

The World of Work AGR

If you're looking for a job, you're probably doing so with two strikes against you. I realize that's a harsh statement, but sadly, it's almost certainly true. Why? Because most of the people in the job market today conducted their last job search prior to December, 2007, the date today's Great Recession began. The conventional wisdom on which they relied, therefore, was designed for a very different time and a very different employment environment. This recession hasn't changed the rules of the game; it's changed the game, itself. What was right for conducting a job search BGR (before the Great Recession) is totally wrong for doing so AGR (after the Great Recession). Yet, that's exactly what a lot of people are doing.

It's understandable that so many of us still believe we can find a job the old fashioned way. After all, we know how that approach works and have grown comfortable using it. Moreover, conducting such a traditional job search was based on an assumption that was especially easy to accept:

- Our careers were stable so we could put them aside while looking for a job.

The economy may have contracted, but a recession didn't fundamentally alter the way business was conducted. Those in transition, therefore, had but one task to accomplish: getting themselves reemployed. It was always a challenge, of course, but at least it was a single challenge. We didn't have to multitask.

That assumption was bolstered by a second assumption that was equally as easy to accept:

- The disruption caused by a recession was painful, but transitory.

Recessions forced employers to implement temporary reductions in force. As soon as the economy began to strengthen, therefore, they would quickly refill their empty positions and even add new ones to accelerate their growth. The resulting "more jobs" recovery meant that those in transition could get by with tried and true job search techniques: they would send out a slew of resumes, do a little networking around the edges and, before too long, have several job offers, including at least one that was better than their last job.

These two assumptions underpinned the BGR conventional wisdom. It enabled us to view our being in transition as simply an interruption in the norm. The world of work was basically unchanged, so our careers remained intact even as we moved from one employer to another. In effect, we had a "come as you are" job market. There was no need to shore up our occupational prowess or to add ancillary skills that would extend our range of contribution or to revitalize our network of professional contacts. Our careers were good enough just as they were.

This Great Recession, however, has reset the dynamics of the American workplace. The downsizing we are witnessing today is not a temporary reduction in force; it's a permanent reduction in structure. Employers are shaving huge chunks off their organizational charts, and those jobs will never be replaced. As a result, what began after the 2001 recession as a "job less" recovery has morphed into a "less jobs" recovery after this recession. There will simply be far fewer positions available even as the economy begins to grow.

What does that mean for you? If you're currently employed, it means you've lost your job security. If you're in transition, it means the quest for reemployment is now considerably more difficult. For both of you, it means accepting two new and very different assumptions and, without sugarcoating them, these truisms impose additional obligations on you:

- Careers are now in flux so you must take charge of your career and take the steps necessary to protect its health.
- Workplace disruption is the new norm so you are always in transition and must make those moves serve your best interests.

I realize that this unconventional wisdom is tough to take. I understand you would rather that I tell you the world is as it has always been. I can't. I owe you the truth. I have too much respect for your inherent talent to spin a fairy tale that makes you feel good but sets you up for failure. The AGR workplace is already emerging, and there is no going back. To put it bluntly, you can embrace this new reality and position yourself for the real and sustained success it offers or you can pretend it doesn't exist and lock yourself into an ever smaller and more desperate box.

What's the best way to embark on the positive course? If you are actively looking for a new job, you must first accept that your quest is now more challenging than it has historically been and then adopt an appropriately tailored job search strategy. If you are currently employed, you must first accept that your job security has now disappeared and adopt the same tailored strategy as your peers in transition. Here's what it entails:

Attention. As it was BGR, finding a job AGR is a full time occupation. Forget "funemployment." If you're in transition, you need to be working on your job search 100% of the time and with all of the talent and energy you can muster. If you're currently employed, on the other hand, forget comfortably coasting along. You also need to be searching for a job, as well, only the one you seek is the next opportunity you'd like to have. It may be with your current employer or with another organization, but wherever it occurs, it must enable you to extend your development and contribution in the workplace.

Guts. Unlike during the BGR period, finding a new or another job in the AGR era requires that you also take a second job. Not everybody is going to be willing to do that. It takes courage and self-confidence. You have to push yourself outside your comfort zone and tap into more of your talent and energy than you've probably ever used before. You must be both a proactive job seeker and a proactive career self-manager. Your second job, however, is not a secondary endeavor; it is every bit as important as your first job and should be given the same priority and level of effort. Said another way, working on your own career is just as critical to your success as working on-the-job for your employer.

Readiness. To be a successful career self-manager, you must become an expert in and regularly practice "career fitness." You must accept responsibility for the health of your career and act to execute that responsibility every single day. You must know how to increase the strength, endurance and reach of your career and be dedicated to performing the activities that will achieve those outcomes.

One of those activities, for example, is to "pump up your career's cardiovascular system." The heart of your career is your professional knowledge and expertise. When you're looking for a new or better job, therefore, enroll in a professional development course to bring your skill set up-to-date. Then, tell your supervisor what you're doing and/or add the activity to your resume with the annotation "On-going."

That simple step will signal to employers that you realize the importance of staying current in your field and that you take personal responsibility for doing so. There's no more powerful statement than that of your workplace character and potential contribution.

A new era is dawning in the American workplace. Coming as it does after the Great Recession and shaped as it is by that extraordinary event, it is most appropriately described as the AGR world of work. It is an environment unlike any we've ever seen, but one that holds great promise for those who can and do adapt.

Thanks for reading,

Peter

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