

## Transcription: Nick Plummer Part 1 - Career Transitions

Welcome back. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today we're talking with Nick Plummer and I'm going to let Fulyana introduce him.

Welcome Nick, I'm delighted you're here. Nick, is one of the founding members of Directioneering. Directioneering has been instrumental in helping so many businesses and individuals within the businesses to find the next career move. Nick you've been in this business for how long?

Directioneering has been going for about 12 years and I have been doing this work for 25 years. Excellent and you actually worked for big organizations before you setup your own business didn't you? Yes I started this with Price Waterhouse for 4 years, I worked with Morgan & Banks for a couple years and then worked with a very large career transition firm which was bought by a big American firm. I worked for them for about 8 years and then we started Directioneering.

In that time you would have seen changes in the way we approach Human Resources generally, have you seen a similar change to the way you approach outplacement?

Probably in the way WE approach outplacement. I think it's changing generally for example in the US, it's more often delivered by technology, but in this country that hasn't happened quite as much. Do you think it will? Yes, I think it will, but maybe Australians are a bit different Americans in that I think they'll want to retain a lot of that one-on-one, hands-on stuff that you get in outplacement here, but it's obviously a hell of a lot cheaper to do that technologically and that's always going to be a driver. So yeah, I think I do have more technology across the board.

What's the biggest issue for you? When you first go to an organization or they first engage you? Well, our service is a bit different. I think, if you ask a client to describe an outplacement firm and what was different about that outplacement firm, they don't really fully understand what you do. So I think what our business is more about, is trust. It takes quite a long while for a client to really get to know you and to trust you.

That probably reinforces that it needs to remain as a human interaction rather than a technology one. Because if you're asking people to trust you, there's more trust placed in a human interaction than a technology interaction. Yes,

that's exactly right Kim. Also we tend to operate at the more senior level and therefore that's not going to be delivered by technology.

Do you find any more resistance to your services at that level? Do you hit a barrier? I'll go back to being inside an organisation, being in the position of using outplacement services, both as a person requiring that and as a representative of an organization. From my experience, the middle level of management, there was huge resistance to even talking to anyone about that particular service. And a lot of people just walked away and said I don't want it. But at the next level up, the senior level, it was yes I understand that this is a resource that I need to use and so I would use that resource rather than have to try and find a solution myself. Do you find that's the reaction?

I think that's probably changed quite a bit. More and more people have got laid off. Everybody gets laid off sooner or later now. And so a lot of people are used to going through that process, sadly. And then I think it gives them an opportunity to reassess their careers that they don't get in any other way. Where else do you get the opportunity to stop and think about what you're doing and where you're going?

To answer your question, the place I find the most resistance is at the managing director level. It used to be that almost no managing director wanted to use outplacement services. They looked on it as something they bought for other people but not something they did themselves.

That's changing now, many managing directors realize that you know, they need some help with what they might do as other people do. But there's still some resistance in that space because they feel their network is very good so they perhaps don't need the service. Do you think that some of that resistance is them feeling they don't want to be seen as not knowing what to do because I should know since I'm the managing director? Yes, exactly.

The same resistance you used to get many years ago, Fulyana, to coaching. People used to think if I'm being given coaching then I'm a failure. These days people put their hands up and say they want two coaches. So yes, there's that change.

If we take a step back, when is the best time for people to look at their careers and assess whether it's time to make a change? Changing your career is quite a significant thing. It used to be that you only had one career, like my father, he had one career. Now my generation has on average about three careers and the

next generations down the track, will have more careers again. So it's going to become more and more important. So I think the sign that it's time to change your career, it's usually it's a crisis that changes careers, but that crisis has come because perhaps the person was doing something that either is becoming less and less demand for in which case it's definitely time to change or that they've moved to a different in a part of their life and it's not so appropriate doing that thing or because this is something else I want to do.

There are two questions we could be asking ourselves about what we are doing. One is, is the demand still there?

Are my skills up to date? The other thing is, am I still enjoying this? Is this something I want to carry on doing? And if the answer is no to either of those things, then it's time to change. Or think about change.

Let's look at the individual who has answered those questions, is it appropriate to say I need some help? Is it appropriate to approach a service like this or do they look elsewhere for help? There's all sorts of places you can turn to for help at that time. Most outplacement services are not retail driven, in other words an individual often can't buy a service from them, but a company can buy it for them. Actually we will do it both ways, but it's definitely worth while turning to somebody in that situation. You need to find someone to give you a very good idea of your own makeup, of where you are in in the marketplace, has an understanding of the marketplace, understands what the opportunities and possibilities and has some sort of process that can help you in really thinking those things through and look at the possibilities.

Are you looking then at a mentor or a coach? Yes, a mentor, a coach or a career transition consultant. What do you see is the difference between mentoring and coaching?

I think a coach is someone who adds value to what you are trying to do, looking at how you do it and help strengthen you. A mentor is somebody who's already done that particular thing and so is looking at the specifics of what you do and you know helping you do it in that way. They slightly overlap but that's how I see it.

What do you think? Well I'm going to let Fulyana talk because I don't want to be in trouble since she hasn't said anything for almost 5 minutes. There's so many different schools of thought about the difference between mentoring and coaching. For me, mentoring is sharing one's own experience, not actually telling them what to do and forcing them in a certain way, it is just somebody to think

out loud with , someone who would have life experience, corporate experience, that can share examples to let the individual come to their own decisions. And if they made a decision and it didn't go the way they hoped, is how to recover from there and how to move on. A coach does a bit of that as well but also more specific, like how do I write the best business plan? How do I go about leading a team of professionals who used to be peers? That's a lot more instructive and there is blurred lines between the two. So you do what you need to do for the person at the time basically.

Talking about careers and the next career move, I know that a lot of people, including me, are driven by what are the opportunities that might come up and you're also driven by am I happy in this company. Am I still growing? And am I getting enough money etc? I came across one of the individuals who went through those graduate programs, a very, very, very focused young, man. He's doing really, really well and after the program finished he said I should now look at a career move. I was very surprised and asked why. He said I'm right at the top of the tree so I'm at my most marketable.

Do you see a trend when people change careers? I agree with you about the three times in your life. But what I have seen is that it's three complete changes, three totally different areas the people work in. I see that with myself because I started off as a marketer in the food industry and I would go around the world doing that. And then I worked for other people running career transition businesses. I started learning how to do that and then I ran a couple of other businesses and then I started my own business. So yes, for me, it has been three very clear changes.

I wonder if the acceptance of the change that's brought upon them when it is a change, is easier to accept if you make that complete change? And that is true. But absolutely normally, it is a crisis that causes that, usually losing a job. I heard a lovely example of when somebody had done that. This had been a very successful lawyer and he was working in Hong Kong and he had a major crisis in his life. He had a bunch of guys that he used to play rugby with and they went off to Bali and a lot of them were killed in the Bali bombing and that had a dramatic change on him. he started a charitable organisation. It can be a number of different things that will cause the change and just provide you with the impetus to do something that might have been sitting at the back of your mind and you didn't think that it was appropriate to do or the right time to do.

Somebody might be listening to this and they haven't been through a redundancy situation. Talking about senior executives which you deal with

regularly, talk us through what emotions these individuals might feel. Losing a job is a very emotional thing. Actually, I think it's less emotional nowadays than it used to be because there's less stigma attached to losing jobs, but nevertheless it's still a really emotional thing and I think the more significant the job was in your life, the more emotional it is too. So usually they will go through the normal grieving process, you know, so at first, when they first lose the job they go into shock and that's something that we see because it's the time that we usually meet the exec that's lost the job. So often they're not thinking through things completely rationally. And then they will usually go through anger followed by the one that we have to watch out for very, very carefully - depression. People can get depressed after losing a job. That's something we have to watch out for very, very carefully and then people will normally stop start to appraise the situation, feel out the possibilities and they'll understand that this is not an unusual thing that's happened and that it happens to lots of other people and usually, they'll move gently toward acceptance of the whole thing. It's quite an emotional rollercoaster for them and it just depends on the individual how long that process is going to take and how extreme it is for them.

This sounds bizarre but the worst thing that can happen for them, actually there's two really bad things. One is that there's something else going on in their life that's not good at the moment. If they've got money problems or sickness in the family or somebody's died or something. Terrible thing like that could make it even worse. The other thing is sometimes the organization to try and be kind, they keep the individual there for a time even though they know that they've gone and strangely enough that's often not a good thing to do. What that does is extends the grieving cycle. So, you know, it's something we have to keep a very wary eye on.

What about the situation where they go on to something too quickly? They go from knowing that that grieving process for one part of their life isn't allowed to run its course, that they get replaced somewhere else very quickly in the process so there isn't closure of that first one. Do you see that happen?

Yes, it's like the person who gets divorced and gets remarried too fast! It can be alright but can resurface as well and they go through it all over again and the worst thing that they could do is to move on to another job but their confidence has been somewhat shattered you know, because it just makes it more difficult for them to do the next job.

If we're talking senior executives here, would they not have an inkling that this was going to happen? Yeah, often they do and it's not a bad thing if they do. You

don't see denial in that process? Yes there's always denial.

There's just so much for us to cover with you Nick that we're going to take a break now and will come back with part 2 of this discussion on career transitions. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.