

A Winning Mindset

by John West Hadley

Since founding my career counseling practice three and a half years ago, I've worked with hundreds of actuaries and other professionals on how to market themselves effectively. Goals have varied:

- "To get a great new job that I can be excited about, and that pays me what I'm worth."
- "To get me out of a situation where I feel trapped and unmotivated."
- "To get me solidly on the radar screen of other critical players at my company, so that exciting new opportunities will open up for me."
- "To create the visibility that leads to sustainable growth for my consulting practice."

One common theme for success is confidence. Obviously, you need to have a clear goal—otherwise any path is as good as another. Once you've decided on that goal, you need to step out confidently and present a *Winning Mindset* to give yourself the best chance of success. Dipping your toes tentatively and testing the waters may be good advice for swimming in an unfamiliar area, but it rarely leads to real career or business success. Unless you can show me that you are really passionate about your goal and have confidence in your own ability to achieve it, why should I believe in you?

Here are three real-life examples of what a winning mindset can help you achieve:

1. Three years after being laid off by Lucent, "Jim" was deeply depressed, having succeeded only in getting a year of contract work in all that time. He had lost confidence in his abilities after hearing so many people tell him he was out of work too

long, his skills weren't up-to-date, his salary expectations were too high, etc. After working with him to draw out his accomplishments and get him back in touch with the measurable results he had been able to achieve for past employers, Jim began to regain his confidence. **Within three months, he had landed exactly the sort of job he wanted.** And Jim had the confidence to push back on the initial salary offer, getting it bumped up \$10,000 to the level he deserved.

2. "Bruce" wanted to close down his consulting practice and seek a corporate role where he could get benefits. However, there was no excitement in his voice about the sorts of jobs he sought. It turned out that he was really passionate about his practice, but it had been stuck at \$75,000 in revenues for several years, which wasn't enough to support his family long-term. Within six months of getting out to a variety of contacts with a confident message focused on the value he could bring to his clients, **Bruce had the commitments for an additional \$75,000 in annual revenues.**

3. "Neal" had a chance to meet with the chair of his company via a "Skip" meeting, where the senior officers would have one-on-one sessions with people a few levels down in the organization. When asked what his goal for that session was, he replied, "To make sure the chair knows what my unit does." Once this was reframed to, "To make sure the chair knows exactly what value my unit and I add to the company," he was able to brainstorm on how to accomplish his goal, and walked

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into the meeting with a winning mindset. End result, on the way out, the chair said, "Neal, keep me informed on your upcoming trip to Costa Rica. I might want to travel with you to pursue business opportunities."

Many actuaries are supremely confident in their technical skills (and rightly so), yet hesitate to take action in important ways to build their careers. I believe this comes down in large part to a lack of that winning mindset. We've been trained up through our FSAs that the way to get ahead is by passing exams and by mastering a wide variety of materials. A self-selection process has crept in that attracts those most comfortable with that approach. Then we enter a new realm out of our normal comfort zone that relies on our ability to clearly articulate what we want, why we should get it (and the answer isn't "because we work hard and we're smart!"), to be good at networking and building our visibility in positive ways without seeming to brag.

It is possible to create that winning mindset, to fight against our natural inclination to over-analyze every situation. **The key is passion and confidence, and sometimes just forcing yourself to act more confidently than you feel and then letting the emotion follow.** Before I started my current practice, I had helped job-seekers as a hobby on the side of my successful systems consulting practice. My own comfort zone was to avoid jumping right in, and I instead thought about ways I could test the waters. I decided to do a resume workshop for the Actuarial Society of Greater New York and gauge if people might have an interest in working with me.

I had lunch with another actuary who had recently started his own coaching practice, and by the end of lunch my workshop idea had morphed into to a four-hour joint seminar with follow-up one-on-one workshops. I left lunch with a real fire in my belly about starting my practice, and decided to immediately put out my first marketing e-mail to a large business networking listserv. I wrote my first draft, at

which point my analytic side began to kick in. What's the best message, the most compelling offer, the best way to send it out that's not too self-serving? I recognized the trap, decided there were no answers to these questions, and limited myself to one hour to refine my message and send out a confident offer. **Within 48 hours, I had 100 requests for the free resume assessment offer I settled on!**

You may be thinking, "This Winning Mindset is all well and good, but I don't want to be pushy. I don't want to be telling everyone I'm the best thing since sliced bread!" That's the beauty of it—You don't have to! **The Winning Mindset is internal. It's about getting really clear on what you bring to the table, and generating your own internal confidence in that.** Yes, you do need to present what you can do well, but this doesn't need to be an in-your-face approach. If you have that clear confidence in yourself, and let people know in a simple, clear, confident way what value you are capable of adding, they will get it. **You will exude that quiet confidence that gets you new opportunities!** □



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