



GET OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY

My favorite way to vacation is with my backpack, my husband and my hiking boots to almost anywhere that our cell phones won't work and people won't take their whining kids. I love the quiet reflection it offers and the opportunity to see how nature provides lessons applicable to our "regular" lives.

On a trip to Glacier National Park last month, I watched a rotund black bear climb up on top of the huge green Waste Management dumpster in the parking lot of one of the campgrounds. He was clearly pretty well fed and used to hunting for morsels people had discarded. He was standing on the black heavy-duty plastic lid and pulling with a great deal of force, but the lid wasn't budging. At the risk of being anthropomorphic, this great black bear looked really stumped. Clearly, he had done this before given his round belly and I could see he was growing increasingly frustrated with his lack of success. He struggled with it for another several minutes and then sulked off into the woods, perhaps to wander to one of the other nearby campground parking lots to try a different dumpster. I hoped that this time he would stand on the ground and lift the lid – to me it was obvious that it was his own weight on the lid that was keeping him from getting the treat he so desperately wanted!

It made me realize that I see this all the time in the way candidates conduct their searches – putting lots of force and effort into the process to get the prize but impeding their own progress by getting in their own way. So, I thought we'd look at five ways nature reminds us to get out of our own way.

1. **Have a Plan of Attack.** If you've ever watched an animal pursue its prey, you know that it doesn't wander aimlessly or half heartedly when it's on the hunt – it is alert to scents on the air, to changes in the weather and to the sights and sounds that could mean a successful hunt, to threats around and to competing hunters. Likewise, in making your next career move, you need to be alert to what is happening around you and be planning your next move or countermove. There are lots of other lions and tigers and bears out there. Oh my! The one with the clearest vision and the passion and dedication to execute his or her plan of attack will reap the reward in the hunt. The others will hope there is something left for them. Read all the trade publications, attend networking events, stay up to date on who is raising a new fund or is adding to their team. Without knowing where to look for your next opportunity, you're wandering blindly in the forest waiting for it to jump into your mouth for dinner. Remember, the two most likely times for a firm to make a hire, especially when the market is tight, are a) when they raise a larger fund because there is more management fee to deploy on salaries and b) when someone else leaves, but only if you can fill the gap left by the vacating person and add some additional value other candidates don't bring.

2. **Play Your Strengths and Recognize Your Weaknesses.** Can you tell me right now: What are the five things you do best and enjoy most in your current work? How do those skills offer something specifically valuable to a new employer? Be prepared to concisely express those when you approach a firm about joining them. What makes you better than any other candidate in the marketplace? What are the three things you need to improve upon to implement your plan of attack and what are you doing about them?

I watched the big horn sheep position themselves for the best role in the herd. The ones who showed clear strength and abilities that were desirable for the next generation were more likely to be elevated in the pack. Use the members of your herd for support, but don't follow like blind sheep. Are you keeping in touch with your networks from school, prior jobs, social connections so you'll be able to learn where the opportunities are and have references to help support your bid for a new position? Are you making a targeted search with a clear idea of a plan about how this new position fits with what you've done before and what you want to do? Or are you just following the herd, keeping your head down, hoping you won't be hit in the next round of layoffs? Firms like candidates who show initiative, who are creative about their approach to recruiting and can demonstrate real quantifiable differences he or she can make in the firm's success.

3. **The Early Bird Gets the Worm.** There was an amazing osprey family that was fishing in the glacial waters of one of the park's biggest lakes. They were up at dawn, kept at it until dark, and circled above the waters spotting their prey before they dove again and again into the coldest waters to get the best fish. Waiting for the layoffs to happen and hoping you don't get fired is NOT a career strategy. Likewise, asking the interviewer to tell you about the firm without having prepared thoroughly for the interview by researching the firm, the backgrounds of the leadership and anyone else you will meet is like sleeping in until 10 as a bird. Sure, it's easy, but you won't get the worm, er job. Be prepared and give thought to what you can specifically contribute to the firm in the event you are hired. Use the resources (like having an interview with one of our recruiters) to help you focus your search strategy. Posting your resume on a job board and waiting for a recruiter to find a job for you without engaging them about your search is a great way to go hungry in your nest.
4. **Don't Bite Off More Than You Can Chew .** Do you remember the snake that ate something that exploded in it? There is nothing wrong with taking a step up on your next move, but remember, there are reasonably sized bites that don't cause you to choke and the same is true in your career. Be realistic about what you are prepared to do next given what you've done so far. Firms most frequently hire people who are like successful people in their firm. Have you taken the career steps already to be prepared for this next step up, or are you trying to change

gears completely? It's good to be able and willing to stretch yourself to learn something new, but a horse is not a wolf, nor will they blend together seamlessly in one group – they each fulfill a very specific need and there is no shame in being a horse instead of a wolf.

5. **Be Prepared to Eat What You Kill.** The mountain lion just wants to eat. It doesn't have to brag about how it tracked the rabbit and could have gotten a bigger rabbit. Nor does it keep killing rabbits just to show it can. The time is gone when you can expect a guaranteed bonus or guaranteed promotion to partner. Firms are only going to hire candidates who are confident, opportunistic and add real value to the team. Be prepared to show how you add tangible value to the team and be ready to step up to prove it when you are on the team. Focus on getting the opportunity you're suited for and once you have the offer, accept it. Shopping an offer, or collecting offers you don't intend to accept, just to see everything that's out there is a sure way to burn bridges that will haunt you when times are lean. Focus on how you can develop the skills that will make you an indispensable part of the team and deploy those skills to make the team stronger.

So step off the dumpster lid, get out of your own way and start working the phones and the streets leading to your next opportunity.

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