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High Spirits + Energy = Better Job Search

By [Diane Costigan](#)

In my [previous article](#) ^[1] I shared ten tips for tending to your career in a down economy. As we continue to struggle through these uncertain times, I'd like to focus on the last point I raised—the importance of staying positive.

Over the past months, as I've been working with increasing numbers of lawyers who have lost their jobs, are in the process of losing their jobs, or who live in daily fear of losing their jobs, I've been able to see first-hand both how important and challenging it is to think positive.

Looking for a job can be a full-time job. You need patience to play out the waiting game; perseverance in the face of rejection and bad news; persistence to keep moving forward when motivation may wane; and, perhaps most important, a positive perspective to keep your motivation high.

Staying Positive Is Critical

A brief interview with outplacement guru Marcia Shannon of Shannon & Manch LLP, who has over 27 years of experience counseling individuals in the job search process, drives home how critical it can be to stay positive.

DC: Why is it important to stay positive in a job search?

MS: A positive attitude can have a tremendous impact on every phase of your job search. There's no doubt in my mind that those with positive attitudes often end up in much better situations than those without.

DC: What are some specific outcomes of maintaining a positive attitude during a job search?

MS: Individuals who take a positive outlook tend to network more, search more job listings, and take a creative approach in expanding their opportunities—something that is very important in this job market. During the networking process, others are drawn towards those with a positive attitude, and tend to want to be more helpful to those who have this attitude.

DC: In what areas, besides networking, is a positive outlook helpful?

MS: A positive attitude can make or break an interview. Competition is keen and employers want to hire those who are not only qualified, but also a welcome addition to the work environment. In other words, people want to hire people they would enjoy working with.

As Shannon concludes, "Overall, we have the choice to approach the job search in a positive or negative way, even given the current state of the economy."

Practice Five Positive-Thinking Exercises

Here are five tips to help you heed this expert advice and maintain a positive attitude during these troubling times:

- Surround yourself with positive people. Having a network of people who are currently or recently similarly situated to share resources and ideas with can be helpful. The positive effects will be greatly diminished, however, if those people are persistently panicky, stressed and negative. Make sure to include people in your support network who are positive, upbeat, encouraging, resilient and have a "can and will do" attitude. Moods are infectious and those who are paranoid and anxious about the market are likely to bring your mood down. Although I am certainly not suggesting you adopt denial as a coping strategy, I urge you to keep things in perspective. Fear can motivate you to take action, but it needs to be kept in check to be most productive,

- Accentuate the positive. Identifying what you are grateful for can help lift your mood and put things into perspective. I'm infamous with my clients for the line, "What I like about this is..." When clients begin a litany of complaints about a given situation, I'll let them go on for a minute or two and then ask them what they like about the situation: How can they grow from it? What's the lesson to be learned? Is there a hidden opportunity? What will they do differently as a result? How will that have a healthy impact on their lives? This simple exercise can help remind you of the many strengths and resources you have as you navigate this difficult situation.

Sometimes it seems impossible to find the good in challenging situations. Volunteering can be a great way to get a new perspective. Volunteer in a soup kitchen or at hospice with those who are terminally ill. Activities like these help you appreciate the advantages you enjoy that others do not—your level of education, prior work experiences, health, the opportunities you've been afforded, and all the loved ones in your life.

- Catch yourself when you start getting negative. Another technique I use with my clients is the "light side/dark side." When their anxious, angry or paranoid thoughts begin to sound destructive, I tell them that they are going to "the dark side" and ask them what they would need to stay towards the light. Once they refocus, they can see the effects of staying on the light side. Our negative thoughts make us feel powerless and de-motivated—we shut down. This inhibits action and keeps us from our goals. When we're in a negative state, it's hard to recognize possibilities, opportunities and solutions. Staying positive keeps us energized, creative and moving forward.

- Distract yourself. When you feel yourself going "dark," nip it in the bud. If you can't immediately go to the "light," at least try to stay neutral. Pick up a mindless project that's long been on your to-do list, like cleaning out your closet, desk or junk drawer. Catch up with a friend you haven't spoken to in a while (preferably one with a positive attitude). Exercise is a great option because it has so many healthful benefits, not the least of which is that it releases endorphins that create a "feel-good" state of being. Do some pleasure reading or watch a mindless TV show—indulge in your favorite form of escapism. Once your mood has improved, get back into action with renewed energy and focus.

- Catch up on comedy. Laughter is always a good antidote for stress and anxiety. In addition to lightening your mood, laughing gets you breathing which not only helps transport oxygen throughout your body but also helps stop any stress responses, allowing you to begin the process of recovery. Keep your favorite comedies close by your DVD player. Instead of logging on to find the latest updates in the market several times a day (which will only be depressing), create playlists on YouTube or your I-Pod that have your favorite hilarious and laughter-inducing clips.

The saying "Happy workers are productive workers" applies to the work of finding a job as well. The more you can do to keep your spirits up and stay energized and engaged, the more successful you are likely to be. It will be challenging for sure, but keep in mind that you didn't get to where you are now without facing down a few obstacles. Keep coming back to that as you continue to plug away.