



## **CHANGING TIMES REQUIRE FLEXIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Today, the press is abuzz about the change coming with the new administration. I've received invitations to at least a dozen seminars focused on how to navigate the changes that will come under Barack Obama as President. No matter how you view the Obama administration, we can all agree that we're going to face change together – as a nation and as an industry. I started to wonder what “change” would really mean. When I went to the dictionary to look up change, I found that it used words like “innovation” “correction” “alteration” “adjustment”. All words we should embrace in this industry which thinks of itself as innovators. I wondered why we all seem a little nervous about the changes that are coming and how to prepare for the impact on our clients and candidates

So, I went to a number of resources on how to weather change. I found dozens of books and articles on change – change management, change of life, climate change, surviving job loss. The one thing that seemed to be clear to me is that change (whether you long for it or you fear it) requires a strong measure of flexibility.

I'll be candid with you, were you to ask my co-workers or my family, they would likely say that I am a fairly rigid person. I'm great at developing a visionary strategy and am almost single minded in pursuing it. Our anonymous 360 reviews at work had my peers pointing out that I am, perhaps, one of the most dedicated and hard driving members of our team – willing to go the extra mile and do the hard work to get us, our candidates and our clients to a goal. This well rounded review recognized that I am passionate with strong instincts and as focused on developing the careers of our team members as I am dedicated to developing the careers of our candidates and the teams of our clients. They also were able to point out, in some gentle ways, that I am frequently less approachable than they would like for me to be, that my passion can seem like harsh criticism when I am urging them to meet the same standards I hold myself to, and that not everyone enjoys my ability to “tell it like it is”. Not easy criticism to hear, or to candidly share with you!

I've offered my own summarized 360 review to you because I want to make a point about how essential and difficult change can be. When I looked honestly at the comments of my co-workers, I had a couple of choices to make – be ticked off and wonder who wrote which ones ☺ or to look deeply for the common threads in these comments. I could choose to blow off their efforts to help me grow, or I could take their comments in a constructive way and find a way to change. I'm working on the changing part. And,

what I saw as a common thread among the various comments my co-workers shared was that I could benefit greatly by developing a more flexible attitude and greater openness to different ways to reach our common goals.

Now, don't get me wrong – it's not easy to develop this greater flexibility and openness – but neither will it be easy to make or adapt to the changes that are ahead for us as a country or an industry or even in your own career search. I'd like to say that I decided to make these changes simply because I have the greatest interests of my firm at heart (and that would be partly true), but I also realized that I would benefit as a person by finding a way to be more flexible and that, overall, change would be easier the more flexible I could become.

The most important element to successfully implementing change (be it a New Year's Resolution, or moving the economy from stagnation to stimulation) is to be able to visualize the end result and to work day by day to implement each small step. It also requires you to see a personal payoff at the end of your efforts or you're likely to abandon the process of change and lapse into your easier, but less beneficial, habits. Just like me, choosing to deal with the change in my view of myself in the workplace, you may be dealing with change in how the marketplace views you as a candidate or how your workplace views you as an employee.

There are three important things to do as you are evaluating how you will deal with the changes you're facing:

1. Honestly assess what you really want from your working life (not a title or "to be in private equity")
2. Candidly assess what your barriers are to reaching that aspiration – Perhaps a 360 review from peers, family, or a recruiter will help you in this aspect of your inquiry. We're glad to help.
3. Chart a realistic course to developing the skills or attributes that will help you succeed and be flexible in devising ways to attain your goal

I started to think about what it would mean to be flexible and I realized it would mean being open and adaptable, willing to adopt change. When I went back to the dictionary, I found other great synonyms - resilient, malleable (or my personal favorite) – springy! What was worse was when I looked at the antonyms of flexible and I found words like rigid, brittle, resistant, unyielding – YIKES! I realized that my co-workers were generous in the ways they described me and for that I was grateful. It also made me certain that I wanted to make sure that I worked myself closer to "flexible" and further away from "unyielding". I am on my way to embracing change and I see that being flexible has lots of advantages to my firm in this changing economy, to my co-workers as I want to inspire them, to my candidates and clients as I find ways to help them reach their individual goals and, most importantly, to my family as I become less rigid.

Just like I saw in the first three weeks of this year's yoga practice, flexibility comes slowly, changes we each make can sometimes be barely noticeable – but keeping up the effort in my yoga practice with my downward dog helps me to find ways to recognize a myriad of ways to be flexible in my expectations, my words and my actions.

In beginning my journey through change to becoming more flexible, I realized that what is facing all of us in this year ahead is the choice to be flexible or unyielding. Change is inevitable. When you look at your life and your career goals – which choice are you making?