

Thriving, Not Just Surviving in Uncertain Times

By Lisa Trudel

These days almost every newspaper, magazine and television newscast mentions the word “recession” or “depression”. Fear sells, so the roller coaster of unemployment is a hot topic. Yet the hottest topic should be the positive one of thriving not just surviving, in an economy that creates uncertainty and builds anxiety and apprehension.

If you are employed, fear of losing your job can increase your stress level and might stop you from investing in professional development.

If you are unemployed, reading about tough times getting tougher can prevent you from putting any of your well-intentioned goals into action. Fear can stop you in your learning tracks and learning is the key to thriving wherever you are in your career.

Developing skills, upgrading expertise and gaining credentials are some of the best ways to maintain self-confidence and improve your indispensability on the job or while looking for a job. Nothing guarantees employment and education does not entitle you to a job, but learning can never be invalidated because it connects directly with your self-worth.

In the January 19, 2009 issue of *Maclean’s Magazine* the feature article states that “The reality is no one knows for certain how hard hit the Canadian job market will be during this recession. If the economists are right, the pain will be brief and the country will return to prosperity sometime later this year or early in 2010”.

Worrying about employment can avert the achievement of valuable professional development goals and can throw you into a spiral of negativity and distraction. Instead, try reframing the doubt that is being discussed in the media and move yourself forward to prepare for the opportunities that will arise in the future.

The basic rules of employment preparation do not change in a weak job market, but the amount of time and effort increases dramatically. The following are five essential tips to coach yourself to success:

1) Create a plan. Your plan should start with knowing what type of work you want and having the education for that work. Employers hire

people who have a clear focus not just a desperate plea of needing a job.

2) Don't underestimate the power of networking. Even before the recent media coverage of high unemployment rates, building business relationships through planned networking or serendipity, has been the basis of job searching. In a recessionary economy, networking should dominant your career planning as few organizations actively seek new hires or recruit strangers.

3) Update your promotional materials. Face-to-face networking requires business cards so have a supply ready to distribute. At some point you will need a resume or CV so revise it to reflect accomplishments not just work tasks, and tailor it and your cover letter to every job opportunity you apply to. To improve your success at an interview create a business portfolio and consider the possibility of an image makeover if you feel your presentation style is out-of-date.

4) Discover the advantage of researching. Detailed research can be conducted by reading appropriate business publications, visiting websites and talking with people. Wherever you are in your career, research is the skill you use over and over again. For example, before registering for a college program, investigate the future job prospects for your area of study and if the school has a career services department that can assist you with your job search after graduation. Before attending a networking event or interview, research to find out if you would be a good fit with the organization or team. Every company has different cultures and values, so make sure you check your suitability factor before making a commitment.

5) Use the free resources provided by Employment Ontario. Toronto has an abundance of assistance if you are an unemployed job seeker. Your researching might include visiting www.employmentontario.ca to see if there is a career centre to fit your personal circumstances. For example, if you are an unemployed woman who fits the criteria, ACCES Employment Services facilitates "START" a 10-week computer training and life skills program.

Susana Parise is a START graduate who successfully changed her life because of her determination to learn. "START made me realize that many women like myself need guidance to find a fulfilling career"

states Parise, now a busy Resource Centre Specialist with the Office Workers Career Centre in Toronto.

“I was unemployed, directionless and unaware of what my next step should be after being a stay-at-home mother for many years. I knew it involved learning but I couldn’t figure out what to do next. The Employment Counsellors at START were motivating, friendly and supportive and they showed me how to set realistic short-term and long-term goals. I researched their profession and realized it was a career that suited me and one I could jumpstart quickly. START also prepared me to transition into College smoothly and confidently. It gave me the reinforcement I needed to reorganize my life, and finances, so I could return to school.”

Parise graduated from George Brown College’s Career & Work Counsellor Diploma program with Honours last year. She adds “START transformed me, George Brown College transformed me even more, and now I am helping to transform others by providing hope and information about how learning is fundamental to being employable.”

Parise states that “the most important thing to remember is that it is not education alone that leads to employment success but education plus an occupation. Job searching involves a lot more than rewriting your resume. It includes learning how to market yourself, how to plan, how to research and how to network. It might mean returning to school and reinventing yourself. It worked for me!”

Coaching yourself to career success might include obtaining community college qualifications which is the road that Parise took. For others it might mean developing communication and self-management behavior. For example, you might need to develop your teamwork skills by recognizing and respecting people’s diversity, individual differences and perspectives. Or you might need to understand boundaries and respond constructively to change.

All of it includes learning how to learn. Writer and futurist Alvin Toffler once said “*The illiterate of the future will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.*” That future is now. It has exploded into 2009 with a roar. To thrive, not just survive, in our uncertain times, respond by learning, and achieving, like Susana Parise.

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