

Conceding Defeat or Time for a Change

A select few of our members have opted to pursue other careers outside the IT senior executive ranks. Some have bought business franchises, others have turned to real estate, some to sales, others are IT consultants, a few are teaching and one or two are semi-retired. One member commented that he is tired of the stress of being out of work every two years or so and wants a career with more stability. I hope he finds it. Others are tired of the extended job hunt; need a change for a variety of reasons, or just want an income – any income. One of our chapters held a meeting on this very subject, asking members to discuss alternate plans should they abandon their IT career searches.

Many of our landed members, on the other hand, are not displaying much excitement or enthusiasm for their new opportunities, either. Virtually all of them report intense pressure from top management. Some are expected to make staff cuts immediately after assuming a new position, making them appear to be “hatchets” before they can find the washroom. Other Associate Members have shared stories of scant budgets, demands for draconian cost cuts along with expectations of high productivity. I have noticed a common thread whenever I ask an Associate Member, “how is your new job going?” Almost every time, they hesitate, pause, look off into the distance, and reply, “it’s okay, but...” They all seem to share a common feeling of hope mixed with resignation that maybe things will turn out alright, but that they will spend the next eighteen to twenty-four months dodging a silver bullet. So too, I sense that they are grateful to have a paycheck and hope that they can hang onto it longer than they did last time. Without necessarily saying the words, they are asking how many more times must I go through this? I suspect that any of us would gladly accept a position, which offered “reasonable” pay, longevity, stability and the chance to make an impact.

There definitely exists a general malaise and uneasiness shared by our Active and Associate Members alike. Being employed offers some fleeting financial security and the ability to cope with basic survival, but it does not guarantee happiness and fulfillment. I am not trying to diminish the importance of having a paycheck and do not wish to appear callous toward many of our Active Members who have endured extended periods of unemployment. Rather, I am simply stating that once you re-enter the ranks of the employed, don’t expect your problems to end with a return to the heady days of the late nineteen nineties. Unless you are extremely fortunate, your next position will be a stopping off point on your way to something else. There exists too much turmoil and uncertainty in the business and political worlds, which will have yet unknown impact on the greater majority of us.

One or two local members have asked me to dedicate a meeting of the Stamford Chapter to alternative careers, starting your own business or exploring franchising opportunities. I have considered this for some time, but can’t get comfortable with the idea. Each of us has the right to pursue the career track of our own choosing. Indeed, more than once, I have remarked to my wife that had I known recruiting would be like this when I entered it twenty-seven years ago, I may have chosen some other career. In fact, when a Starbuck’s opened in a neighboring town, I commented to her that I wish I had known the franchise was open. On the other hand, do I want to spend the rest of my life pouring coffee, having spent so many years performing consultative problem solving? There are no easy answers here for anyone. Many people change careers and go on to be more fulfilled than they had previously imagined.

Others do not and return to their original path. Each of us passes through peaks and valleys in her or his career. At this moment, it seems that almost everyone is in a valley.

Recessions typically spawn career changes for the reasons cited in my opening paragraph, added to the fact that some executives in transition have large severance packages, which they use to fund their own business. Unfortunately, many of these businesses fail, because they were not well thought out or they were under capitalized. But a significant number of businesses fail because their owners used them as an escape from a career track stalled by a recession, rather than as a means to pursue a passion. Whether you are changing jobs within your field or switching careers, you should change because the new job or business offers an arguably better opportunity than your old one. Switching careers or jobs simply because you have an offer, which is a chance to escape your present predicament, is in itself usually a path to potential failure and further unhappiness. However, I will qualify that by saying that if you are unemployed and have a job offer that will give you a financial means to survive, consider it very carefully before refusing it.

Whatever your choice, this is your personal decision. You may discuss it with family, friends or colleagues, but ultimately you act on values and circumstances that matter most to you. TENG was created to help senior IT executives find their next career opportunity in this field. I have attempted to follow a disciplined approach of sharing appropriate leads. You now trust me to provide you with a consistent and focused service. Most of our members are seeking to continue their careers by assuming a position comparable or better than what they previously had. Our present market conditions are causing many of our members to accept positions one or two steps below their previous level, but this is a personal choice and not a membership mandate, just as it is to decide to leave the senior IT executive career track. However, because of the trust that each of you has placed in me to help you further your IT career, if I hold meetings or circulate information proposing alternative careers, I feel that I am admitting defeat. You have every right to pursue an alternative career, but if I propose collectively that members consider alternative careers, I feel that I would violate one of my purposes for creating TENG and would be sending a very pessimistic and negative signal. I somehow feel that by sanctioning meetings that discuss alternative careers, I would be breaking my own rules. If I offer other career options to our members, I could distract our broader membership with possible unwanted information, just as I would if I circulated inappropriate leads.

As an added service to you, since I have twenty-seven years recruiting experience, I would be pleased to reply to any career related questions you may have. I suggest that you submit them through the Discussion Group. I will reply to the entire Group to share my thoughts with the national membership. If you wish to discuss your career with me on a more confidential level, please call me at any time. If I am not immediately available, we can establish a mutually convenient time to speak on the phone. If I am not available at the number shown below, please call my voice mail toll free: 888-458-6566. After you leave your message, I will be beeped and will get back to you. Please allow me a few days to do so.

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