

Don't Hope for a Job — Have a Plan Amy Lindgren

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I've been thinking lately about the concept of hope. With Easter upon us and spring finally declaring itself, it seems like a seasonal topic to explore; with the national unemployment rate tipping 8 percent, it seems essential. When have we ever needed hope more than right now?

And yet. Now that I've started thinking about it, I can't help noticing how we use the word hope in our everyday conversation. One of my favorite applications comes when we want to express doubt or cynicism, as in "I hope you know what you're talking about."

We also say the word when we want to comfort someone, but not too much. Such as, "I hope things get better for you." If the speaker meant that sincerely, the next sentence would be "Here's how I can help." Instead, the subsequent words are more likely to be "Tell me how everything turns out."

Conversationally, it seems, "hope" is more of a filler than a word with deep meaning. That's harmless enough, until we remember that our words often shape our actions. In job search at least, that's where things get interesting.

Here are some of the ways I heard the word hope used last week by job seekers who came to see me:

"I hope I get an interview."

"I'm hoping to get a job before my unemployment runs out."

"I would hope employers could see from my experience that I can do the work."

In my heightened state of awareness, I was startled to realize that in every case the job seeker was expressing not hope, but its opposite — resignation.

Now I started to see the real passivity imbedded in the word. When we say "I hope..." we're implying that we've let go of whatever action would be necessary to ensure the outcome we seek. When it comes to job search, this can have terrible results. Not only does the message of passivity lodge itself in your own subconscious, but it's likely to do the same in your listener's as well. Instead of seeming assured and proactive in your career path, you sound wistful. Hopeful.

What if we removed the concept of hope from job search? I get an image of those dark prison movies where the wrongly accused no longer hope for vindication. Not because they don't want it, but because they can't live with the emotional roller

coaster caused by so much hoping. The result, inevitably, is a hardened character who takes half of the film to crack a smile.

Okay, that's not the outcome we're going for. But what if the other consequence was peace of mind? What if the absence of hoping really did smooth out the emotional ups and downs that plague job seekers and plunge them into bouts of inactivity?

The answer to this musing came from an unexpected source. I was watching a television news program hosted by Bill Moyers which is usually so gloomy I can barely stand afterwards. I can't even remember last week's topic, but I do remember this quote from one of the guests: "Hope is not needed to persevere."

Apparently that was the mantra of a small beleaguered nation fighting for independence from then-superpower Spain, centuries ago. If I'd been paying more attention, I would have better details to share but I was momentarily dazzled by the quote itself.

If you don't need hope to persevere, I thought, what do you need? I would guess that in the case of an army throwing off an oppressor, you would be well served by having a plan, and tools to carry out that plan, and enough personal courage or at least faith in the plan or even desperation to force you to take the first step.

In that storyline, it becomes obvious that hope is either implied in all that the besieged do, or is totally irrelevant. In other words, whether hope is converted to action or is absent, the steps taken by the army are the same.

The more I ponder, the more I'm coming to believe that hope may be one emotion we could do without when it comes to job search. Those who are religious or spiritual by nature are probably better served by faith, which at least demands a measure of action and discipline. Everyone else, faithful or not, should make a plan.

My new mantra? Save your hope for spring and for daffodils. When it comes to job search, make a plan and work it.

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