



Mike is a recently retired partner of a major accounting firm who now has a portfolio of public and private sector roles where his experience can add value.

'Surviving the Recession'

We are fully in a recession now and the only matters in doubt are - how bad is it going to be? And how long will it last?

We have seen it before but that does not make it any easier. We have seen the impact on people of losing their businesses, their jobs and their homes. We have also seen the real human cost- the relationship breakdown, the deterioration in health and in some cases a decline to an early death. But we have also seen folk survive and thrive- and in this series of notes I want to make some personal comments about how to survive and thrive and what in my experience will help you to stay in work, to stay healthy and to be happier if somewhat poorer than you have been or want to be.

Losing your job at 50 plus has been pretty rough in the past and it will not be easy now especially if you act like a victim - so don't!

The first thing you must do is to remember what skills and experience you have – attributes of real value to enterprise in so many ways. So the first action is to make sure you capture all this in your full CV- not the one you send in to any specific job but your personal inventory that will be kept on your computer and that will be the reference point for specific CV's that go with a job application.

Your personal inventory will be far too long to go with a job application but it is really essential that you have a record of what you have done in your life – if for no other reason that it will remind you just how much you actually have done – and if you are like me it is a reminder that over the years I have done things - I am OK – I am not without some merit. It is also a reference point to what gaps you may have that you should work on through perhaps volunteer work or through membership of a group. This will keep you out of mischief as well as continuing to populate the personal CV as it is very important that you

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stay engaged – sitting at home moping will do you no good whatsoever.

When you are made redundant there are three courses of action open to you- take a career break- set up your own business – apply for another job. This note deals only with applying for a new job.

Even in a deep recession there are job vacancies that need people to fill them and interestingly in many cases they will be in growth businesses where your experience can really matter – especially if a lot of the business leaders are dealing with a recession for the first time.

One issue about being older is that most of us do not want to move. That is a decision we should look at closely- is it just our natural gut reaction to stay put? Most of us have 30-50 years of life left so why not think of radical change, there is plenty of life left to build new friendships and networks of contacts but I certainly have empathy with those who want to continue to live where your kids have grown up and where so much of your life has been shaped. But we do have to remember that there is a price in limiting choice if we will not move and I personally would not want a job where I had to spend the week away from home .

The key when applying for a job- to state the absolutely blindingly obvious – is to try and match our skills and knowledge to the requirements of the job. This is where your personal inventory comes in- it will record what activities that you have been involved in that are relevant- for example serving on a management committee of a charity will have enabled you to broaden many of your skills such as influencing and judgment. It can also be easier for interviewers to relate to say involvement with MIND than with a large business that they may not be familiar with, and it demonstrates that you do engage in wider activities and are willing to learn new skills by taking on new challenges. It is also sometimes what sets you apart from other applicants and gets you through to the interview in the first place.

I think it is also important to get some interview practice. The aspect of applying for new roles that I found most difficult was filling in a form and attending an interview because I had not done it for thirty years; even though I had interviewed many people and seen more CVs than I care to remember. If you can get help with this- take it!

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If you are like me avoid rambling on the application form, make sure that it only records the key points- your skills and experience relevant to the job in hand ; remember that your experience is a lot more than your paid work. You are probably being asked to use no more than 200 words so you must keep it brief and relevant. For the interview remember that it is a process- it may seem shallow as the questions will be geared towards the job and person description- so study it and make sure you are prepared to answer questions relevant to what they are looking for in the job – and do not be frightened of silence and saying you do not know. If you are asked an ice breaker question – please do not give them War and Peace – it is designed to make you feel more at ease so that the interview proper can begin so please do not use up two thirds of the interview telling your life story.

I am told that we baby boomers do not like feedback but it really is important to ask for it. There might be some reluctance because people are aware that some are looking for an excuse to claim discrimination. I suggest that when you make the call, you have some set questions that enable you to find out if there are specific matters that stopped you being successful – do the same if they have offered you the job too- there may be a next time when it comes in handy. Also ask yourself the basic questions. 'What have I done well? What mistakes have I made? What do I need to do different next time?' Most of us are our harshest critics so look for positives as well as faults.

Being made redundant is traumatic and looking for a job when you are over 50 seems a real hill to climb as it is for any group in a recession, but just remember what you have to offer - do your preparation thoroughly and think positively- it will not guarantee success but will greatly increase the odds in your favour.

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