

AT THE CROSSROADS

*Downsized or outsourced?
A career move may be inevitable.*

BY JOHN J. TURPIN, SR/WA

Once upon a time, employment stability was the norm. Years ago, those of us employed in the right of way industry thought that we would be employed by our organizations for a working lifetime. We were confident that, if we performed our duties in a professional manner, we had nothing to worry about. We took comfort as we watched our colleagues retire with 30 or more years of service, believing we would someday be in a similar position.

That was then; this is now. Those days of job stability seem to be a thing of the past. If you think that you are safe from being downsized, right-sized or outsourced, you are mistaken. No industry, agency or institution is immune from the economic forces that require new management stratagems, innovative methods of containing costs and fundamentally different ways of doing business.

I've been employed in the right of way profession for more than 35 years, the last ten of which have been in Federal service. During my professional odyssey, I have been downsized twice. After a 15-year corporate career with Amtrak, a reorganization and severance package made my plan for a 30-year career moot. I eventually found my way into Federal service as a real estate acquisition specialist with the U.S. Postal Service. I soon relaxed, confident that I had found a professional home that would see me through the remainder of my career. Wrong again. After a few years, due to a precipitous decline in first class mail volume, USPS reorganized and closed several facility service offices around the country. Once again, it was time to find a new position.

Fortunately, I had not completely drifted from the good networking practices that I had developed early in my career. Within two months, I was able to find a position with another agency. I need to stress that the position I found was one of those in the hidden job market. The job had not been advertised in the classified ads or any website or job bank. I was fortunate to find the new position by networking with professional contacts, having current professional references available, and of course, a carefully crafted and concise resume.

To those who have been right-sized out of a job, consider it as a unique opportunity to evaluate your personal and professional priorities

(Note: The views expressed here are those of the author, and are not necessarily shared by his employer.)

and chart a new course. If you find yourself in transition, it's best to try and maintain a balanced routine, including a heavy dose of job searching, networking activities, physical exercise, community service/volunteer work, and last but not least, something fun. Here are some suggestions for developing a balanced structure:

1) Plan for a strong Monday. Schedule meetings, phone calls and other planned events that can be expected to have a positive result. The effect will be one that pumps you up for the remainder of the week. Also, before the weekend comes, schedule at least one meeting for the following week. This will help you feel optimistic going into the weekend.

2) Use, nurture and maintain your network of friends, colleagues and associates as part of your regular routine. Many of the available positions today are not advertised in newspapers, trade journals or websites. This hidden job market holds enormous opportunities, and the best way to access them is through networking.

3) Make it a habit to keep your resume current. It's much easier to update it with your latest accomplishments than to start from scratch. To draft a resume after years of neglect can be a daunting task, and you run the risk of omitting recent projects that could make the difference in a job search.

4) Remain active in the IRWA and other professional, civic and fraternal associations. Helping others is a great way to keep your self-esteem intact. Your familiarity with association and community leaders can also provide a wealth of information if you find yourself in need of additional networking resources.

To those who have been pushed into early retirement, I say rejoice! It is not the end of life, and it doesn't mean that you have been put out to pasture. You have just been conferred the enviable title of "Elder Statesman of Right of Way." Bask in your prestige. Build on it as you use your network of friends and associates to help you decide what you'd like to do next. ✪