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Tough times need not harm jobs

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This is the third time I've had to cope with a period of economic malaise since I began recruiting in direct marketing back in the late 1980s, and with every downturn comes heightened anxiety about job security. Here are some tips on how to make the best of it.

If you are in the job market, you should make sure your résumé glows like a military shoeshine. You should make sure it includes every major accomplishment of your career. You will be up against more applicants seeking fewer available positions, so this is a great time to sharpen your interviewing skills and seek out books, articles or anything else you can find that could help you gain a competitive edge.

After each interview, consider writing a handwritten thank-you note instead of an e-mail, because it might help set you apart.

In this environment, you also need to have more conservative earnings expectations. Save your hopes for a big pay increase until after things turn around.

If you do lose your job, it may be something you hoped will never happen, but it is not the end of the world. Employers still hire during downturns and, in fact, you may have the exact skill set a company needs to help it cope with tougher times. And who knows — it could open new doors that you otherwise would have never known about.

If you are an employee, how is your attitude? Are you willing to do more? Are you working late when needed? These are the people your employer will want around to help keep others motivated during times of recession. Those who are lazy, complaining or who gossip will probably be the first to go.

If you are an employer, you should give top priority to retaining your “A” talent. Keeping these people should be your top priority, but it is particularly challenging when a company is not experiencing growth or

creating the kind of opportunities that attracted superior employees to begin with. Spend more time with them.

If you plan to hire in the months to come, you don't need to jump at the first candidate who comes through the door. For many job categories, there will be a larger pool of applicants chasing fewer positions, and that will create potential opportunities to pick up top performers who might otherwise not be available.

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