

Conventional Wisdom: Summer Doldrums or Time of Opportunity

As a rookie recruiter over twenty-five years ago, I recall some of my more senior colleagues commenting that business was slow both during the summer months and at the year end holiday season. I think this belief is common among many sales organizations and throughout the broader business community as well. This is why many recruiting firms and sales divisions run sales contests during these periods, to motivate their people to get out and “beat the bushes”. What I observed over the years was essentially a self-fulfilling prophecy: if you believe that these are truly dead periods and stop selling, you won’t close any new business. As the Connecticut Lottery people say, “You can’t win if you don’t play”. Indeed, during my career, some of my busiest times were during the summer months and the year end holidays. Many Decembers were particularly noteworthy because some of my clients operated on calendar year budget cycles. On several occasions, a client would call me in early December, frantic because someone had just resigned. Because their budget cycle was nearing its close, they feared losing the position, if they did not have someone in it on by the end of the month. I remember working feverishly through the holiday season to help them and always welcomed a solid unemployed candidate, because they could interview and commence work immediately. I always liked December because in situations such as this, I developed the opening, found the person, facilitated the hire, and was often paid by the end of the year. Meanwhile, some of my colleagues were attending holiday parties and complaining that business was slow. I made money and saved calories at the same time.

Let’s cut to our present reality. The flow of business does slow down during the summer and at year end, but this is no excuse to stop your search. Business slows because hiring executives are on vacation, which means longer delays between interviews and more interview sessions. Years ago, before companies began major staff downsizings and had a “deeper bench”; it was more common whenever someone resigned in early summer or November, for management to delay finding a replacement until after Labor Day or after the New Year, as applicable. We’re in a tight market, but some companies are so lean that when a key employee leaves during the summer months or late in the year, they must find a replacement immediately.

Some would argue that during the summer months you should make more calls and work that much harder to compensate for the business slowdown. If this is your second or third summer in transition, I don’t want to hear your reaction to that idea. Keeping in mind my last newsletter, in which I encouraged you to pace yourself and take a break, I suggest that you continue your job search through the summer but on a reduced schedule. If you quit and leave the game altogether, you will find it that much more difficult to restart in September. On the other hand, by working on your search three or four days per week, you’re still in the game, but you are allowing yourself some downtime for warm weather recreation and personal enjoyment.

Economists, analysts and pundits have been stating that a recovery is just around the corner, for the past three years. Eventually they will be right. Even a broken analog watch tells the correct time twice daily. Recent stock market run-ups, tech market rumblings and statements by the Treasury Secretary would lead us to believe that the economy will be rolling by year end. Whatever happens, if you take yourself out of the game, you will miss any opportunity to land in late summer or early fall.

Anyone has a hard time getting motivated to make network calls when times are slow. Planning your summer days with the following thoughts in mind, may help:

- Plan yourself for a four-day work week. If you have been out for a long time and are on the fence about the future, you may wish to set your week up this way: two days networking for your job search, one day searching for consulting opportunities and the remaining day to do online research and also explore your “Plan B” (franchising, alternate careers, self-employment, etc.).
- Make every weekend a three-day weekend until Labor Day. You deserve it.
- Focus on making contacts now for jobs that may open in September. You’ll have a leg up on the people who are taking the summer off. You may contact someone now who will share lead for a potential requirement opening after Labor Day.
- Many hiring executives tend to slow down activities during the summer and at year end. Vacation plans and holiday pressures may cause them to delay hiring for a key replacement. On the other hand, there may be a few desperate managers whose personal careers are on the line and who need help now. If you find one now and are hired by the end of summer, you’re going to look and feel pretty smart. People do get hired in the summer and during the year end holidays – believe it.

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