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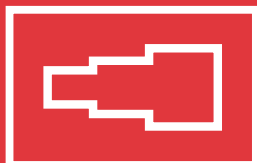
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INSIGHTS...IN SIGHT



The rough and tumble game of musical chairs

by Dennis Schrag

I hate writing this piece. But it needs attention.
I hope you don't ever need it. In case you do, read on.

There is a game that is still widely played at children's parties: musical chairs. The game starts with several players and an equal number of chairs. The chairs are arranged in a formation. Music starts. The player walks around the chairs – positioning themselves. The players know there will be at least one less seat when the music stops. They walk in unison around the chairs. The music stops. Everyone races to claim a chair. The player without a chair is given a pink slip and a good-bye. Everyone knows the music will start again – the same old tune, just fewer players. When the music stops again, there is one less chair and one additional pink slip. The cycle repeats, you never know how long the music will play.

We are playing that game a lot in our stressed economy. Chairs and the positions that go with

them are being removed. Like it or not, players need to be ready to sit someplace else. Janet Banks and Diane Couth wrote a fine article for the *Harvard Business Review: How to Protect Your Job in a Recession* (September 2008). They report that luck plays an important role in who stays and who goes. But survival is most often the result of making personal strategic plans. Here are a few of their suggestions from the article.

Act like a survivor

Don't show that you are concerned about finding a chair when the music stops. Lighten up, act confident and keep your eye on your job and the mission of your organization. Studies show that when people need help getting tasks completed, they are more likely to choose an affable associate over one who is more capable but less likeable. Advice: be in a good mood and be fun to work with.

Plan your future

Survivors have a vision of the future for themselves and their organizations. Stay focused on your internal and external customers. Anticipate organizational needs as necessary changes take place. Show your value to the organization by becoming indispensable. Advice: demonstrate daily that you are a key contributor to the success of the organization.

Be versatile

The more hats you can wear, the more attractive you are. Rightsizing above and below your position can create vacuums. Get as much training (formal and informal) as you can now to be ready to tackle more responsibility (probably without more compensation for a while). Advice: display your capabilities, but remain humble.

Align smart

Recognize the key managers who have the above qualities, and support them. These are tough times for managers and leaders. Help them. Make them look good and they owe you. Advice: reciprocity is one of the oldest forms of currency.

Have a Plan B

Be ready to move on when your chair is moved from underneath you. Read Tom Rath's *StrengthsFinder 2.0* and take the online assessment. Know your strengths and apply them. Get your resume up to date. Broaden your professional circle of friends. Most people find jobs through their network. Anticipate the survivors in your industry and connect through professional organizations. Reconnect with that backyard neighbor who was just promoted to vice president. Get active again in your civic organizations. Advice: get connected with those who may help you find a new job

In the game of musical chairs, both luck and skill will increase your chances of a more successful future. Depend on skill more than serendipity. Turn up the volume.



- Many firms make the following stupid mistakes at interview time:
- Fail to plan and rehearse the interview.
- Talk about themselves and their projects instead of the prospects' project and needs.
- Show an hour's worth of PowerPoint slides of projects in a dark, warm room---that's where they grow mushrooms in manure you know.
- Discuss only technical issues, when more than likely the owners are concerned about the chemistry of your firm working with them., costs, alternatives, schedule, and quality.
- Meet the firm's sub-consultants for the first time at the interview---showing a gross lack of TEAM ability.
- Fail to manage the interview time perfectly.
- Fail to seek and answer owners' questions.
- Fail to be themselves, be truthful, and direct.
- Appear or act nerdy, geeky, superior, pompous, impolite or cold.

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