

STYBEL PEABODY

HOW TO BE THE WAYNE GRETZSKY OF JOB SEARCH

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

Hockey great Wayne Gretzky was once asked what differentiated him from other professional players. He is reported to have said, "Others look at where the puck is. I look at where the puck is going."

Getzsky's perspective is worth remembering when looking for a job in a highly competitive market.

Spending much of your job search time looking at classified ads or asking people "who is hiring?" is like skating to where the puck is. And that is a low probability win tactic for two reasons.

The first reason is sheer numbers. All your competitors are asking the same questions and looking at the same posted job opportunities. You may like to perceive yourself as an individual. But to the hiring authority, you are one of hundreds of resumes. It is hard to be a winner by playing the game this way.

The second reason is timing. Just as a puck in play doesn't remain stationary long, available jobs do not remain unfilled for long. But you may think it is unfilled. For example, at Stybel Peabody, we sometimes advertise on the web for candidates for jobs we are seeking to fill on a retained search basis. To job candidates reviewing job postings, the opportunity may seem "new" because by looking at the posting date of the ad. In reality, when we post the ad we are seeking to create a second or third tier candidate pool. The first or second tier candidate pools were found by us through our own networks and referrals from our networks. We are seeking to find another pool in the event all the candidates being presented are rejected. You think the job is "fresh" but the reality is that it is "stale." The puck has moved while you stare at it.

JOB SEARCHING IN A THREE DIMENSIONAL WORLD

Looking at ads and asking your network "who is hiring?" are examples of "linear thinking." It is the type of thinking most often taught in school: take x courses and score a grade of y and you will achieve z. The world of management self-help books often has a linear logic behind it. For example, adopt these seven habits and you too will be successful.

We wish our lives could be managed in a linear fashion. But we teach our clients to manage their professional lives in a world of chaos.

Another term for chaos is non-random. A non-random event operates within fuzzy boundaries of logic. For example, you attend a trade association meeting in the hope of finding job opportunities. You know you will probably meet new people but you cannot predict the people you meet or what you learn. But you do know that there are fuzzy boundaries for what you can reasonably expect to happen.

Conducting an aggressive mail campaign to prospect companies is an exercise in chaos: you are sending letters out to hundreds of companies but you put the boundary on who gets the letter. You cannot predict the result.

Job search within the chaos dimension is skating away from the puck is to where you suspect it might be.

MANAGING RANDOMNESS IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL LIFE.

If chaos follows a logic that is non-linear, random events follow no logic at all. Living in a random world can be a highly disturbing idea for some people. For example, many of our most successful clients over value the importance of their own efforts in their own success and minimize the power of random events (dumb luck). That failure often results in cocky senior executives assuming that one success increases the odds for a second success. in their second attempts at new careers.

If you don't factor in the random dimension, you cannot manage it. For example, we recommend that a job candidates randomly "spin dial" their mobile device address lists. Call the person whose name appears. "Just thinking about you and called to say 'how are you?'" At Stybel Peabody we manage random events with techniques like this. We have been delighted with the number of responses that begin with, "It's amazing that you should call. We have a need for your services right now. How did you know?"

In hockey, a random approach is skating around the rink and waiting for the right opening.

A THREE DIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO MANAGING YOUR JOB SEARCH

Skating to where the puck is going requires giving up the illusion of living in a linear world. Grasp the implications of structuring your professional life along a three dimensional framework of linear, chaos, and randomness. Structure your job search along these three dimensions with an emphasis on embracing chaos.

If you are uncomfortable with our message, think about the most important positive event that has ever happened to you in your professional life. Was the event linear, chaotic, or random? When we do this exercise with large groups of executives, few of the "most important " events are linear.

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