



## Career & Life Planning

### Improving and Enjoying “Your Recession” Time

Frequently, conversations in Ireland today revolve around the following topics; doom and gloom of poor economic performance, anger or support for NAMA (depending on your view), cost of living, high unemployment, social welfare, public v private sector, poor job prospects and an overall feeling of being “down in the dumps”. While all can contribute to feeling down, most if not all are outside our control.

It is the last two points that I am going to address in this article; poor job prospects and feeling down in the dumps.

For many people, they have never experienced redundancy and all the hardships that go with it. Most who are not working are experiencing emotions around “not being in control” of their life and being idle, again for the first time in their career. In this sentence, lies the answer, being idle. Why?

Well if you think that there are no jobs out there and with over 400,000 (12.5% of the working population) people out of work, you could take comfort in that statistic. However, few media reports tell us that 87.5% are working. Different way of looking at the same media story.

Being idle because lack of employment doesn't mean you can't be highly motivated and productive in using your recession time to improve your life. A case study may help you understand a different way of looking at your situation.

I recently met someone, John, who was let go from his job in March 2009. At the time, he wasn't too concerned of being let go; he knew it was coming and had the summer holidays coming up with the kids, things to do at home that he had put off fixing and his plan was to start “really” looking for a job when September came round.

September came and went. No job. In early October, he told me that he was starting to get annoyed with the few opportunities that were available in the papers and online. He hadn't interviewed since being let go and prior to that it was six years ago that he had an interview which as he recalled was “more of a chat” than an interview. He was also starting to dip into his savings which he hadn't planned and wasn't comfortable doing this.

He was very determined that he needed and wanted a job.....any job will do! “I'll do anything at this stage” Understanding the background to his reasons, I asked him what he had to offer an employer and where he could add value to them. The response to be politically correct was very poor.

John could tell me his work history, what he had done for his previous employers but couldn't tell me what he was going to offer a new employer. Also, he started to tell me how upset he was about really being let go – he had given a lot to his previous employer, worked late, often without pay and although he could see the end coming, mentally he wasn't prepared for the change that was coming.



He was also only looking at jobs in related fields to his past experience and never really explored other options seriously and also didn't fully embrace how competitive it is out there in trying to get employed.

One of Stephen Covey's habits in his book, the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People is to "seek first to understand, then seek to be understood". In John's case, he didn't know the answer to both statements; he didn't know really what prospective employers were looking for and hadn't prepared to be understood when sending out his CV or if he was lucky enough to get an interview.

An employer doesn't need to hire you right now because you need a job. Understand what employers are looking for and prepare a CV that will generate sufficient interest in your application so they will have reason to contact you. They have so much pressure on them right now in trying to survive and if they need to hire someone, they want to make sure the person has the right level of skills required, understands how the role is going to benefit you in your career plan and that they are hiring someone with the right level of skills, history of adding value to previous employers and a much better attitude than the rest of the applicants.

I also asked him about outside of looking for a job, what does he do with his time? Now that most of the projects are done around the house, he was finding it difficult to stay motivated during the day.

John's situation is very similar to many others in Ireland today and the good news is you can change yours if you want to. The following illustration may help you if you are in a similar place as John right now.

If you asked most people what they do or did with their wages at the end of every month, the following simple example may be common;

|  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| <b>Take Home Pay</b>                         | <b>€ 2,000.00</b> |
| Less Mortgage Payment                        | € -700.00         |
| Less Bills (Phone, Sky, VHI, Groceries etc)  | € -500.00         |
| Less Savings                                 | € <u>-300.00</u>  |
| <b>Money to live on till next pay cheque</b> | <b>€ 500.00</b>   |

From this example we have a definite amount every month from which we take away all the deductions and hopefully, we have enough to survive on until next payslip!

Going back to John's story for a minute, I asked him how many hours were in a month. He couldn't answer me so I asked him to calculate how many hours were in November;

**24 Hours X  
30 Days  
720 Hours.**

Taking the same formula for take home pay and apply it to hours in the month, the following was applicable to John;

|   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| <b>November Hours</b>                       | <b>720</b>      |
| Less Sleep ( 8 Hours a Night times 30 Days) | -240            |
| Less Housework (2 Hours per Day)            | -60             |
| Less Job Search (3 Hours per Day)           | -90             |
| Less Work                                   | 0               |
| Less Commute                                | 0               |
| Less Personal Development                   | 0               |
| <b>Monthly Free Time</b>                    | <b>330</b>      |
| <b>Daily Free Time for John</b>             | <b>11 Hours</b> |

Once he realised the amount of free time that he had at his disposal, he was upset that all the time he had lost since March and began thinking of how to put the rest of his time to good use.

He'd normally look for jobs in the morning after kids had gone to school then tidy the house. The rest of his day was free and if someone called around or he had to do something in town, he would do it. He was a like a boat in the middle of a lake being pulled in different directions by people who needed him. He was not anchored to a fixed point and therefore had no base to start from. He was just drifting along.

I then asked him to look at how he could use up the other 11 hours a day to improve his recession time. From here, he started to look at different ways at using his time to become more focused on what was important for him, personally and professionally.

Some of the areas he identified were;

- Using his skills in a volunteer capacity to help some local charities. This would keep his skills current and help improve his networking skills
- He also identified he needed to get some interview experience and began looking at ways of getting formal interview experience from previous HR contacts in his previous employers and practical advice on preparing a professional CV.



- He started looking a putting a plan in place around improving his fitness during his recession time which he had neglected
- He identified networking groups which helped him improve his confidence and ability to and sell himself.
- Identified that he needed to improve his computer skills and started using the internet for free tutorials in improving certain technical skills in Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

Overall, he began to look differently at his future career and life and started to take a positive attitude towards his ability, stop feeling sorry for himself and stop being pulled in different directions by other people.

He has become more proactive on his career and life plan and by putting small goals in place at the end of every week he is gaining more knowledge and confidence about his own ability.

While there are lots of reasons to be negative and despondent during your own recession, my advice is to spend the time challenging yourself and putting together a career and life plan, persist with it when it gets tough and resist the easy option of sitting back and waiting for someone else to hand you your ideal life.

Enjoy the journey!