



Point of View

Why Looking for a Job in a Shaky Economy can be a Solid Move

It may seem counterintuitive, but even a shaky economy can offer good career opportunities.

To quote a 1950s tune about looking on the bright side, job seekers today should "Put On A Happy Face." There is no denying that there's a ton of unsettling economic news right now.

Even a gloomy economy has some bright spots. In fact, looking for a job in a shaky economy can sometimes be a very solid move. Savvy job-hunters boost their chances of success by understanding what they truly want and by excelling in their current position.

Sometimes, the numbers sing a happy tune

Let's start with some numbers. For recent college graduates, the job market is relatively healthy. Employers expect to hire 8% more college graduates from this year's class than the class of 2007, according to a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers. And while some industries are losing ground, others are growing. Healthcare, professional and technical services are all adding jobs, according to a July 2008 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Forward-thinking companies are also continuing to hire in anticipation of large-scale Baby Boomer retirements. In 2008, the oldest Baby Boomers reach 62 and about half are planning to retire, according to the Social Security Administration.

While numbers never tell the whole story, they clearly offer some reasons for optimism.

Finding your bliss on the job

There are also other potential bright spots when it comes to finding or changing jobs in a turbulent economy. A challenging market forces people to really assess their interests, skills and talents. Since you may have to work harder to get a job, you'll need that level of commitment. How hard are you going to try for a law firm job, for example, if you only went to law school because you had a vague sense it might pay off down the road?

Of course, it's possible you'll do the hard work of soul-searching and career research and still come up short of a job offer. But don't despair. Things could still work out in your favor. Being flexible and open to new experiences can be transformative. Plenty of successful people, recounting their rise to the top, say "I never expected to be doing this" or "I kind of fell into it."

Have I brought value to my employer today?

What other blessing-in-disguise result could there be from preparing to compete in a challenging job market? For one, it will help to shift your thinking about work. When the job market and the economy are booming, many people don't think about where they fit in the organization or how they can add value. They look at their work as a series of tasks, rather than results.

Whether you're looking to move up or move on, that kind of thinking won't get you to the next level. Changing your outlook from "what's in it for me?" to "How am I truly benefiting my employer?" can help you now and for the future.

Overall, resist the urge to panic and try to remember that if you persevere, you can often turn challenges around and succeed beyond all expectations. In the words of another upbeat ballad, "The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow."