

How to Climb Back Aboard the Economic Wagon By Asking the Right Questions

By Clay Parsons

According to recent statements by the pundits and the press we are slowly climbing out of the economic doldrums. Despite continuing job losses and the shipping of many support positions overseas, inventories in some industries are way up and sales jobs are the hottest items on the internet job boards. The indicators are all pointing in the right direction. Prosperity has not arrived yet but it will in the near future. It's time for those of us who have been unemployed to climb back aboard the economic wagon. There's just one catch. If you haven't played the job search game in awhile how do you gear up and reconnect? How do you avoid making damaging mistakes and take full advantage of the opportunity this new chapter in your life presents? Consider the following suggestions before you leap into the fray.

During the last few years there have been major changes in many industries and occupations. What has happened in your field ? What are the trends? Who are the primary players now ? How has the market changed ? Is the role you performed still viable or has it been changed or replaced? Are there any new skills required ? Perhaps the most important question is the following. With what you offer in learned skills and experience, what are your options? Don't make blanket assumptions, get the facts. Know what you're getting into before you make any commitments.

Now is a window of opportunity, a time to reexamine and rethink your career goals. Where is your career going ? Do you want to continue on the same career path? Does it still fit you ? If you were to reconnect in the same place where you left off, where would it take you? Would you rather do something else? Has your personal situation changed? Have your needs changed? Should you make an adjustment in your career direction? Ask yourself all of these questions and try to answer truthfully. If you tend to question your ability, remember that you bring a lot of skills and experience with you and therefore actually have many career options. You can change your career if you want, or you can stay on the same track. It's up to you.

You will need a clear focus to find a job in today's chaotic marketplace. A scattershot approach where you send out resumes in all directions in response to every ad which interests you is very inefficient. The chances of success are very low, and you also lose all power over your future when you take such a passive approach. Be proactive, at least then you will decide the direction of your own career path not someone else. To help find your focus answer the following questions. What are the roles you can see yourself performing ? Can you combine a role where you are comfortable with a long time occupational interest? If you were to take that route where would you end up in ten

years? Does it make sense to you? Would you enjoy the work? Do you have the right qualifications? What are some of the specific organizations that you should target?

Bring your professional skills up to date. Add any new ones which have become the norm or are required for advancement. If you need to learn a new computer program take a course in it. If you need management experience take a course in project management from the Project Management Institute. If you need language training take an on-line course, or attend a class at a local community college. Finally, assess what you offer and ask yourself this question. Would you hire you for that job? Be honest. Most likely you will answer “yes, but”. When you can say there are no longer any “buts” you are fully prepared.

Unfortunately competence and experience will not guarantee you a good job in the new economy. You will need to package and market yourself if you hope to attract attention and get the job you want. Create a personal script which answers questions you will most likely be asked in a job search. Include answers to difficult questions including interview and personal questions. Redo and refocus your resume to emphasize the skills and experience you will need to promote to get that job. Create a professional biography if you will be doing a lot of networking. Because it’s all text, a one page biography is a lot more flexible than a resume, and sometimes much more effective. Finally prepare and implement a job search marketing plan which emphasizes your strengths and experience, utilizes your networking contacts and targets those organizations which need what you offer.

Conducting your job search with the help and support of all of the resources available to you is much easier than going it alone. Build a network of friends, acquaintances and former work colleagues starting with the people you know well and then reaching out to others. Make sure they all know what you are looking for. Join a job and career search organization like ProSearch. Take their workshops, use their networking resources, and join a support group so you can share your experiences with others and network important job leads. Take classes from local colleges to upgrade your skills and make you more employable. And most importantly, especially if you are changing your career direction, find a professional career coach or counselor and consult with them regularly during your search.

If you are going to get back onto the economic wagon you can’t do it with a halfhearted effort. Looking for work is a full time job. Expect to make sacrifices such as going to meetings including informational interviews, formal interviews, social gatherings, etc., making phone calls, writing emails, completing resume revisions, responding to advertisements, meeting with your career counselor and coach, etc. Allowing yourself the time to succeed is also important. In a boom period, a few months job search is the norm, in a recovering recessionary economy it can last much longer. Be prepared for the long haul.

Many of you over forty have never had to look for work which makes this process even more difficult. A healthy state of mind is essential. Remember that you need to keep believing in yourself. Don’t take rejection personally. Try to keep the process in perspective. If you don’t get that coveted interview it’s not the end of the world. You may get the next one. There are a lot of other people out there in the same boat. The length of

your search does not reflect on you as a person or as a prospective employee. It is simply a question of supply and demand. The fewer number of positions available the longer it will take. Try to accept it, make some adjustments to your lifestyle, and concentrate your attention on the process and the targets.

Also, be prepared to be surprised! A job search at the end of a long period of unemployment may turn up all kinds of interesting opportunities. Welcome the unexpected. Try to keep an open mind and be flexible. You may end up through hard work and a little serendipity in a role that fits you perfectly, and one that you would never have believed possible when you began your search. Believe in serendipity. I see it happen all the time.

Of course it's much easier to talk about all of this than to do it. If you find yourself stuck anywhere along the way give me a call.
I can help.

The best of luck.

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