

Executives in Transition - a humbling experience

Job transitioning can be a humbling experience. This is surely an experience felt across all job levels and industries, however, I would also imagine that for executives in transition it is far more humbling.

The very executives who often make the tough - and at times not so tough - decisions about who gets hired, fired, promoted etc. are now on the other side of the desk. And let me tell you, the other side of the desk is much more difficult to navigate than it once was.

As an executive in transition, I speak from personal experience. When we first find ourselves jobless we are not deterred, it is just another challenge to overcome. The fire in our belly is still burning, we are still on the roller-coaster not realizing that our ride has come to a full stop. We approach our reduced situation with confidence, conviction and at times we may also come across as arrogant and standoffish. Like, really? "How could that recruiter have passed me up? I am going to challenge them. And what about my network? Surely they will answer my call, after all we were once part of the same club".

Whether by our design or by circumstances beyond our control, we never admit defeat and rarely do we run out of good explanations about our current predicament.

I call this a defensive mechanism projected in the initial stages. But after being subjected to countless interviews and rejections that further diminish one's self-worth, multiple opinions about our resumes, past experience, approach, and more advice than we can actually process and our list of contacts compresses at the speed of light, it finally hits us: our identity is lost, we are in a big pond with many species of fish, some referred to as Millennials, more technically savvy, with a lot more stamina and much more desirable to those who now sit in the same chairs we once occupied. We realize at this stage that we have been left behind and that we need to find a new school of fish to lead, and that our journey back into society can be long, disappointing and frustrating.

This phase fuels a wave of emotions never experienced before, and let's not talk about our loved ones caught in the crossfire! Once the disappointment and rage passes and our ego is back in check, well then it's our confidence that suffers next. The very foundation that shaped who we are, what we accomplished for ourselves, our families and the many organizations and lives we touched, our dreams and hopes all come into question.

The final stage is acceptance. Accepting that this is our new reality and that we need to draw on all we have learned in in our past experience to really apply to the process.

And so the real journey begins. We begin to speak a different language laced with a whole new attitude. We start by slowly surrounding ourselves with people who truly understand what this process is all about, but not with some resistance because old habits are hard to break. "A career coach, personal colors, assessments, keep busy to demonstrate that you weren't brain dead during the transition, dress a certain way, network, get on to social media, and here we go again!" Now I am dealing with Creatures from outer space, like who knew! And why am I not prepared for these Creatures?

Personally speaking, I resisted accepting this reality at every turn. And after months of sanding and staining my own deck, attempting to paint the ceiling in my home (really difficult to do), pulling the microwave out of the wall, attempting perfect baking, 100 banana cakes (later my debut cake nearly poisoned my family), planting every species of flower known to man in my backyard, breaking nearly every pot light in my home in an attempt to demonstrate that I can do anything, cutting my own grass, and almost demolishing my home – my son would probably add a bit more color to all this – and all the while continuing on the path of destruction related to my job search, I finally accepted the fact that I needed help, support, guidance and a whole lot of compassion. Lucky for

me, I was fortunate enough to meet someone who introduced me to Phoenix Executive Network (PEN), Toronto's leading Executive Transition Support Network. And even more fortunate to have joined!

Joining this organization has had a significant impact on me, from the moment I made my case as to why I should be allowed to become a member to every interaction I have had since. Interrelating with like-minded people who share similar experiences and face similar circumstances can be a game changer. I can lean on this group for support, contacts, constructive criticism and above all I can lean on them if I am about to fall off my game. My reach in this organization extends far beyond this group – there are over 300 Alumni (former members) happily and productively back in the workforce contributing in all areas of our economy.

Since joining in June, I have hired a Career Coach, Recruiter, Kim White of EliteMinds Services. The busiest person I know, a reflection of her work, who happily never fails to remind me about how much I have to offer. She backs her claims with assessments, training, getting in my head and a huge dose of reality on what I can and can't do and what I can and can't say and areas that could use improvement.

Through PEN and my career coach I have learned that there is just as much need for experienced, seasoned executives as there is a need for younger and more agile ones and that striking a balance would serve our corporate world, our economy and the next generation well. For the first time in months, I am confident that I am exactly where I am supposed to be and that this journey, with all of its challenges and hardship, is one that I want to treasure, continue to learn from and enjoy. After all, the lessons learned during this process can only be taught through first-hand experience.

In conclusion, I am hopeful, and I am sure I speak for my colleagues at PEN, that when we do land, the lessons we have learned during this phase will make us better at our jobs and above all it will always serve as a reminder that organizations are made up of people, people who have families, commitments, talents and are ready and willing to do their best. And that when others' turn comes up to get off the merry-go-round, we will be there to offer a word of comfort and a helping hand.

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phoenixexecutivenetwork.com/ "PEN" is Toronto's leading Executive Transition Support Network for C-Level executives. Since its inception in 2007, PEN remains by invitation only, we are represented by a mosaic of talented executives from all functional areas (e.g. C-Suite General Management, Finance, Sales, Marketing, HR, Legal, Operations, IT, etc.). Members are empowered through shared resources and networks, across disciplines, markets and geography. Please check our profiles.

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