

Interview with Frank G. Skedel and Mark E. Little on positioning for employment advantage in a slower economy.

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THE PLAIN DEALER

Recession-proof your job

Tuesday, July 22, 2008

In this slowing economy, no one is immune from layoffs, shutdowns and downsizings. The job market is tight, especially in the housing, real estate or finance fields. There is obviously no sure way to guarantee or "recession proof" your job, but there are some strategies to consider in difficult times like these that can help in your job search, career change or current employment situation.

During a recession, are there some professions that are less vulnerable to job loss? Some industries do remain strong in a weakening economy, according to a report released earlier this year by outplacement specialists Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

"Certain industries are particularly vulnerable during recessions, including retail, manufacturing, the financial sector and technology. However, there are always some areas that seem to be recession resistant," stated the firm's chief executive officer, John Challenger.

Among the areas less prone to economic downturns are education, energy, health care and security, the Challenger report said. When attempting a career change during economic downturns, focus on transferring your current job skills to the more resilient industries.

For instance, Challenger pointed out, hospitals not only need nurses and physical therapists, they need administrators and information technology workers. Security firms need accountants and marketing professionals.

A few other industries to consider when looking for a job in this market are international business, the environmental sector, counseling and substance abuse treatment centers, federal and state government, and technology.

But remember, hot careers today can become a cold career tomorrow, said Frank Skedel, president of Paul-Lawrence Associates, an executive search firm with offices in Hudson.

"If you jump around a significant number of times, that last jump might make you vulnerable. You're going to be the last person in and the first person out in a downturn," he said.

Skedel said his firm advises its clients that the best time to upgrade talent is when others aren't, so the sluggish economy is a good time to search out strong employees who otherwise would be in the greatest demand in normal times.



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"So if you happen to be unemployed at the moment, it should give you some encouragement perhaps to work even harder to contact companies that have a particular need for someone with your skill sets," Skedel pointed out. "Research the Internet to find those niches and opportunities."

Become a valuable employee

To protect your job in these challenging economic conditions, it is also a good idea to make yourself as recession-proof as possible by following a few simple strategies, said Mark Little, vice president of Paul-Lawrence Associates.

Companies, even in a downturn, are always looking for the people who generate revenue, Little said. So if you are a good salesperson, chances are you will always be in demand. Good people can move with different products and services. The same goes for other positions across industry lines.

There are certainly ways an individual can become more valuable to an organization, thus making them less vulnerable when it comes time to layoff employees, Little offered.

"Be a contributor, be vocal and make suggestions. Look at cost savings or process improvement. Everyone is challenged to do more with less these days. If you have any great ideas from a business development standpoint or new prospects you can bring in, you become a valuable contributor and companies don't want to lose contributors," he said.

Little offered these additional suggestions to make your own job more recession-proof:

â' Shore up your network, both internally and externally. Make sure people know who you are and what you do.

â' Be a visible volunteer. Participate in company events and projects.

â' Be flexible. Companies trying to make their budgets might require some adjustments relative to compensation programs and duties. Being flexible can pay off down the road.

â' Update skills. Individuals who are continuous learners are more valuable.

â' Stay positive. This is a time where attitude can be one of your greatest assets.