old fashioned hard work? Everything. The tighter the market, the more likely it is that whatever jobs exist will be going to those job hunters who are really hungry for them and who demonstrate that hunger by aggressively pursuing all leads. If you send a resume then never follow up with a call, forget about it. If you see an interesting ad and you don't even try to make contact with someone who knows someone at that organization, you are busted! If there is a great job at another company, in another state, and you don't automatically start to wonder who in your city might offer parallel positions, you are not fully using your cognitive powers.

Clearly nobody wished for a job market like the one we now have but, since it's here, our only real choice is to meet the challenge head-on. If we are to learn anything from history and those who got through hard times before us, now is the time to put our "noses to the grindstone" and "make our own breaks." While the optimist in me believes that the legal work world will return to some form of normalcy in the not-too-distant future, when the going gets tough for future generations of lawyers (as it inevitably will) perhaps they will look back at us and thank us for re-teaching them the value of conducting a job search the old-fashioned way.

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