



YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE

My Maine friends tell me that's a common response to give tourists who don't appreciate the mountainous or cove-studded terrain of that state. The first time I heard it, I thought "That's nonsense – of course you can get anywhere from where you are." What I realized they meant is that you can't get there if you keep going in the direction you're pointed or with the mode of transportation you're using. In this market, applying it to your career, it means that you need to think about your path in a less linear way.

When I travel, I often rely upon Mapquest. It asks me such helpful questions as:

- Shortest time? Or Shortest distance?
- Avoid highways? Toll roads? Seasonally closed roads?

What it never asks me is if I want to avoid the mess of The Big Dig in Boston or the DC Beltway at rush hour. Nope, it's up to me to make alternate decisions when I'm faced with those unexpected surprises. The map & step by step directions make it look simple and straight forward to get from where I am to where I want to be.

Our careers are much like a Mapquest direction sheet. You start out with a printed map and what seem to be turn by turn directions. But, then you come upon 17 miles of taillights because an oil tanker has overturned on the road ahead. Who knows when the traffic will clear! You can stay in the traffic and fume about how unfair it is, how it's delaying your arrival and costing you money. You can be a lunatic blowing your horn or pacing the shoulder of the road shouting into your cell phone Or, you can take a breath, be grateful you weren't the guy just helicoptered from the scene or his family. Then you can start thinking about finding an alternate route. You might get off the highway, have dinner and wait for the traffic to clear. You might call someone on your cell phone and ask them to give you directions on side streets. Maybe, just maybe, you might decide to cut your own suffering and try to enjoy this alternate route you're forced to take. After all, life's about the journey, not just the destination.

The difference is, if it's only an overturned oil tanker on the road, you know that at some point they'll get it cleared and traffic will begin to move. In this market, it's more like a giant sinkhole just occurred and swallowed up several lanes of the highway. There's no telling if it will be weeks or years before crews will be able to repair the damage. It might never return to its former wide path of career mobility. Waiting it out probably isn't realistic.

A banker insisting on only looking at top tier firms in his current city, is like the guy fuming in the traffic but hoping it clears up soon. Anyone still thinking that their former compensation (or the economics that their lifestyle demands) will determine their salary for the future, is like the lunatic blowing his horn at the stalled traffic.

Those mindful of the goal of getting “there” realize that a detour may be the only way. Sometimes it means taking a step back. Being a VP in the next firm instead of a partner. Or a detour – working in a start-up or ongoing entity earning real operations experience. It might mean going completely without a map – a role in an NGO or a lesser paying position in a completely different field that holds a passion for you (an arts and crafts gallery, a teaching position, being a scuba instructor). For many, the option will be to pull off the road, sit in a diner and enjoy your dinner while things clear. Take this much needed break, do something you enjoy (but thought you’d put off until retirement) and read the book The Number by Lee Eisenberg which talks about how much is really enough or How to Find Your Mission in Life by Richard Bolles, and then get back in the game when conditions are different.

What doesn’t work is staying stuck in the traffic fuming and hoping. By all signs, the road isn’t going to return anytime soon to its formerly high speed six lane condition we became accustomed to. You’re going to be “late” arriving “there”. Your economic goals need to be realigned and you’ll likely have to seriously downsize your expenses and lifestyle because of the detour, and do it soon. It might, in fact, take you a while to get back on the road you had planned. Ultimately, if you really want to reach your destination, you’ll get there. The real surprise will be how many interesting experiences you’ll be able to relate to the others when you arrive.

Email me for directions on your detour – dpalmieri@pinnaclegroup.com