

Redundancy

Redundancy is unfortunately not unfamiliar to me. I have probably negotiated the redundancy for over 40 people during my years as union representative in the company. However, it was not a word that I had ever thought I would associate with myself. I always believed I would either resign or retire.

My initial feeling when I signed the redundancy papers in January was huge relief. I had been miserable in my job for a long time and had started looking actively for new jobs. In my head I was already halfway out of the door. I knew I wanted to make a radical change from working within Shipping and Logistics and knew that redundancy meant access to an established outplacement company which would mean help with career coaching and to give me guidance and get me back into the workforce.

Right now what is feeding me with energy and spurring me on is the fantastic support I have been getting from the outplacement company, from my friends, my network and of course most importantly my family. I tell everyone I meet that I have been made redundant and I listen in a different way now to people around me to hear what they work with and how they like their jobs. I am inquisitive to find out what opportunities there are and amazed at how many “leads” I have received through my network. The big advantage of the majority of people over 50 is that they have gathered so many contacts over the years.

What is killing my energy is that I still have to go to my old place of work. As far as I understand the norm is “garden duty” but since it is not clear yet how and when my duties will be transferred to our owners I will have to press on for the time being. It is difficult to sit and focus on something you know you will only be doing for a short time. Your head is constantly in another place thinking about the new future and that you need to press on with finding something new.

So what next? Follow me and my journey and transition. The ups and downs of re-schooling and see where I end up when my redundancy time is up.

Flow

What an amazing month this has been. So much has happened in only 30 days.

Many courses and seminars, many leads to possible future business partners and so much new information that needs sorting and prioritizing. I was advised in the beginning to structure my job search and make it a project. Having lead many projects myself and knowing how easy it is to stray and get diverted I have set up goals and milestones. I have the last day employment date as my timeline and by then I have to be ready.

The most positive thing this month has been the 3 day skills and abilities course. It has boosted my confidence, given me an incredible insight into who I am, what I can do and what I should or should not be doing. It has provided me with tools that I can have with me for my resumé, for linked in and also for any future interviews. These three days have been a confirmation that I am on the right track with starting my own company and that my business concept is the right one.

Most importantly, I have now finally found what gives me “flow”. A good friend of mine talked to me about “flow” a few years ago and I never really understood the concept. However, I have now finally identified what it is that I do that engages me so much that I lose all sense of time. What I do that captivates me. Best of all I know how I can apply these activities in my new job to ensure I am working with something that is optimal for me.

The downside this month is that I still have to go to my old company if I am not on a course or at an interview. I have been informed that I will not be released from the company during the redundancy period and the best I can possibly hope for is “garden duty” at some point after the summer. So I go to work and work with my job search and with the very few tasks I have left to do. I grit my teeth and try to remember that this is a very short period of my life and it will soon be over and I will be in a better place.

Swings and Roundabouts

Redundancy is truly a question of swings, roundabouts and roller coaster rides. Last month I started by saying “what an amazing month this has been”. This month starts with “where on earth did this month go and what, if anything, have I achieved?” This month has been a frustrating month as far as my career journey goes.

Since signing my redundancy papers I have been pushing and pushing and pressing on without really giving myself healing or breathing time. I have probably overdosed slightly on courses. I have basically said yes to any course that has had any relevance to my career path and that I believed could help me on my journey. This has actually resulted in me putting myself under an unnecessary amount of pressure. Instead of taking one step at a time I realise I have been trying to take a lot of parallel steps. I have to be realistic about how much I can cope with and absorb in one go. This journey is about personal development and that requires time for reflection. Again, I need to remind myself to run my job search as a project, having clear and realistic goals and a clear plan for the road ahead.

Also, I need to bear in mind that I am still working and have not been released my current position. This means I have two jobs – my current job plus my future career which means more than a full working week. My current job is a constant distraction and makes me lose my flow and focus. It is an energy thief. I understand why companies are recommended to release staff as quickly as possible after they have been given notice of redundancy. Having to keep staff on becomes like a bad marriage between the employer and employee and can be very destructive. I hope that I will be released soon so I can focus 100% on the road ahead.

So that was the “lows” but there has also been a fantastic “high” and that is that I have been accepted to a coaching course in the Autumn. If all goes as planned I will be a certified coach by my last day of employment and ready to start my own company.

Job Search

Before I was made redundant, I had started looking for job vacancies for the first time in 30 years. It was fairly obvious that we would be downsizing and that what had once been a fantastic company where you could develop, grow and be challenged had totally stagnated. I felt frustrated. My work description had changed drastically. I had no idea how to go about finding a new job so I started “surfing” and registered with few of the larger net recruiting companies. I had a c.v. which was basically a list of dates and work experience over the years. So

with cv in hand I ticked in all the boxes on the internet for “fulltime” “Stockholm” “logistics” “shipping” “containers” etc. and started receiving vacancy notifications for jobs that matched my search criteria. I applied for a couple of jobs but with little enthusiasm and with no success. Looking back at this, and now six months down the road, I realise what a huge mistake it could have been. I could have easily slipped into another job doing something I am very good at but I quite frankly find boring instead of stepping out of my comfort zone and trying to find something I am good at and that gives me positive energy.

Knowing what I know today it’s extremely unlikely I would even try to find a job over internet but if I were tick in boxes today they would be “consultant” “career coaching” “ICF certificate” “project”. My cv (still in progress) is no longer a long list of dates and jobs descriptions but now includes my skills, abilities and experiences which I have gathered over the years not only at work but also through activities and experiences during my freetime outside work which are relevant to where I am heading.

I haven’t unregistered from the recruiting companies and I am letting the mails with vacancies continue. I see this as a way of measuring my progress and development from where I started looking where I am today. From something I was last year to the new person I am becoming.

The final countdown

I have just taken the whole of month of July as vacation and recharged my batteries. My employer made us all take four weeks holiday to reduce what they need to pay at the end of our employment. When they informed me that I had to take four weeks holiday I resented it. I wanted to save the holiday days as extra salary after my redundancy. Also, I only usually take a couple of weeks each summer. However, it has been a fantastic four weeks where I paused my “redundancy project”. Not only this but I have not checked work mail and have not had a single phone call from work for the first time in years. Wonderful. I needed it. I did read though. I read three books from the course material list ready for the start of my coaching course and the road to my certification. The literature I read was exactly what I needed for my personal development and was a positive affirmation of what I already know. I need to take responsibility

for the job search and nobody can do it for me. I have to do this myself. I know I am hurtling towards unemployment and these next 6 months will go so fast. I am working hard on not allowing negative voices in my head to tell me that I will not be ready in time.

In the Spring, I touched on so many areas that were new, challenging and exciting – how to start your own company, skills and abilities inventory, linked in, job searches, market research. All of these are still ongoing and now it is time to tie up all the loose ends and start to finalise the things I started ready to press the button in the beginning of next year.

Back to School

My coaching course is in now in full swing.

I have been struggling at times with getting structure in my life and with the self-discipline of studying, working and my free time. I haven't studied for 30 odd years so my studying technique is very rusty. All of us who have been made redundant at work agree that after a lifetime of 9 to 5 in an office, when that rug is pulled from under your feet it takes time to get a healthy balance back into your weekday. It isn't always that easy to prioritise your time and to ensure you are focusing on the right things. It is hard to time manage new challenges such as studying when they are not something that has been part of your everyday life.

Another insight in August was that I started to doubt myself and started to feel worried that I might be heading off on the wrong career path. What if I had wasted seven months of my redundancy time to find this was not really what I wanted to do? Could I back pedal and start from scratch again? Looking back I believe these voices in my head were a combination of performance anxiety and time pressure seeing how close my last work day is now. I should have trusted my gut instinct and should never have worried. All the courses I have participated in, the career counseling I have received and the fantastic help from people around me has given me a platform to stand on and has proved to be spot on. I see now that the Spring was a time for laying a solid foundation for my career path and for the road ahead.

Diploma

A very good friend of mine asked me a few years ago if I had ever thought about becoming a coach and when I was made redundant this year, he encouraged me to go on a coaching course. I am so very grateful to him for seeing that potential in me and I am so glad I listened to him. I now have a one-week-old Diploma in Coaching and an education to do something I really enjoy. Something that gives me “flow” and something that gives me the chance to help and make a difference.

While on the course I took several opportunities as coaching client to use work related issues and worries about my new company and about my future career. On one occasion I took the topic of my last day at work coming so close and that I have so many loose ends to tie up before I can press the button and start my company and start invoicing. It was a really excellent coaching session with the course leader as coach and me as client resulting in me drawing up a timeline of when I realistically think I can invoice for the first time and working backwards to where I am now – end-October. I added milestones and dates onto the timeline. Being able to visualize the steps, dates and important landmarks on a white board made things feel so much better and so much more tangible instead of having all the issues in my head and spread on several bits of paper. The best part of the coaching was that I realized I really need to take half a day each week to have a meeting with myself. Make an agenda, work through it, plan and set goals for the following week. This way I know I can ensure I cover the aspects that need to be addressed before my last day. So far so good. I started with my first half day this week and have already managed to finalise two items I had identified as a goal for the week and that have been pending far too long. Great to tick these off and to move on.

Four years down the road...

Looking back at this blog I can hardly believe what has happened since I wrote this. I started my company on an uphill climb in a pandemic. Frightened at the thought of saying no to assignments I ended up with too much work a while and was able to slowly scale back. Would I ever be employed again? The answer is simple. No.

I have learnt so much over these years. Perhaps one of the biggest lessons and something that feels very close to heart is the importance of a good career transition. I am an advocate for smooth downsizing and for companies ensuring they have both onboard and offboarding procedures in place. I hope anyone reading this blog who has been in a similar position either as employer or employee takes note and takes to heart the importance of a worthy and dignified transition.