

Conscious Careering



One Simple Key to Career Success: Don't Be Average!

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According to the most recent government data available, the average (median) income for U.S. individuals over the age of 25 is \$32,140. The average person will change jobs at least 11 times during his or her career. And the average length of unemployment for an out-of-work professional has reached a record 34.4 weeks, according to a U.S. Department of Labor report issued in June.

These statistics probably don't seem very inspiring to many of you out there, especially if you're among the millions of Americans on the hunt for a new work assignment or who are currently "underemployed" well below your potential. And yet, these statistics underscore a profound key to career success that I've rarely seen talked about, but that all of us have it within our power to embrace and follow. The secret formula? Don't be average.

Simply put, being "average" or "mediocre" in either your professional credentials or your job search strategy right now is a virtual guarantee that you'll experience a lengthy period of unemployment, combined with a less-than-ideal income level. This truth of this statement is clearly evident whether you view the issue mathematically, through a statistical lens, or whether you instead just hold a few anecdotal chats with anyone in your immediate circle who has been affected by a layoff event this past year or two. There's no bones about it. The average person is having an awfully hard time out there finding gainful, satisfying employment these days—or at least it *seems* unusually hard, compared to recent societal norms and what we've all come to expect out of the job market these past few decades.

But here's the kicker. Despite these "average" unemployment statistics that are so widely reported, I'm still seeing a "whole lot of average" going around in my encounters with out-of-work professionals around town. For starters, quite a few folks seem to be going through the motions and engaging in the same old tired job hunting methods (e.g. web surfing) that all of their competitors are engaging in, as well. I haven't run across many individuals who seem to be trying anything new, getting creative, or striving to any great length to out hustle or outmaneuver their peers in any way. Instead, I see lots of

folks sitting squarely in their comfort zone, doing the same things everybody else is doing but expecting, for some odd reason, to experience above-average results.

On a related note, I've also witnessed a surprising shortage of folks attempting to boost their employability by securing "above average" qualifications in their field. In my experience, the majority of displaced workers seem to be spending a ton of time fretting, worrying, wringing their hands, and allowing their qualifications to atrophy with each passing month—when they could be devoting all of these hours, instead, to upgrading their skill sets and acquiring a more marketable set of credentials.

No occupation stands still, after all. Every profession is in a constant state of evolution and if you do a little research, you can identify the "hot" credentials that are emerging in your field and most in demand by today's managers. And as I remind a lot of my clients, the obligation of calling yourself a "professional" is to engage in a regular regimen of professional development that ensures you don't get left behind in terms of the knowledge, tools, and technologies demanded by employers in your field. Just as you don't see professional athletes (at least the successful ones!) taking their summers off and eating big bags of Krispy Kremes, you won't find many employers eager to recruit job candidates who have let their skills "go to pot" during their employment hiatus. So if you're a marketing professional who still hasn't managed to learn anything about SEO principles, get on it. Or if you're an accountant who is rusty on the latest tax regulations or financial software packages, carve some time out to address these issues.

The bottom line? The "average" employment statistics right now aren't very encouraging; so don't let yourself become one of them. If you're going through a career transition as we speak, or employed but worried about the stability of your current assignment, it's time to make a commitment to yourself. Commit to not being average. Avoid the dangerous luxury of mediocrity and recognize that the key to success in today's market is to acquire a set of credentials your competitors won't likely be able to match—and to learn how to market and sell yourself more effectively than you have in the past. Thankfully, there are more ways than ever to accomplish both of these tasks if you put your mind to it, since we live in a world that's awash with books, blogs, webinars, coaches, college courses, and other methods that can help you jump the curve on both fronts in a hurry!

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