

Authors Share Insights on Career Success

In keeping with the overall theme of this blog, I decided to do a quick Q&A on career guidance with two authors of new career books.

Ford R. Myers is the author of "Get the Job You Want, Even When No One's Hiring" (published in June) and Rick Smith, author of the forthcoming (September) book "The Leap: How 3 Simple Changes Can Propel Your Career from Good to Great."

Both experts answered my questions independently via email, and their complementary insights that can boost career advancement during these hard economic times.

-Question: What is the most important thing people can do now to control their career destiny?

F.M.: The single, most important thing people can do now to control their career destiny is to get crystal clear on the value they offer to prospective employers. Once this is accomplished, the next priority is to learn how to articulate this value, along with the tangible results they can produce. If people can do this, they will see that this economic crisis is actually a huge opportunity to develop a far better career.

R.S.: Research has indicated that those who are in roles that leverage their strengths and passions are much more productive, successful, and fulfilled in their careers. The problem is that most people are left to stumble into this spot. ... Educate yourself about alternative directions. Find a mentor. Volunteer outside of your comfort zone. The right path will become clear over time.

-What is the best move you've made in shaping your career success?

F.M.: The best move I ever made in shaping my own career success was to change fields in my late 30s. I hired a career consultant, completed a battery of assessments, and ultimately discovered my "perfect career." This was a life-changing experience, and I've never looked back!

R.S.: I allowed myself to drift. In the research for my first book, "The 5 Patterns of Extraordinary Careers" (cowritten with James Citrin), we uncovered a surprising finding: Those who were the most successful in their careers were not the ones who had everything planned out from the start. The most successful people were those who allowed themselves to drift. They tried out different roles, different functions, even different companies and industries. After some time, often by their mid-30s, they had identified the roles and environments where they excelled, taking on challenges that they were passionate about. This marked the inflection point where their careers really took off.

-We hear loads right now about how the recession is damaging careers (e.g., lost jobs, pay cuts), and many people feel like they're in a professional desert. What oasis -- in terms of career opportunity -- would you point them toward?

F.M.: Many people are struggling in this challenging job market. So until the economy improves, I'd advise people to be persistent and resourceful. This could mean taking a temporary "bridge job," doing a contract assignment, working two jobs for the time being, or even starting a part-time business. The folks who will thrive during this period are those who are most flexible and adaptable. The job market will never "go back to normal," so we will all have to learn to thrive in a new world of work.

R.S.: Finding a job is about solving someone else's problem, not your own. In today's environment, the biggest problems are related to increasing sales, and finding efficiencies (cutting costs) to meet shifting demand. If you legitimately show how you 1) have a deep understanding of the problem a manager is trying to solve, and 2) have the skills and experience to make significant headway on these objectives, then doors will be open to you, no matter what the environment.