Job Talk – Strategy & Tactics

What’s the difference between a strategy and a tactic? Simply put, a strategy is the big idea – or a few big ideas. Tactics are all the little things that go into making a strategy work. In looking for work or finding a job whether it’s a temporary situation or part of a career, your strategy is the foundation. You don’t need to do ‘everything’, just pick two or three strategies and be persistent with them.

We only have so much energy and attention, despite labor saving devices and caffeinated drinks. The truth is (based on reliable research) people who focus on one thing – quitting smoking, learning a language, quitting drinking/drugs, more exercise, healthier eating, not being sarcastic, are more successful than those who decide from now on they are going to be nice, lose weight, stop smoking and walk 10,000 steps per day. We simply don’t have the energy and focused interest to do it all at once. Partly because you have to not only convince yourself you want to change, but you have to deal with all the people who are used to you the way you are, and may be reluctant for you to change because then they’ll have to figure out a new way to be with you!

One of the essential strategies for finding a job is to discipline your mind. The most important talk you’ll have is the one inside your head. In “Learned Optimism” author Martin Seligman discusses the three factors in being optimistic as opposed to pessimistic. There is a link between optimism and the ability to avoid depression. And not having or finding a job can be incredibly depressing. You can move from “Why should I try, it’ll never get better, this always happens to me, they’ll never hire me, nobody has a job, I'm such a looser” to “This situation will not last forever, I can do lots of useful things and I have good relationships even though this one is almost impossible, and it isn’t totally my fault.” I am not talking about being foolish, a Pollyanna, or naïve. Bad situations (can’t get a job) are not pervasive, permanent or exclusively because of your personality. If you learned at your mother’s knee ‘the sky is falling’ (if something bad happens it'll last forever, it impacts everything and it’s all your fault) you have to work harder at it, but the mind is incredibly teachable. You can teach yours to move away from depression and into optimism, which makes you more resourceful in finding and securing a position. And if not that, at least you’re more enjoyable to be around.

Those three tactics combined with regularly focusing intensely for a fixed period of time on the job search, follow-up, and interview planning will help you get a grip. Notice I didn’t say two hours per day, or one day a week, for example. Every individual has a personal rhythm, but at least a once a week big focus is essential. And then forget it – don’t use up your energy worrying about it. Do your best for now, get on with the rest of your life, and schedule your next job search session.

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