

RESOLVE TO OWN THE BUSINESS OF YOUR CAREER

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Would it surprise you to find that your company has been sold, your division cut or that your new boss decided that despite your obvious, multi-year contributions that you were expendable? How would you handle a career transition now? What if the *'what if'* happened and you faced unemployment in the next 12 months? How would facts like these affect your attitude and your economy? In the 12 years of coaching clients and developing outplacement and job search strategies, few lessons learned come to mind quicker than most people at all levels of careers, entry-level to executive, run the business of their career this way – crisis management.

To run your career properly treat it like a business, anticipate change, embrace change and remember that you have made a rather serious business investment. Whether you own your own business or not you need to know that transforming change takes place daily. On a small scale the sand shifts underneath you as a business leader, business owner or person who works for an organization or company. Will you be ready for small changes? Will you be prepared to accept total responsibility for your business and career? Will you take ownership and not make excuses for challenges during your career? Will you embrace the new digital economy and challenge yourself to think differently? "Unfortunately I want to get out of management for a number of reasons," a recent Fortune 100 human resources manager and client exclaimed to me. "Maybe it's me but all I seem to do is babysit, deal with personnel issues and try to get people to understand the new realities of today. I wish people at every level would think about their job from the owner's point of view."

How you think about your career tells me a lot. Most people hold the wrong thought-process about their career life. In fact this nation still produces great entrepreneurs and great leaders. But in many ways we have lost the sense that we own something. Every employee should take an ownership view of their work and their work life. The best do this, are promoted and understand this value proposition. In recessions and tougher times many learn other lessons. You must drive revenue and reduce costs for an organization. If you do not do this you can easily and quickly become expendable.

If someone asked you what you do you could tell them, right? *Well I develop software. I work in quality control. I'm in sales for xyz company and we sell abc. I'm in management. I work in technology for def who I am sure you have heard of.* Okay that will get a bar conversation going but it does not really detail what you do probably. To ensure you think like an entrepreneur about your career you need to develop a mission statement. This mission statement must not be limited to some narrow refrain like *I'm a telecom manager.* So as a recruiter I can say to you that you are like an expendable cog in a machine, downsizable and not placeable. This narrow definition is like saying to someone and believing that you are in the buggy whip business. If you were this person years ago and defined your business this way you would be out of business. So why are you still in the buggy whip business? Your mission statement and entrepreneurial thought-process demands more of you. Decide first on what you provide in value to an organization. Decide second that your service saves money accelerates revenue for an organization. If you are in the buggy whip business decide third that you are in the business of providing transportation automation and control. Get the picture?

At least weekly I hear this unprompted refrain from jobseekers: *It's the economy. When the economy improves my job prospects will improve.* In other words they set their sails and are waiting for the right wind. External forces may impact your career or your job search; they should not control your career or your search. If you are setting sails and waiting for wind and not using other, more efficient transportation methods you are using essentially ancient machinery and technology. You can have a sail boat on the ocean but know its limitations. As transportation goes it may be a fun way to go but you better have a GPS and an extremely powerful motorized backup. No matter what industry you are in it would be a good idea to know the business you are in, the changes pending and be ready for them.

A quick glance at history provides clues. It doesn't take a degreed economist or historian to acknowledge that this country shifted from an agrarian, trade and business ownership economy to an industrialized nation. Workers took dreams of starting their own business into the factory or the big company. Henry Ford started as an entrepreneur and turned his engine building business into a huge manufacturing system and enterprise. Innovations in flight turned into the business of travel. The list goes on and on. Now costs have been so reduced and manufacturing made so efficient that the act of making things in great commodities can be sent south of the border or overseas. One doesn't need to point out to the legions of unemployed in the manufacturing sector that employers found out where costs can be reduced – labor. Let's fast forward to today.

Today many economists including those at the Federal Reserve view critical job growth skeptically, feeling and believing that strong job growth will be slowed by serious structural changes in the U.S. economy. Technical changes noted may include technological improvements, per-person worker efficiency and a trend toward outsourcing work out of this country where labor is cheaper. For example, last Tuesday's Conference Board data confirmed some of this sentiment: survey respondents expecting an improvement in the job market six months from now rose to 26.8 percent from 24.5 but the percentage of respondents expecting things to get worse in the next six months also rose, to 8.1 percent from 7.2. The percentage of survey respondents saying jobs are *hard to get* rose to 32.6 percent; this is shockingly near the highest level in a decade, from 29.6 percent in November. Concerns about outsourcing come into play here despite recession and job recovery possibilities. This kind of data suggests something that may be nothing new – the economic system is changing. It has before. Are you ready?

How do you think like a career entrepreneur and stop living your career life in crisis management mode? Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Clarify Your Mission, Clear Goals and What Business You Own** – Most executives complain to me about employees who essentially think like a job is something owed to them. Instead, think of your job as an opportunity to contribute. If you are in a job and not an opportunity you may need to change. If you are underemployed you may need to change and consider career counseling or career coaching. Nonetheless, write your mission statement and create goals that stretch you out of the comfort zone of your current job description or whatever definition you have today. Set specific long and short-term goals. Don't just write down goals that have to do with your salary, income and titles. Write down goals that have a more lasting impact on the industry you serve. In what way could you contribute? Have a 1, 3, 5 and 10 year career plan. Where do you want to be in 10 years? How will you get there?
2. **You Never Stop Marketing** – This means that you never stop understanding that what you do has or at least should have a wider impact to people in this world than your daily tasks may permit you to see. Marketing means that you never stop the dialogue between you and the marketplace for your skills. Promoting, selling and distributing should be functions of your career regardless of whether you are in sales and marketing. You are! That means you must network, connect with others outside of your organization who are creative and changing your business. Then you will be able to understand, contribute and know how to stay valuable.
3. **Don't Be Swept Up by Changes in the Economy; Understand and Act on Economic Trends** – Constantly understand the depth of your industry and the economic impact of those changes. Stop thinking like a cubicle person described in some Dilbert world. Seek education and most importantly read read read! Read the periodicals but also dig into books and authors who can communicate to you greater ideas. By all means seek to associate with great minds through books. These books do not have to be a technology manual or something related to your field. At least clearly understand that what you do impacts someone. Make sure you understand the bigger picture of you and your vocation's impact on others' lives from a wider perspective. Entrepreneurs don't pay attention to today's news especially negative news; they see opportunities in news and trends.

4. **Decide to Be an Achiever Not a Bystander** – To a career entrepreneur this means you must decide to be an achiever. By all means reach goals set to you by others and by your organization; however, do not stop there. Set achievement-oriented goals outside of your vocation. Define achievement in every area of your life: spiritually, financially, physically, emotionally and career-wise. As you decide to stand out against the status quo expect to be criticized. However, living in an achievement mode often elicits greater emotional awards in all areas of your life. If you habit of thinking this way your business will fail: *What's the least amount I have to do to get the most out of this situation?* Instead, consider this thought-process: *What price am I willing to pay to achieve my goals? What valuable lessons might I learn if I decide to pay this price or enter this journey?*

Most people who think like the business owner rise to a level of responsibility and achievement. Those who make resolutions don't keep them very long. Resolve to do this today – start thinking like a career entrepreneur. You will then be a participant in change, respond properly to crises, use information to motivate you and shape your career destiny.

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In 2004, Mr. O'Connor became the first private practice Certified Federal Job Search Trainer (CFJST) in North Carolina. He is also a Certified Electronic Career Coach (CECC). With a unique fiction writing pedigree with fiction publications as well, he obtained a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Bowling Green State University. With over 14 years experience in professional career transition, resume writing and career coaching, O'Connor applies his considerable job market expertise to career transitioners nationally.

He has been featured recently (May 2003 and May 2004 feature) in the Raleigh News & Observer, Resume Writers Digest, The Gladiator, Execunet, Career Masters Institute Monthly Newsletter, Monster Career News and other national publications such as JIST. Additionally his diversified experience includes serving as a college professor.