

What's Ahead in 2010?

Prognosticating is a fine, old end-of-the-year tradition. Perhaps it's the knowledge that the devil we know is bowing out and the devil we don't know has yet to appear, but we seem especially interested in these forecasts during the last days of December.

How much credence should we put in them?

Well, the dictionary defines prognostication as an activity in which you “predict according to present indications or signs.” To my way of thinking, however, figuring out the future is nothing more than guesswork gussied up as deductive reasoning. Nevertheless, I think it's helpful to look ahead at what might happen if only to scare ourselves into paying more attention to the emerging trends and issues around us. So, without further ado, here are my predictions for those in the world of work in 2010.

We'll emerge from the Great Recession with a permanently altered world view. The Great Depression profoundly changed the outlook of a generation or more of Americans. The Great Recession is doing the same. Americans lost their trust of banks in the Great Depression, and while that may be true during this Great Recession, as well, today's Americans have also lost their trust in employers. In 2010, a growing number of Americans will come to believe that too many of these organizations do not have their best interests at heart and are not led by compassionate, fair and honest executives.

What can you do to protect yourself? Take charge of your career and get comfortable with change. Don't rely on your employer to advance your career—that's now your job—and plan for the inevitable adjustments it will require—you are now likely to have a new job, a new employer or both every three years or so. Make sure you're the master of those changes and not their victim.

We'll begin to feel the effect of two new classes in America. The traditional distinctions of American life—a society loosely composed of upper, middle and lower classes—will become less important as two new groups begin to emerge: workers and talent. Employers believe that the recession has given them access to an oversupply of workers—their mailboxes are now filled with resumes—even as they face a shortage of talent. In fact, the situation is so dire that they call it a War for Talent. They simply can't find enough of two kinds of people: those who have a skill that is critical to the organization's success and those who are superior performers on-the-job. As a result, workers find themselves competing with dozens, sometimes even hundreds of others for the same position, while people of talent have employers competing for them with hiring bonuses and above market salary offers.

What can you do to protect yourself? The good news is that everyone has an inherent talent; the bad news is that not everyone is working at it. The key to success going forward, therefore, will be to ensure that you are doing your best work using the talent with which you were endowed. For many Americans, that may mean a new career field, but making that shift now will also mean greater security and satisfaction in the future.

We'll see layoffs continue even as hiring begins to increase. During the recession, employers laid off employees to cut costs. During the recovery, they will continue those layoffs to improve performance. They will eliminate the positions of those workers who are average performers and create new ones that require top performers. In this post-recession, global economy, employers believe that to ensure their own survival, they must hire only the best and brightest who deliver only the best and most useful contribution on-the-job. Loyalty to the organization, knowing the ropes and how things get done inside it and all of the other attributes that used to be valued and rewarded with continued employment in the past will no longer work in the future.

What can you do to protect yourself? See yourself as employed in two jobs, whether you're in transition or working full time. You must conduct your job search or do your best work for your employer and, concurrently, you must devote the time and effort to build up and sustain the health of your career. Simply put, developing your personal Career Fitness is the only way to achieve meaningful and enduring success in the 21st Century workplace.

We'll recognize the demise of the "come as you are" job market. Historically, you found a new job with the skills and knowledge you had in your old one. You simply updated your resume, sent it out to a bunch of employers and within weeks had several offers, often including one that was better than the last job you had. Unfortunately, those days are over. Most recruiters want to hire people from the ranks of the employed—whether it's true or not, they believe those individuals are better qualified—so if you're unemployed, you are at a real and serious disadvantage. If you have any doubt about that, consider the record number of long-term unemployed persons in the country today. Once you're out of work, you're out of the zone of primary consideration.

What can you do to protect yourself? Re-imagine yourself as a work-in-progress. Enroll in a class or start a training program even as you are looking for a job. Then, note that effort on your resume. Enter the name of the course, the institution where you're taking it and the term "On-Going." That single step will position you as a candidate with two attributes every employer prizes: it will show that you understand the importance of state-of-the-art skills and that you take personal responsibility for ensuring you have them.

Next year will introduce a world of work unlike any we've ever seen in the United States. For many, it will be a disconcerting and even frightening environment. There are, however, steps you can take to protect yourself. And doing so will also enable you to reach for and grab hold of the extraordinary opportunities that this new workplace holds, as well.

Thanks for reading,

Peter

Visit my blog at Weddles.com/WorkStrong

Peter Weddle is the author of over two dozen employment-related books, including *Recognizing Richard Rabbit*, a fable of self-discovery for working adults, and *Work Strong, Your Personal Career Fitness System*.

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