



Being Realistic

For Job Seekers

A recent article in *Harvard Business Review* (October 2012) explored how best to achieve a significant goal in life. Certainly for anyone in transition, getting reemployed qualifies as such an objective. But, here's the rub. Goals do not exist in a vacuum. Indeed, the only way to reach a significant goal is to focus on the intervening goals that will ensure your steady progress toward that end.

The key intervening goals for a job seeker are the openings to which they apply. Misjudge them, and, no matter how experienced or skilled you are, your prospects for success are significantly reduced. Make the right judgments about those goals, on the other hand, and you will not only speed your return to work; you will put yourself in a job where you can excel. And, excellence on-the-job is the single best way to help your career recover from a period of unemployment.

The *Harvard Business Review* article laid out a simple process of self-assessment for making realistic decisions about goals. It involves answering two questions:

- "Do you have the required capacities, knowledge, skills and personal characteristics?"
and
- "Are your capacities as good as or better than those of other people with the same goal?"

Of course, asking the questions is the easy part. The real challenge is being able to answer them accurately and honestly. Every human has a standup comic inside; we kid ourselves about how truly great we are. Thankfully, however, we have also been graced with an extraordinary intellect, and it has the power to tame the comic. So, ask the questions, but bring your intellect along to help you answer them.

Applying the Questions to a Job Search Campaign

The two-question assessment is probably fine for most goals, but for a person in search of reemployment, it must be tailored. In order to get answers that are relevant and useful, the questions must address the current dynamics of the job market. They are the inflexible and, in many respects, draconian new rules by which it is now operating.

The first question must be reframed to ask, "Are you a perfect match for the requirements and responsibilities stated by the employer for its opening?" Given the number of people competing for each open job these days, there is no wiggle room on qualifications. It's pass or fail; the gray area has been eliminated.

In the past, a job seeker could compensate for a missing skill or even some experience with a different skill or kind of experience. Today, employers will no longer accept those tradeoffs. They want to hire only those

who meet every single specification. If you don't, you aren't qualified and applying for the job is a waste of your time.

The second question should then be reframed to ask, "Can you prove that you will be a superior performer on-the-job?" Employers today are no longer competing with cheaper labor overseas; they are competing with smarter labor. To survive let alone prosper in such an environment, they need employees who excel at their work.

In the past, a job seeker would be selected for an opening in they were competent to do the job. Today, employers want people who have state-of-the-art knowledge and the requisite experience to outperform the competition. In effect, being a perfect match isn't enough. You must also have a track record of perfect performance.

In today's tough job market, the only way to achieve the goal of reemployment is to achieve critical intervening goals first. That means focusing on those openings where you have the best chance of success. And, to make that judgment - to be realistic - you must conduct a candid self-assessment of both your qualifications and your competitive standing. It isn't always easy, but the answers will help to hasten your return to work.

Thanks for reading,

Peter

Visit me at Weddles.com

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