

Conscious Careering



When looking for work, take a cue from the Navy Seals! It's better to act than to sit around weighing your options

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Like many small business owners, I've found that I have a hard time giving myself permission to take time off work. It's just not as easy to enjoy a vacation, you see, when there's nobody back at home minding the store!

Earlier this year, however, I saw a great window of opportunity, so I convinced myself to take a week off to go visit an old friend of mine from high school. I figured it wouldn't hurt to relax for a while and take a break from thinking about resumes, job hunting, and all of the other issues that I focus on as a career counselor.

So after some hasty calendaring and collaboration with my friend, who works as a Navy Seal commander based in San Diego, we decided to spend our R&R time taking two kayaks south of the border and paddling around the Baja Peninsula. This decision reached, we started working on the logistical arrangements and soon found ourselves camping out on a beautiful, isolated beach in Bahia de los Angeles, a small village on the Sea of Cortez often referred to by guidebooks as the "Poor Man's Galapagos"—and a destination which I'd highly recommend to all outdoor enthusiasts.

Once we arrived, and were comfortably ensconced around the campfire, the Coronas started kicking in and some serious reminiscing was in order. Gary turned out to have a great many questions about what life was like in the private sector, since he'd been in the military since graduating college, and I, of course, wanted to know everything he could share about the special forces and what life was like as a Navy Seal. Was it as glamorous as portrayed in the movies? Could he really swim 100 miles underwater in the dark and disable attackers with a twitch of his little finger?

As you might suspect, these Hollywood stereotypes were all laughably overblown. And while I certainly wouldn't have wanted to tangle with Gary in a dark alley, he was still by all appearances the same person I knew, not some superhuman fighting machine.

When our conversation drifted to the topic of tactical battlefield maneuvers, however, my friend said something that surprised me. He said that when Navy Seals face a combat situation, and are under fire, they follow one key

rule—that it's better to make the wrong move quickly, and execute it flawlessly, than sit around analyzing the situation until you're convinced of what the exact right move may be.

He said that this concept traced back to the words of General Patton, who once said: "A good plan violently executed right now is far better than a perfect plan executed next week."

The moment this profound disclosure came out, my vacation came to a temporary halt. I found myself instantly transported back into the world of career coaching, since the principle that Gary was describing was the exact same one I'd taught my clients for years with regard to the job search process. When faced with the need to find employment, especially in a short time frame, it is far more effective to take action than to sit around waiting for the "right answer" to come to you in a flash of inspiration.

Simply put, job hunting is a sloppy, messy process. There are few absolutes and it doesn't lend itself well to patient, rational analysis. More than anything, it's a numbers game where you create your own luck through a combination of energetic networking, direct marketing, and proactive legwork. Approaching it from an intellectual standpoint can therefore be a major mistake, since people prone to extensive analysis will consistently lose out on opportunities to the go-getters they're competing with who get out of the house and gain visibility for themselves.

By getting out of your head and taking action, you'll also inevitably stumble upon goldmines of help where you least expect them. I've had people land great interviews at pizza parties, by talking to people in the grocery store line, and by sending out batches of unsolicited letters to companies of interest. If you keep planting enough seeds, your efforts will eventually bear fruit. But if you constantly second-guess each seed before you plant it, you'll likely be in the job market for the long haul.

In the end, thanks to the tranquility of the Baja landscape and the power of cerveza, this unexpected insight didn't ruin my vacation. My friend and I resumed our kayak excursion the next morning and I was able to successfully tune out thoughts of the job market for the remainder of the trip. But for that brief moment in time, I was excited to discover a thread of kinship between my friend's world and my own. In his role as Seal Team commander, and my role as career coach, it appears we each pass along a similar philosophy—while planning is important, it's no substitute for decisive, immediate action!

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