

Moving Up in Down Times

Consultants say look inside yourself, then look in the mirror

Whether you are forced to make a career change by downsizing, plan to move on to a new organization, or want to position yourself to move up to a higher position in your current company, guidance from a career coach can help make the transition smooth and successful.

“In tight financial times, even executives and senior professionals find themselves facing tough career decisions,” says Donna Beestman of Career Success Strategies LLC.

A seasoned counselor and coach, Beestman helps people assess their strengths, evaluate their experience, explore all of the possibilities, and then pursue a new vision with an updated résumé and a well-defined plan to reach their goals.

In her nearly 20 years in career management for nonprofits, outplacement firms and Fortune 500 companies, Beestman has learned that those in positions to create strategies for organizations are not always adept at creating strategies for their personal development.

Combining multiple types of assessments with plentiful communication, Beestman encourages thorough introspection that often opens the door to latent talents, desires and opportunities that otherwise might have gone undiscovered.

Included in Beestman’s weekly one-on-one in-person or telephone sessions are tips for developing a personal brand, self-marketing, Internet searches and online resources, networking, interviewing, negotiating and ongoing career management.

Creating a Personal Brand

Beestman encourages her clients to develop a personal brand, and a professional appearance is the first step. Colleague and consul-

tant Kathleen Watson specializes in appropriate business attire and other elements of nonverbal communication that distinguish job candidates and set the stage for career success.

Her business, Moving Up Unlimited, offers training and coaching in impression management, a field that helps us learn how to make our presence felt in the most favorable way.

“Research shows that the first 30 seconds of an encounter are critical,” Watson says. “We begin to make immediate judgments about people based on what we see, and we seldom change our minds, instead filtering additional information to support our initial conclusions.”

Watson recommends a traditional, tailored, classic look for both men and women seeking managerial and executive-level positions in most fields. She and Beestman agree that a structured jacket is a key garment for professionals.

Women Managers, Executives Have Special Challenges

“Professional attire is more complicated for women because they have so many more choices than men do, and they have to be careful not to send the wrong signal,” Beestman says.

Both she and Watson caution women about short skirts, low necklines, jewelry that makes noise or dangles, open-toed or -heeled shoes and bare legs.

The consultants admit that conservative clothes may not always reflect the latest fashion



Donna Beestman



Kathleen Watson

trends or colors, but they agree that classic styles are the best choice to convey credibility and competence.

Accessories — including the pen and attaché case you carry — along with grooming, appropriate eye contact, a firm handshake, a well-modulated voice and posture that conveys a sense of presence all contribute to that critical first impression.

Watson also counsels people on how to effectively move, gesture and occupy space to create a sense of authority and trustworthiness.

Scott Fredrick, who is CEO of Phoenix Products Co. Inc., Milwaukee, hired Watson to work with a group of young staff members who were well-educated, bright and capable, but who needed some polish. “We make a high-end product,” Fredrick says, “and professional appearance and proper business etiquette are just as important as product knowledge when calling on architects and designers.”

Every Encounter Counts

“I encourage people to become more intentional about managing their careers, and part of that is paying close attention to personal presentation,” Beestman says. “You’re always making impressions and building your reputation.”

Watson concurs. “Being well-dressed and well-groomed will not guarantee success,” she says, “but an unprofessional appearance almost certainly will undermine it.”