

Effectual Thinking for Your Career Search



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Two years ago, at the height of the pandemic finding employment was a challenge for many. In April 2020 unemployment rose to a record 14.7% and the U.S. had 43.2 million workers either out of work or working reduce hours. Today (March 2022), employment is at 3.6% and there is this “great resignation” phoneme still going on from the spring of 2021. According to Willis Towers Watson’s 2022 Global Benefits Attitudes Survey, 44% of employees are actively looking for new employment. Times have changed!

For those who are graduating or that 44%, consider looking at the job search through an effectual thinking process. Effectual thinking works on the philosophy of, “If I can control the future, I do not need to predict it.” Some very successful serial entrepreneurs, including Michael Rubin, an e-commerce and sports entrepreneur, and Oprah Winfrey, an entrepreneur who built businesses based on her television audience following, each used effectual entrepreneurship. Serial entrepreneurs are effectual.

Individuals are often raised and educated in a manner that results in causation mindset which thinks, “If I can predict the future, I can control it.” You focus on achieving a desired goal through a specific set of given means. Causation uses the philosophy of search and select tactics, which serves as the foundation of management theories you have learned.

To navigate through the job market, consider using what you already know. Focus on the given means (what you know) and choices; and then, define your goal. Effectuation encourages creative, innovative and transformative tactics to control your future. As stated earlier, effectual thinking says, “If I can control the future, I do not need to predict it.”

Effectuation uses five principles. Applying these principles can provide advantages in your job search.

BIRD IN HAND PRINCIPLE

The first step of effectuation is your means, not your goal. Begin with looking at the resources you have at your disposal right now. Make an assessment by asking yourself “*Who am I?*,” “*What do I know?*,” and “*Who do I know?*”

Who am I? Conduct self-reflection and complete a value map exercise to determine your strengths, traits, and abilities. “*Who you are*” is something you likely take for granted, think of as obvious, and have never thought about memorializing in a written document. However, defining your values is key when trying to explain your work to colleagues, superiors or hiring managers. When developing your value map, survey your supervisor, co-workers, professors, and peers. Try to keep away from asking your mom, as she already knows that you’re brilliant, and BFFs are not always unbiased!

What do I know? What value do you bring to the table with education, training, expertise, interests, and experience that employers can use to solve their problems? Here is where you want to uncover your value through a competence mapping exercise. Use the results from competence mapping (what you bring to the table) to match your value to solving the employer’s requirements and needs. Maybe you are applying for a social media marketing position and have been successful with social media marketing through school clubs and internships. That’s great, and you are very qualified, but you also need to highlight what differentiates you from the other qualified applicants who are applying.

Who do I know? Target and segment your social and professional networks for employment opportunities. This provides you with effective introductions via your network (e.g. colleagues, classmates, former employers and co-workers, professional acquaintances, friends, family, etc.). You will find an excel spreadsheet works well for this task. Research on how to best develop this process as there a number of books and websites with good information on identifying and farming your network.

After completing the exercises of “*Who am I?*,” “*What do I know?*,” and “*Who do I know?*” you will be ready to create a personal value proposition (PVP). A PVP is a summary of why an employer should hire you! It’s not what you want, but instead it’s about what value you bring to a particular opportunity. Some job seekers will write a brief statement, a value proposition letter, to a recruiter or hiring manager. The statement explains what makes you a unique job candidate, including skills, strengths, and accomplishments that show how you will add value to an organization. Usually the first question asked in an interview is, “Tell me about yourself.” When answering this question, the first sentence is your PVP. It’s extremely important to develop a strong PVP. A message map is an excellent place to start when developing your PVP, here is a link for more information on [the message map technique](#).

AFFORDABLE LOSS PRINCIPLE

PRINCIPLE 2

Determine what you can afford to lose. By using this principle, you kill failures early and accumulate successes by leveraging on what works. Ask yourself, “*What can I possibly lose by taking this action and is this action affordable to me?*” If it is an affordable loss and there are potential gains, go for it! Here are a few examples:

- Initiating contacts with other people has a very low cost but high upside.
- The job market is booming, should you stay in school to earn a Master’s degree for a better opportunity in 18 months? You already have \$70,000 worth of debt from your undergraduate degree. Is the additional debt worth it?
- There is a significant need for coding skills. You could attend a coding school, incur an additional \$20,000 of debt and in six months have multiple certifications making you a candidate for a variety of high paying jobs opportunities.
- A company you desire to work for has a low paying position in a different department than your field of study. Should you consider this position to increase your chances of landing a position in a department that you want to work in?

There is no “right” answer to the question of “*What is an affordable loss?*”. The question is very personal and can only be made by you after careful consideration of your personal aspirations and financial situation.

LEMONADE PRINCIPLE

PRINCIPLE 3

There is an old saying, “*When you get dealt lemons, make lemonade.*” I always use lots of sugar! Leverage the possibilities by embracing the unexpected that arises from uncertain situations; be flexible rather than chained to your current goals. A great story I share with my entrepreneurship classes on the lemonade principle is the invention of the potato chip. George Crum invented the potato chip in 1853. Crum was a chef at a restaurant where French-fries were popular, and one day a diner complained that his fries were too thick. Mr. Crum cut the potatoes thin, fried them up, and salted the potatoes heavily. Out of a customer complaint, the potato chip was born! Learn to work with surprises and turn those surprises into opportunities e.g, If you have a business degree with a concentration in marketing but there is an opportunity at a large company as an accounting clerk, why not consider it? After getting your foot in the door, you’ll have a better opportunity to move towards that desired marketing position (actually happen).

CRAZY-QUILT PRINCIPLE

Partnerships, partnerships, partnerships...create a personal “*quilt*” by forming partnerships with diverse people and organizations willing to make a real commitment to jointly creating the future with you. For example, join a business civic organization and volunteer to serve on a committee. A committee member notices the hard work and skills you employed to ensure the success of the committee project. Her company has an opening, and she recommends you for the position before the job is on Indeed (actual story). The Crazy-Quilt Principle can serve as a paramount resource in finding the right employment.

PILOT IN THE PLANE PRINCIPLE

You are in the pilot seat of your career, which means you need to “*Control vs. Predict.*” By focusing on activities within your control, you need to know your actions will result in the desired outcomes. Of course, not everything can be shaped or controlled, but effectuation encourages you, as the pilot of your career, to focus on those aspects of the environment that are, at least to a certain degree, within your control.

The effectual thinking process can be a great tool to take the next step in your personal and professional journey. Congratulations to the recent graduates! Best of luck to the new graduates and the 44% looking for that new opportunity.

ABOUT AAWDC

Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation (AAWDC) is a nonprofit organization that provides innovative, high quality workforce development services to Anne Arundel County businesses and residents. AAWDC enhances the economic vitality of Anne Arundel County by developing and implementing workforce solutions. The organization builds and maintains a pipeline of skilled talent to meet the demand of businesses and prepares residents with the in-demand skills that lead to family-sustaining employment.

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