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Thirty years ago outplacement was offered by caring companies to long-tenured employees who were forced to look for a new job in an environment where most people started and ended their career at the same company and left with a pension. Today, the average employee will change jobs 10 times in their career, in many instances not by their own accord but due to changed business circumstances. Does this mean that individuals are getting accustomed to being laid off and have likely previously been through an outplacement program? Are most becoming experienced job hunters?

Questions such as these have led some to wonder if the importance of outplacement is waning and whether it should continue to be part of a caring company's offering to employees who are "right-sized." In reality, outplacement is relevant today provided the services meet the changing landscape of workforce demographics, technology, and organizational needs. Let's explore the various constituencies, some common perceptions and the outplacement value chain itself to determine what continues to be relevant.

First, why should employers sponsor and invest in outplacement?

While most companies want to be perceived as caring and understand the importance of social responsibility to treat all employees with respect and dignity from the time they arrive to the time they leave, sometimes there is a reluctance to "invest" in outgoing employees. In fact, given today's highly networked world, it is even more important for companies to protect their brand and minimize the risk of a negative image. The employees who are leaving are not just co-workers with those who remain, but in many cases they are friends and possibly neighbors. Surviving managers and employees remember how ex-employees are treated and will either advocate for the company or be critics. In today's environment the employees exited may be hired back in the future or the company may decide to recruit a son, daughter or close friend. Their next job may be with a customer or a prospect. In addition, an angry ex-employee can be a danger to others, or sue the company. Effective outplacement helps the ex-employees focus on themselves and their next opportunity rather than the situation and the company they just left.

Why do terminated employees need outplacement?

Searching for a job involves a multitude of social interactions in both networking and interviewing. Today's workforce is comprised of Baby Boomers, Gen X ers, Gen Ys and Millennials. Terminated employees in each of these groups have vastly different experiences, preferences and needs and navigating opportunities in our highly technical, global economy is more challenging than ever. In addition, individuals in search will be interacting with individuals within these groups in an entirely different way than they may have in their prior work experience. For example, a Baby Boomer may interview with a much younger Gen Y.

Being good at anything takes education, training, mentoring and tools. In this ever-changing environment, a job search today is vastly different than it was three years ago and will likely look considerably different in another three years given increased globalization, the proliferation of social networking and changes in the way work gets done. Outplacement is a profession with experts in managing change and career transitions. Outplacement is critical for individuals to efficiently and effectively land their next job! Good outplacement programs can reduce the time of unemployment by 40% and our research shows that over 95% of the individuals we work with secure opportunities that are on par with or above those they left.

There are a couple of perceptions that are changing the contractual arrangements for outplacement. First, given the proliferation of social networking and applicant tracking systems there is a perception that technology is the most important part of outplacement. Secondly, there is a perception that office based programs are not necessary because most people have a home computer. Consequently, there is a conclusion that outplacement services have been dramatically redefined and can be delivered at a lower cost. Interestingly, a recent analysis of over a thousand outplacement service evaluations at Career Partners International (CPI) ranks individual coaching as most important, office services and in-office events as second most important, resume writing assistance third and technology access fourth.

A breakdown of the outplacement value chain is important to make an informed judgment on what is best for both the employee and employer.

Dealing with Job Loss – Being told you are without a job is traumatic whether it is the first time or the fifth. Let's face it, no matter how strong you are or what level you are at in the organization, this is a very lonely experience. It is an emotional time for most people and they go through a predictable cycle that will touch on all emotions including shock, denial, bargaining, anger and depression. Outplacement coaches are expert listeners and counselors and can objectively help an individual keep things in perspective and move forward to focus on their search.

Job Search Preparation –Although the steps can be detailed on a website, it is quite a different experience to discuss them with a coach. There is quite a bit of work that an individual needs to do before entering the market, particularly if they have been at the same company or job for a long time or are interested in changing their focus. Outplacement coaches are experts and have great networks to help people examine their financial situation, develop their public messaging and get ready for the market effectively and efficiently.

Career Decision-Making – Transition can be an ideal time to assess what the best next move might be for an individual. There are a number of assessments that can be used by coaches to help guide individuals through a career decision-making process. While individuals can discuss possible career changes with a spouse or friend, an outplacement coach is an expert and can provide insights and best align client strengths with hot markets and opportunities. In addition, the number 1 issue that prolongs a job search is a lack of career focus.

Sales and Marketing –The job search is a sales process and requires an expertly crafted marketing plan to be successful. With less than 20% of all jobs being found via the Internet, a job search involves much more than sitting at a computer. Foundational to the plan is a well crafted and relevant resume. “Does it accurately reflect evidence of experience as it relates to the job for which I am looking?” Effective resume development requires critique, challenging conversations and most importantly excellent communication and writing skills. Outplacement coaches are experts in effective resume development and understand what works best in today’s environment. And once the conversations have taken place and an individual has direction, outplacement coaches can assist individuals with developing a unique detailed sales and marketing plan which incorporates a multi strand approach taking into account all the various job sources including the internet, search firms, corporate websites, networking, etc.

Networking and Social Media – And in today’s highly competitive marketplace, networking and the use of Social Media in job search deserve special mention. Particularly given that research has shown networking, both “live” and “social media” networking, uncovers over 50% of the jobs. Outplacement coaches are experts in effective networking and can assist individuals in advancing their own skills. In addition, they have expertise with creating impactful social networking profiles and helping individuals understand and effectively utilize the myriad of current social networking sites.

Interview Skills and Job Offer Negotiation –Successful interviewing is 10% learning what to do and 90% practice and critique. It is very difficult to practice and critique alone. Outplacement coaches are experts, experienced in helping individuals through role-playing, video-taping, critique and practice before and debriefing after an interview. Despite tight market conditions, individuals are best served to interview the company too. Developing an ability to assess culture fit will go a long way towards maximizing job success. Even after a successful interview the job search process includes offer negotiation. Terms of employment today have gotten more complicated with some of the unique ways companies are rewarding employees. The offer negotiation is compounded by individuals interviewing for positions that might be different than the one they just left and in some cases at a lower level. Poor negotiation can result in the loss of the job opportunity. Since every situation is different, it takes sage advice and counsel to maximize the outcome. Good outplacement coaches have current knowledge of the marketplace.

Considering the constituency, reviewing current perceptions and analyzing the outplacement value chain should lead each one of us to a conclusion. We firmly believe the coach relationship is the **most** important ingredient to a successful outplacement program outcome.

Outplacement doesn't have to be expensive to be effective, but it does need to be flexible enough to have the right blend of ingredients for each individual situation. A great coach customizes the outplacement to the unique needs of the individual and becomes a close confidant and advisor. One size does not fit all. Companies need to determine why they are offering this opportunity to former employees and build the business case for the right level of services to optimize the benefit to the recipient and meet the organization's objectives, whether it is to maintain a strong employment brand and employee engagement or minimize the risk of lawsuits. In all cases, outplacement should be recognized as an investment in which an organization will get a positive return.

We at Kensington International ask each of our clients their motivation in offering outplacement. Where does your organization stand?

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