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Facing the New Business Reality

Working for a corporation for many years, creates a “false sense of security” in many people’s minds. After working for the same corporation for many years, people often became complacent and don’t face reality, assuming they will be able to retire from their jobs. The massive new layoffs in the auto industry that we hear about and see in the media, result in a major upheaval for the workers and their families. When caught by the layoff wave some people feel their world has “come apart” and have difficulty getting their lives back in order. Others “bounce back” and find different positions resulting in successful new careers.

Experiencing a rude awaking when unable to face reality:

Two of my friends who worked for major corporations for many years faced the layoff wave but could not bring themselves to do anything about it. The first one worked as a sales rep for an International Technology Company for 35 years and was laid off in his mid-fifties. Seeing the “handwriting on the wall” for a year before being laid off, he still could not bring himself to look for another job. His manager, who gave him the bad news, was devastated and had tears in his eyes since he had known him for many years and was aware that he was getting married for the second time. After getting over the initial shock, my friend “pulled himself together” and started looking for new employment. Being an excellent sales rep he was able to get a new job within a fairly short time. While attending his wedding, I met his new company’s CEO who gave a speech and said how lucky they were to have him “join the family.” A year later he was contacted by his previous company and offered his old job back. Still bitter when he got the offer, his response was: “thank you, but I found myself a new home where I am appreciated.” My friend’s manager, the one who had laid him off, was unexpectedly let go a few months later. Working for his company for 30+ years and being terminated in such a way left such a bitter residue, that he decided to “retire from the business world,” and chose to get involved with charities despite the fact he was still in his early ’50’s.

The other friend was an Engineer who worked for a company that was caught doing “creative accounting” which resulted in thousands of people losing their jobs and their pension funds. Losing his entire retirement fund along with everyone else, the engineer then faced the grim reality of losing his job. For a full year he watched his colleagues and friends being laid off in addition to losing their retirement funds and wondered when it would be his turn. Having dinner at their home one evening, his wife told me that “his car can go to the office on auto pilot” after being at the same job for 32 years. Over dinner my friend said that the Friday before he could not go to work, knowing that another round of layoff would take place. Remembering the previous round of layoffs and watching friends and colleagues in their mid-fifties cry as they were laid off having already lost their retirement fund, he chose to avoid seeing it again. Since the work was outsourced, he was spared from being laid off for one more year, performing quality control on the outsourced work. A year later, his wife told me that she expected him to lose the job any day since he had been bringing home his belongings from the office every day for the entire week. The following Friday he was finally laid off. Having become so bitter, he chose to leave the corporate world and change careers. Three years later he was



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called back by his previous company who felt they needed his expertise again. At first he was so upset he wouldn't hear of returning, but after a number of persistent calls he agreed to come back since it meant getting his previous salary as well as his lost retirement fund.

Facing reality and making a “bold career move” resulting in great success:

One day I got a call on my cell phone from a dear friend who worked for the International Technology Company as a mid-level manager. His opening statement was: “This is a confidential call; I have decided to leave my company.” Not believing the news since he had been with them for the past 30 years, I asked him if he were joking. After a short pause he said: “I never joke about such matters. By Friday it will be public knowledge.” My friend, who is a brilliant manager, was beloved by his employees and was voted the best manager they had ever worked for. When he had to lay off someone, he would give them a year's notice, telling them to look for a new position within the organization or outside of it. Seeing the other manager forced to retire in his early '50's, he realized it might be the “handwriting on the wall,” wondering when it would be his turn. During dinner with a friend who was an executive at an International Communication Company resulted in his being offered a challenging management position at that Communication Company. Despite the fact that the position was in a completely different industry, he chose to accept the offer leaving behind a 30 year old career at the International Technology Company. The regional executive of that corporation, who was also his friend, did not want to lose him and made him an offer he “couldn't refuse.” Against everybody's advice, my friend decided to leave his old company starting a challenging new career with the Communication Company. This decision turned out to be an excellent move resulting in his being promoted to General Manager.

My two friends who did not face their uncertain reality ended up facing the bitter new reality of being laid off. Unlike them my friend the manager, who was also in his mid-fifties when he faced his reality, made a “bold move” which resulted in a rewarding new career as General Manager at the Communication Company. Our greatest enemy are the people who feel they have to give us advice, looking out for our “own good.” Being a self-made man I always say: “When somebody gives you advice, watch where the advice is coming from.” I don't regret the costly mistakes I have made in the past. I regret the decisions I did not make because of listening to other people's “good advice.”

About the author:

Since 1980, Dani Kaplan has worked with Manufacturers, Distributors and Retailers helping them lower their Operating Costs, Mainstream the Operation and Control the Inventory. Dani can be reached at 212-714-3536 <http://www.smcddata.com/> His business mentor Dan Schaefer, PHD, can be reached at www.danschaeferphd.com