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Why Wouldn't You Tell Everybody?

Skills and Professional Development



By the time you read this, there's a good chance that the contact information in the caption below my picture will be outdated. I'm in the process of winding down operations at the company I've called home for a little over 16 years. I don't yet know my end date, but I do know that there is one, and that it's more accurately expressed in weeks than in months.

So, yes, I'll soon be "in transition." The phrase most of us have adopted as the replacement for "unemployed." It sounds like such a pleasant, peaceful state of being, doesn't it? The phrase dovetails nicely with all the variations on "It's not about the destination, it's about the journey," variously attributed to Emerson ("[l]ife is a journey, not a destination"), Eliot ("[t]he journey, not the destination matters..."), Garcia ("[t]ruckin', got my chips cashed in"), and others that well-meaning people offer to those facing challenges. I suppose we reach for those options because the reality is perceived as more painful (see also "gone to a better place," or more simply "passed"). We treat the situation like a sort of death, and I understand how one could look at it that way. I'll even acknowledge that, at times, I've certainly felt sadness and grief about the whole thing. That said, I don't think hanging on to those feelings will do me much good in the long run.

I've explored a few other opportunities over the last few years, but the last time I went all-in on a job search was back when the internet was slow and made unpleasant noises until the connection was established. Likewise, my résumé and LinkedIn profile have grown rather dusty from inattention. As a result, I've given some thought to getting professional help with the job search. I learned of an outfit that offers a combination of placement and coaching skills that sounded promising, so I turned to ACC eGroups to search for anyone with experiences and opinions to share about the resource. Though I never found mention of the entity I sought, I did find lots of good discussion about other job-

seeking options.

I also found lots of anonymity. At first, I chalked this up to concerns about word getting back to employers, but I soon realized that many posters were already unemployed. So why is this? We've all heard about the importance and benefit of networking, and how so many in-house job placements start with word-of-mouth identification of candidates. If one needs the support of a strong network, it is in these circumstances more than ever. It's apparent that the best thing I can do to find my next adventure (there's another employment-related euphemism that deserves the occasional side-eye) is tell everyone I know that I'm actively looking for it.

That point of view isn't original to me; it's one of the oft-unspoken "why" answers to so many opinion pieces about the value of effective networking. More importantly, when I talk with colleagues and friends who have recently changed jobs, they almost always tell me that this is how and why it happened. I also spoke with a recruiter at one of the household-name (our households, at least) firms about this. She shared that they were typically engaged after the networking process failed for the client, and that once they were, the clients became far less flexible in considering candidates that fell outside a rigid set of parameters. In other words, the positions that filled before the recruiters were engaged were more likely to go to people whose skills and experience were not a perfect point-to-point match to the required and preferred qualifications in the position description.

I still don't know why so many are reluctant to share the news of their job searches. Maybe there's nothing to be gained in ferreting about root causes for these tendencies, at least in terms of helping people overcome their reluctance. I think I'll be content recognizing that it's an actual issue, and taking opportunities unique to me (e.g., this column) to help people see that it doesn't need to be.

In the meantime, I'm also going to try to speak plainly about my circumstances and my goals, avoid vague-but-pleasant euphemisms, resist the temptation to coin new ones, and discard the ridiculous ones (e.g., "taking a pop-up sabbatical," "getting a calendar cleanse") that already exist.

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