



## Guest Speaker: When downsizing is the best (albeit, unfortunate) option: A marketing professional's role to make it better for everyone.

By Anne Scarlett, printed in *The Zweig A/E Marketing Letter*

In these tough and uncertain economic times, your firm may (unfortunately) determine that downsizing staff is its best course of action. As a marketing professional, your 'Job One' is to reassess, plan, and mobilize to win relevant new business. In addition, you can help to make the downsizing process gracious and considerate, to preserve:

1. Industry reputation: In the longer-term, your firm wants its brand to stay intact—even elevate—during tough times and beyond. Laid-off staff will relocate to other firms within the industry. If their downsizing experiences are helpful and reasonable, then they are more likely to regard the firm in a decent light, or at least to curb their criticisms.
2. Client perception: Staff members have direct relationships with your clients. The client, over time, has a choice to stick with your firm, or follow the staff member elsewhere. Your thoughtful, empathetic approach will be more palatable to existing clients.
3. Firm culture: It's just the right thing to do, human-to-human. Plus, the remaining staff will be less distressed if your firm handles this well.

While it's not your firm's responsibility to secure new positions for former staff, it is your firm's responsibility to be a stand-up organization that earns respect from clients and the industry. The firm should establish a feasible process in which to help staff launch their new job search. So why should business development and marketing professionals get involved? Well, you have the best communication skills in the entire firm. Here's how you can assist:

### THE LEADERSHIP:

1. Provide input (regarding downsizing decisions) from a marketing perspective. Depending upon your level of seniority, you may be asked to provide input on those to dismiss. This is a very painful topic, and the wisest firms are those that will look at all facets of each individual in question, including the marketability of that person to secure and expand new business. Your point of view may be invaluable in terms of how that person's skill sets are viewed by others—on their resume, during prospect visits and networking, and when preparing fee proposals and marketing language. Their level of cooperation and contributions are a relevant factor when making downsizing decisions.
2. Form messages/rehearse proper delivery of news. Your human resources professionals will have the proper legal approach to layoffs. Offer to collaborate with them on a forthcoming approach and considerate delivery.

### THE STAFF:

1. Review resumes. Offer to comment on their resume. Provide templates, ask them submit a first draft within one-week, and then review/comment by phone appointment. If there is time, you may also advise on cover letter language, which they can customize for each pursuit.
2. Analyze opportunities. Once they find their first real opportunity, help them find relevant connections between their experience and the job, all in an effort to position them as a valuable asset for the hiring company. They should get the hang of it once they do this exercise with you once.
3. Define personal brands. Their own brands will be best-received once they are solidified. What do they offer and why is it

valuable? Within a 30-minute 'interview/dialogue', you can help individuals identify their best skills along with supporting stories. Advise them to select several anecdotes so they can easily reference them during their job search.

3. Build confidence. Even in a down economy, losing one's job is a blow to ego and esteem. As a marketing professional and expert communicator, you can help them re-frame their thinking in a positive light. Even honest self-assessments on their own personal challenges may help them to feel a sense of control/empowerment, a.k.a. confidence.
4. Practice interviewing skills. When the layoff occurs, it's unlikely that the person will remain onsite at your office. However, you could offer a session on interviewing skills with the entire group at an offsite location. Emphasize the Behavioral Interviewing STAR method—which is beneficial in multiple contexts. If a formal session is unfeasible, then distribute interviewing handouts, followed by phone meetings to discuss questions at the same time that you do their resume review.
5. Evaluate and/or share networking contacts. Have them create a top-ten (or more) list within their own network from their existing and former 'lives'. Encourage them to reach out to every person, and share their personal message and intent relating to their job search.

Downsizing should be framed in a realistic, yet optimistic manner. Acknowledge that it's a tough experience. Yet, gently promote the positive: Change often leads to better opportunities, and it can motivate folks to evolve towards even greater heights. How many people do we know that are ultimately happier in their newfound positions after being laid off? Yet, please don't insult their intelligence and don't plant feelings into their heads. It's not right to force someone to be 'ok' with this. Instead, be empathetic, listen, and encourage discussion on the pros/cons to release their feelings, and then move on and upward!

By offering short-term, well-defined assistance for downsized staff, and by taking special care during this process, your approach will benefit those who have departed, soothe those who remain, and solidify your firm's culture as a whole.