

DIARY OF A JOB HUNTER
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In Times Like This, Families To Count On

SEAN O'DONOVAN

Last week, my wife suggested I might enjoy living in our pool cabana.

"There's power for your laptop, a light and some garden chairs. And, if you're working late, you could even sleep over," she said.

What she was really trying to say was: "I want my home office back."

You see, during a recent renovation project, we had the bright idea of building a two person office to replace our dining room on the main floor. For the previous 10 years, Amanda's office had been in the basement, and I had finally persuaded her to embrace the daylight.

The office overlooks the garden, which Amanda has lovingly landscaped over the years, and a move upstairs would allow her to appreciate the fruits of her labour as she sits in front of her computer screen. We even put in some nice French doors to maximize the view.

At the time, it seemed like a neat idea to buy one of those two-person desks from Ikea, so I would also have somewhere to work on the odd evening or weekend, rather than piling up my papers on the kitchen table.

However, since I involuntarily started working from home as sole proprietor of "Me Inc.," the occasional use of my half of the desk has become somewhat more frequent. So, now I sit about three feet away from Amanda, and blab incessantly on the phone as I network my way around the technology sector.

Apparently, I also talk to myself while I type, so, even when the phone is safely nestled in its cradle, I'm far from silent.

Meanwhile, Amanda tries to concentrate on writing a white paper, a promotional campaign or copy for a website for one of her clients. I've kept suggesting I should move upstairs to

the desk recently vacated by our oldest daughter while she attends McGill University. But, that's not going to work if I'm still job-hunting when Hannah gets back at Christmas.

Amanda keeps trying to reassure me that she can cope with the distractions as a mother of two, she's had plenty of practice multitasking but I'm getting the distinct impression that she's not being entirely truthful. I think she's finding my continued presence slightly irksome. In fact, I think she might even be peeved about it.

Don't get me wrong. Amanda has been a great source of support, but I guess the initial novelty of having me around the house all the time has started to wear a little thin. She's also really working hard, juggling multiple copywriting contracts to help backfill for my dearly departed salary. So she's already stressed out, even before I come on the scene, jabbering constantly on the phone in unceasingly upbeat and enthusiastic tones.

Unfortunately, the kids are suffering, too. They're sensitive to the stress of it all and take every opportunity to be encouraging. But I think the financial impact gets them down a little.

We're not destitute by any means. But we are having to dip into our savings to cover expenses, and, with the uncertainty over how long it might take me to find a new job, we are being careful. And being consistently careful about money means doing without stuff, like evenings out or visiting Hannah in Montreal.

We've worked hard to teach Hannah and Becca to recognize the value of money, and to earn it for themselves, delivering newspapers, cutting grass, babysitting and other part-time jobs. And they have been pretty good about it.

But that doesn't mean we haven't been like many other parents, offering the odd handout for "essential" clothing purchases, pizza dinners for friends, money for the movies. In our current situation, we've had to curtail a lot of this discretionary spending, which has been hard (for them and for us).

So, with my wife driven to distraction by my constant yakking, and the kids missing their old dad, who always seemed to have a spare twenty when they needed it, the good-natured support of my family has certainly been put to the test.

Luckily, the need to provide support and encouragement has not fallen on them alone. My extended family back in England has taken turns as well. It really helps to get a call from my big brother every weekend to see how the search is going especially since we haven't been that good at keeping in touch over the past 10 years.

And, soon after I lost my job, I discovered another group I can turn to. It's called the Phoenix Executive Network.

When I was last in transition, I came across a group of enterprising unemployed executives who had formed an independent executive networking group, meeting weekly to share contacts, provide mutual job search support and swap war stories. They called it JOBS. I think it stood for Join Our Buddy System.

I heard about it through a networking contact and convinced them to let me join. It was a great group, and I got an awful lot out of my participation, especially since I was a job loss newbie. We helped each other craft résumés, shared contacts and, most of all, provided mutual support.

I sought out some former JOBS members when I found myself in transition again this fall, and discovered the group had since been renamed the Phoenix Executive Network, to reflect the fact that we are all rising from the ashes of job loss.

There are about 15 members now, all senior executives from a broad variety of industry backgrounds. We have CEOs, COOs, CIOs, CFOs and VPs of marketing, sales operations, human resources and finance. It has become a little more formal than JOBS used to be, with guest speakers joining us most weeks, but it still remains true to its support group roots.

It's a real boon to be able to interact with a group of seasoned executives who are also in job transition especially when I have exhausted the patience of my darling wife and daughters.

Like JOBS, the group is still focused on mutual job search and networking support. Mostly we're looking for permanent roles, but a number are also considering interim contracts.

Phoenix is a great source of information, too. I've emailed members on several occasions at odd hours of the day or night to ask such questions as: "Should I have months and years on my résumé, or just years?" or "How do you manage questions about contract roles that appear on your résumé?"

I only ever have to wait a few hours before I'll have a dozen or so responses in my inbox, providing instant expert advice. It's like having my own Yahoo Answers for job seekers.

The group has been around for a while, so there's already an alumni list. Our objective is to keep in contact with members old and new, even after they've secured a new position.

Statistics show that most senior executive roles will last just three to five years in today's environment. So every one of us may need to seek out Phoenix again. I hope it will still be around if I need it and I'm pretty sure my wife does, too!

Sean O'Donovan lives in Unionville, Ont. He will write regular reports chronicling his job search in Globe Careers.

globecareers@globeandmail.com

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