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Defibrillator Jobs — Part I

By **Peter Weddle**

This is the worst job market since the Great Depression. Each new day seems to bring another corporate bankruptcy announcement or another round of layoffs or both. The competition for work, as a result, is fierce. There are now millions of Americans looking for a new job and far fewer jobs to find. It doesn't matter how many years of experience you have or how distinguished your past record may have been, if you're breathing as you read this, you're dealing with the most difficult and frustrating job market of your life.

So, what should you do?

Increasingly, some are saying that you should take any marginally acceptable job you can get and hang on until the recovery arrives. With a mortgage to pay and a pesky need to eat from time-to-time, I can understand that point of view. However, I think it's wrong, dangerously wrong. Hunkering down is the worst tactic in such an environment. It puts your career on hold, when you should be fortifying yourself for what is likely to be a challenging decade or more. You see, the good times won't return simply because the economy recovers. The job market may ease a bit, but employers are going to be just as demanding and just as picky as they are today. They won't change which means you will still be at risk of spending month, even years in search of reemployment.

So, here's my suggestion: look for a "defibrillator job." That's a job that will shock your career back into a rhythm that can sustain you even in the face of unprecedented competition in the job market and the fussiest employers in history.

A defibrillator job has two characteristic benefits:

- **Survival income that pays the mortgage and other bills and puts food on the table.** These positions do not draw on all of your talent or capabilities. They do not put you at the same level of seniority or power as that which you had attained in your former jobs. But, they are gainful employment. They reestablish you in the employed workforce—with the stature inherent in that position—and provide a paycheck you can

count on, not to enjoy some previous standard of living, but simply to survive.

- Is taking a defibrillator job a step backwards in your career? To put it bluntly, yes. But, it's a backward step with a very important forward looking advantage. Finding a job that fits you perfectly takes far too long and may even be an impossible dream in today's job market. A defibrillator job acknowledges that reality and enables you to avoid harming your financial position further by drawing down on your savings or selling your home in a lousy real estate market. It provides a foundation that you can use both to get by in the short term and, equally as important, to get ahead in the longer term as the economy recovers.
- **Flexibility during the day so that you are able to regain your occupational strength and momentum.** Either your work schedule or the demands of the job provide the space you need to focus on expanding your professional knowledge and skill set, extending your range of contacts in your field and doing all of the other things required to move yourself forward again.
- When you're unemployed in this kind of environment, your career is sick. As with a physical illness, that doesn't necessarily mean that you've done anything wrong. It simply recognizes that your occupational health has been weakened, and you need to recuperate. Unlike with the flu or even a virus, however, your career cold won't get better by itself. You have to take proactive steps that will enable it to regain its health. That's why a defibrillator job is one that provides both a survivable income and the time it takes to regain your career fitness.

How do these two benefits "shock" your career back to health? The income stream holds you and your family steady financially while the aggressive acquisition of new skills and occupational stature jolt your career back into a rhythm that will sustain your progress. It takes a bit of humility and a lot of courage to attain the first and unflinching determination and a wellspring of drive to give yourself the second. Acquire both and you will have everything you need to survive and prosper, no matter how terrible the job market.

I will explore how you find and compete for defibrillator jobs in my next column.

Thanks for reading,

Peter

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