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Portable Work

Sometime back in the 90s, I read an article in a business magazine (probably Harvard Business Review or Fortune) about the “end of the job.” The premise of the article was that the loyalty ethic that once existed between employer and employee was disappearing. Companies needed flexibility to make swift changes as needed. The advice to employees was to learn what you can from each job and be prepared to take that on-the-job training to the next job.

With more and more people leaving corporate jobs for the promise of entrepreneurial bliss, it seems we must be even more creative about acquiring skills and using them to make a living. When was the last time you took stock of your skill tool kit and thought about what you could be using to add value to potential clients?

The more experience you have (and the older you get), the more you have in your tool kit. Without divulging my age, let’s just say I have an ample number of tools. And to shift metaphors for a minute, sometimes I feel a bit like a prostitute – I’ll do a lot of different things for money.

Being away from my home office for about a month, as I care for my elderly parents, I’ve been delighted to find that at least some of my skills in my tool kit are portable and flexible enough to allow me to serve clients remotely and at odd hours of the day and night when I’m not on “caregiver duty.” I’m assisting one client with business writing (PR materials for a media kit). Thanks to laptops and Internet connections, it makes no difference that I am 2000 miles and two time zones away.

And, of course, this is just a tiny example of the global workplace that has evolved in the last decade.

The point of all this is that we cannot afford to get stuck in the way we think of our methods of making a living – whether we work for an employer or for ourselves. We must continually think of the core value we deliver, the diverse skills we can put to use, and the diversity of potential clients who could benefit from our services.

With this in mind, I challenge you to sit down with pencil and paper (or a clean Word.doc) and make a Skill Inventory – what are the many skills you’ve accumulated through your education and experience?

Next, make a list of all the types potential clients who could use those skills. Don’t stick with those types or industries you’ve served in the past; expand your vision beyond the logical answers. Get wild and silly; those are the possibilities that may lead to new markets or new services.

Sue Martin