

Transcription: Nick Plummer Part 2 - Career Transitions

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and today we continuing our talk with Nick Plummer about career transitions and the use of outplacement services.

When I was in Human Resources or just general management, I was asking for some feedback, asking people how did they find this transition process and if they could pick one or two things that they found was most helpful. I must admit, I've been close to this process from all aspects and this one surprised me, but I kept it in mind. They said the services were helpful in the way they would articulate to their family, to their friends and afterwards, to potential employers what to say about the situation. These are intelligent, capable people who have helped many, many people in their time. It's easy to say restructuring or downsizing. What do I say? But two phrases that come up all the time - why me and why now? How do I feel about that? How do I articulate that? It was harder for a number of people than getting the news.

And so they found the outplacement services, the coaching, the mentoring, helped them do that and get comfortable with the language with which they can feel human. They get it off their chest but at the same time they don't impact the other party.

It's rewiring your brain. It's no different to writing a journal, writing all the bad things that happen in the day and you keep re-reading and that just perpetuates the feeling that nothing's working. But if you stop to say I'll just put that behind me and today I'm just going to write down the good things, even if you think you've had a bad day, if you only wrote down the good things that happened today, you'll always be able to find three. If you do that at the end of the day it rewires your thinking. It's a physiological thing that it rewires your brain to say there was some good that came out of that and that's what I focus on because that's the direction I want to go. We don't wake up every morning thinking how bad can I feel today. So we need to train ourselves at the other end of the day to give our brains time to rewire a few minutes.

The communication thing is really, really important. When you first meet the person that has just lost their job, usually a few minutes after they've lost their job, the most important thing for them is to go out and tell the rest of the world and that usually means their partner what's happened. And that's really important. I mean, you have heard terrible stories of where an individual loses his job and doesn't tell his partner and pretends to go back to work.

It is very hard to go back and tell your partner that you just lost a job because you feel in some way it was your fault.

So we have to try to encourage individuals to do that and check with them when we see them again that how did that go? And what was the reaction of the partner? And then of course, the next important thing is what are you going to be telling the "market", if you like me, the search firms, the potential employers and your network what's happened. And once again, people find it very difficult to say what happened. Our encouragement of them is to say, tell exactly what happened, cast yourself, of course, in the best possible light, but tell the world what we call the leaving story, which is, you know, what happened to you at X firm and why have you moved on.

And quite frankly, the market will know about the parting of the ways between the two of you. Let's explore what actually did happen. Perhaps it was a parting of the ways, the chemistry was not right between you and your boss or whatever mutually you decided, that you and your organization mutually decided that you move on. Because that's what happened. And then it's what are you going to tell the neighbours, the relatives?

You know, we wear our jobs. When people introduce themselves at parties and things, it's what I do is really important. When the answer is I'm not doing anything at the moment or I'm currently unemployed, that's very difficult. So helping them work out what they might say is really important.

Interesting that we see that not just in people who lose their jobs for whatever reason, but also in retirees that their vision of themselves, who they are is identified by their job and they can't move beyond that and there's no life beyond that.

I just want to go back to something you said at the beginning of that about the timing of your services. You see them almost immediately? Is that always the case? No, in an ideal world we'd like to meet the individual immediately after they've had the termination. I believe that that's a sensible thing to do is because that person needs help at that time, but it also helps them move forward because you can give them some guidance or some reassurance, that you're going to be helping them.

It's so they don't get stuck. But sometimes it's not appropriate to do that. Sometimes organisations would prefer you don't because they just don't feel

comfortable doing that. So we might meet that person later on sometimes. I mean, to be honest, it's not easy meeting for us either but we would prefer that we meet them immediately after if possible.

That's interesting, I've not ever thought of that. In the situations that I've been in, people have always been in the room when you get called in for the news. So it has been that they need you to fill out these forms, so we can pay you and see you later.

The networking, you mentioned networking as part of the outplacement, that one of the stages is to encourage the candidate to rebuild their network. I have experience with people who are very, very good at networking but they actually get lost at that time of job loss. They get lost because they're used to people coming to them because they're in a senior position and things are always happening around them. They're always meeting and greeting and knowing people and now they feel they're not in that position. They have to actually break the ice. Did you come across that?

Yeah. Because it's what we were talking about before. I think people are embarrassed by the fact that they've lost a job and that they don't want to tell their network that, there's almost a reluctance to network. Some people don't have a good network. And almost everybody thinks they're not a good networker. Or they don't identify a network, they don't see that the people they know are ostensibly a network of contacts, regardless of what they do, or how you know them, that there's other parts of their lives that you don't know about that might be useful.

I think sometimes people confuse networking with "gald handing". That's not networking. Networking is having a mutual help group where people communicate with each other and they help each other. Most people do that and most people have a "network".

This is really important because we keep stats on how people get jobs and of the people that come through our doors around Australia, 58% of them get jobs from that network which is a much higher number than any other source like the service firms, recruitment firms which have much lower percentage results. So your network and how you use it is significantly important.

And you would think too, that these days at that level within the network, whether it's identified or not, there's going to be people who've been in the same position as you. These people may have known that this was coming for you anyway,

because they know what's happening in the industry with all the other companies that are around. So they're not isolated from what has happened. They will know if your story is true, so why would you not fall back on that support group?
Absolutely.

And I remember when I was made redundant, which is how I discovered outplacement services, by the way. I was embarrassed about it and I saw one of my neighbours over the fence so I said, just to let you know that you'll see more of me because I've just been made redundant and I remember his response. He said yea, that happened to me a couple of times and there's this recruitment firm I should introduce you to.

This country is very supportive of each other because it has been a kind of frontier country. People are very supportive of each other and the network usually is absolutely there to help. Yes, I think what we fear in those situations is us putting a label on things that isn't necessarily there, we're hiding behind thinking this might be how these people would react. It's not how I would react if the situations were reversed, but it might be how they react. So I'll prepare myself for that, when you're not really looking at the reality of how these people have been friends for you over years or done things for you and would only want to be doing the best for you anyway.

Absolutely and your network is only a conduit really. All you're looking for in your network is advice on organizations but really also looking for connections to businesses which you're trying to explore. You might not want to work for them, but you want to find out more about them and the network can do this more easily. And now, of course, you have LinkedIn which is an extraordinary tool.

I think that's probably what we should look at it in this situation, is that we can use technology. It won't replace the human services that are available in this area, but it's certainly going to make some of the tasks broader and more useful. For example, on that point is that I know that going through the outplacement services that you provide, is that you go through a different steps and then you do questionnaires and all of those to find out what you are good at, your strengths and weaknesses, but then what's the most natural to you - dealing with people, being a researcher in the back office etc that part you can do online.

You can. It's interesting what you say Fulyana. We look upon that as probably the most important part of out placement, really. Because it's a very important thing for you to define the job and the career that you're looking for because you know, if there's an opportunity in losing a job it's that you move into something

that's going to work better for you over the next period. Now we use technology to do that a lot. You're quite right.

You can use very good online tools nowadays to do that. I use American tools. The important thing is the information you see come out with tools is the conversation between the consultants and the candidate that will open up things, really. So that's where we need good, you could call them coaching skills, but I call them counseling skills, more. So that's the really important part of what we do.

And that's important because I could go and fill it online and then what? In that situation the counselor or consultant is crucial in that process. So it's a process and it needs time as well, you know. Now, that time is going to be dependent, the more senior the role, in many ways, the longer the process. It's a process where you give some structure to the individual so that they explore various things, but you allow them, in concurrent interaction with other people beyond you, who can act as a sounding board and then they need the time to think it through. Often that time will change things as well.

I can think of an example. Fascinating guy that I worked with once who was a very high powered individual. He came out of a well-known Australian company and, you know, should have been the managing director this company, but he didn't get that role, wrong choice, actually. Now I started working with him before he finished up. He was very clear in his own mind that he wanted to go back to a very senior role. There was one more very senior role in him then he would move to a portfolio, get easily on boards and things like that. And then he went away for a long holiday with his wife, you know, when he actually finished up and a really good holiday and perhaps for the first time for a long time he "smelled the roses". He came back and said he had a complete change of plans. I'm going to go straight to portfolios. So time can change things as well. It was the right move for him as well, he ended up with a really portfolio which he is still doing now.

So we're getting a picture of say, you come in early in the process of being an outplacement candidate and then you go through getting to know them, helping them, giving emotional support, then talking about utilizing networks, giving them examples of percentage of people getting a job through networks, maybe use some tools online to assess what their career might look like. What else is there in that process? Recruitment agency, introductions, forums where they can discuss different topics. It depends on the seniority of the candidate in terms of where their next job is going to come from but obviously the search firms are

important for that as well. Some of the boutique recruitment firms also. So to make sure they do get outplaced properly we have to know those organizations ourselves. And of course, it is difficult to go out and meet them because often they are offering outplacement services.

Your question was what about other things that we do here? We do run workshops, there are other things for them to go to if they want to and that includes particularly training and research. And that's really important that they know how to research properly. Training in LinkedIn, how to set your LinkedIn up properly, all of that sort of stuff. A certain percentage of the people that come to me, not a big percentage actually, about five or six percent, start their own business. So we send them on a training module to do that. And then we line them up with a consultant that's had experience in that space, usually starting up a business or something like that.

Also I forgot to say, when we meet people, there's usually something else on their minds. When you lose a job, one is what am I going to do next? How are we going to find it? Well that's our issue, but there are two obvious other issues. One is I don't even know financially how I am at the moment, so we also use very good tax accountants to give people advice, not investment advice, but good taxation advice so that they can review things. We are not privy to those discussions. And the third thing they're concerned about is their health and fitness. We organise a very thorough medical just to make sure they're okay. And again that information is privy to them, but we just make sure it happens.

At the end of the process how you measure success? We measure it in two ways. One is we actually do a career plan with the individual at the end of the career thought process. So they are able to play against the plan. So is this really what you said you were looking for? Is it taking you where you want to go? Usually the answer to that is yes. Sometimes it's not. People have decided to step down a bit, that's acceptable to the individual. What we do, most critically, is we survey every individual again. We get their permission to do it because it could be breaking privacy since we get a research company to do it. It's not appropriate for us to do it because it's difficult to tell somebody you worked with six months that you don't like the job. It makes it much easier for them to tell what happened. So we survey everybody.

The results are really interesting. We are pretty pleased with the general levels of satisfaction. What is really interesting is what was important for them. It surprises us but I suppose it shouldn't in some way. But what was most important for them? Quite often it was the relationship they had with the

consultants that they worked with because they felt that person added huge value to what they were doing. There's great appreciation for it. Help with networking, training for interviews, some people found the use of the facility particularly important. Different things for different people. I think the facility point is worth making a bit stronger in that having a place to come to use the phone, secretarial services and the number to give somebody to call you on other than your mobile, I think it's keeping that bit of structure. If you have three or four interviews and you have time in between, that place is extremely valuable rather than hanging around town.

There are those who feel an office presence is not necessary these days. And if you're driving technology as a delivery system, you would say that. But we find that a lot of the candidates get a huge amount out of the facility. Some don't, some really don't want to come in all that often and they set up at home and they use their car or computers or mobiles and they just want to come in and see the consultant or the researcher or come to some of the modules or whatever. Other people get huge value out of the office that they can come in and use it as a place to perch while they are networking or because they've got young family at home and they can come in and get on with some work or they are just that sort of person that needs the routine of an office.

We're nearing the end of our time and we do thank Nick for his time and his expertise and sharing his experience. I have to tell you that he's looking very dapper today. He's worn his tie for the podcast episode. In wrapping up is there anything else that you'd like to say? I think you've covered it pretty well, I can't think of anything to add to your questions. Fabulous. We thank you for your time today.

That's it for today. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.