

by Allen Anderson

Job Development— Preparing Your Employer Relationships for a Recession

Job development in a recession, a slow economy, or an economy with limited businesses (like some rural economies) needs a focused strategy for ensuring job market penetration and the securing of employment opportunities.

I have noted that the hidden job market becomes predominant in a recession and the open market disappears, or is so small as to be irrelevant. The way into the hidden job market is through existing contacts or creating new relationships. To prepare for a recession, the key strategy is for job developers to have a large list of employers they have some sort of relationship with and who they can approach via this existing relationship.

Job development in a recession, a slow economy, or an economy with limited businesses needs a focused strategy for ensuring job market penetration and the securing of employment opportunities.

The key strategy in a recession is being able to shop the candidate around to employers who know you, to see if the candidate fits the timing and hiring needs of this employer. You don't work from the perspective of uncovering job opening, but rather anticipate them, feel there is a good match between your candidate and an appropriate employer and you take the initiative to introduce the employer to the candidate hoping your timing and matchmaking will pay off.

Employer Trust

To get an employer to consider a candidate when the decision to hire may not yet have been established, the employer must trust you. They must trust that you truly understand them and know what their employment needs are. They must believe that in knowing them that when you make a business proposition like "I have a candidate you should be interested in" it is made from their business point of view. If the employer believes this about you, then when you present an unsolicited candidate, and the candidate offers potential solutions for employment issues, then employer will give serious consideration to this candidate is there may be upcoming jobs.



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Relationship Building

Relationship building is not establishing casual friendly relationships or networking with local employers. Although this is important to initiate the first contact with an employer these activities in and of themselves do not construct the depth of business relationship we are after. We need employers to see that you are genuinely interested in their business needs and are viewing your connections with them as leading somewhere in a business sense. Business relationships talk about business and how you can help the employer's business to succeed along with your own success. Business is always a two way street so the focus on the business relationship ensures positive reciprocity.

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A business relationship is different than networking, education or friendship. All these relationships can be positive but they may not clearly define employment as the ultimate goal and working for employment opportunities may only be implied or inferred. This lack of clarity makes these other relationships weaker in securing employment. A focus on education if it fails to ignite the employer's interest can actually create more employer resistance if the employer feels no need for an education.

Networking is good for establishing the initial contact but there needs to be some activity behind it to take advantage of the outreach created by the networking. This will take us directly back to the business relationship. Friendships are great but often slow at creating job opportunities and at times familiarity makes working together more difficult than working with strangers. Also job developers can get lost in maintaining the friendship and lose sight of the employment goal.

Henry Ford, it is said was asked by his long time friend why he did not buy insurance from him, knowing he was an insurance salesman and instead bought it from a stranger. Henry's reply was (so it is said) "you never asked me". A lesson in why friendships can sometimes get in the way of doing business.

To prepare for a recession we are interested in creating a series of business relationships whether jobs exist with the employer or not at the time of our approach.



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The Two Approaches

We have two approaches to an employer. One, the traditional approach where you respond to immediate job needs as identified, either jobs found through general prospecting activities or jobs that come to you via employers calling in. In non-recessionary this how most job developers secure jobs. But in a recession too few jobs are out there that job developers can find by just prospecting. Often also the job developers have too few employer with whom they have relationships who will call in offering jobs. So these job developers will be at a loss as the market becomes more restricted and have to work extra hard in a recession with fewer results.

An alternative approach, and one that positions you well for a recession, is to target and get to know employers and their business needs about employees, regardless if they have a job opening or not. By getting to know the employer's general business needs even when they are not yet hiring, positions you as a future supplier. The employer comes to trust you, because they know you know them and have started the business relationship by understanding their needs before you have presented any solutions. This will earn you the right to present candidates at anytime before or when openings arise and be seen as a trusted, informed source of labor.

Becoming a Connection

You will become a connection amongst the limited connections the employer is using to access candidates in the hidden job market. When an employer knows you know them, you do not have to wait to be contacted about a potential job; you can make the first move in the best interests of the employer and candidate. This is a more proactive approach than waiting for the job opening to be identified and presented to you.

This more proactive approach gives you reasons to engage the employer on more occasions, cementing the relationship and opening up more opportunities through more discussions taking place. Even if you present a candidate the employer does not need, or is unable to hire, you can ask some additional questions about other employment needs the employer may have or know about. These discussions will generate more opportunities and build the relationship.

Finally, getting to know the employers and their needs before they have any job openings, positions you to gather valuable information from many employers. You will see trends in employment needs and solutions before it comes together for everyone else. You can use this information to be better positioned or better able to build solutions.



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You will get a big payoff in understanding the employer community. This information is valuable. It produces an insider's perspective and confidence, which is what gets employers to listen and elevates you to a higher-level type supplier. It offers a political component in allowing you to understand what is happening in a broadly in your home communities and the ability to concretely speak about it. You will know things that are not commonly known by everyone who does not share your broad scope of employer contacts.

This information has been particularly valuable in communities facing significant layoffs and having to convince laid off workers that the opportunities they need may no longer be in the community and other solutions will be needed. This has also proven valuable in finding part time and other less traditional types of job opportunities.

Employment Relationships Graded

You need relationships in a recession and you need to think about what type they will be. There are three relationships you can have with employers:

1. **One based in price**—you are the least expensive source of labor (not the greatest position as someone will always undercut you).
2. **One based in service**—you provide extraordinary services to support the hiring decision, i.e. follow-up support (better than a price relationship but any service you offer is duplicated by others and you disappear into the crowd).
3. **One based in partnership**—you understand the employer's needs so well you provide added value, anticipate new needs and ensure ongoing effectiveness through your partnership that would be hard and expensive to duplicate (this is the best and most long lasting relationship and it is built in understanding the employer at a deeper level).

There are three relationships you can have with employers:

1. One based in price
2. One based in service
3. One based in partnership

The strategies just discussed work towards a partnership relationship. The next article will provide techniques for getting the relationships started now, hopefully ahead of your recession.

