

Chapter 2 – Roadblock

At the beginning of October 2012, a little over two months after I lost my job, I felt it was time to start looking again. Although I really did not feel like actually applying for anything, I just wanted to see what was out there. However, before I did that I made the decision to contact an outplacement agency, which was part of my severance package from Wells. Had I waited just one more day, that option would have expired. I had the choice of two different agencies, so I visited both of them. I will only mention the agency I chose, and that was Right Management.

Right Management was clear from the outset that they do not find you a job, but they help you in many ways to find your next job. I had several meetings with my counselor, who gave me a lot of great ideas, gave me some tests to take (Myers-Briggs, personality tests, career choice tests, etc.), and offered a lot of good advice. There was just one problem. I was not ready for this. This was a good time to get all of this information and ponder it, but it was not a good time to actually put any of it into motion. I simply was not ready yet, and knew I would not be ready for a while. I had been through so much over the last few years that my body, mind and soul were still in “rest/relax/recovery mode”, definitely not in “dive back into the labor market” mode. But I had no choice. It was either join the agency now or lose out on that part of my severance package. Thus, while many of the things the agency offered were excellent, I was not yet at the point where I wanted to take advantage of them.

After a while, it became noticeable to my counselor, wondering why I wasn't being more proactive in carrying out some of the tasks he suggested such as contacting recruiters and going to networking events and such. I was fine with retooling my resume and spending time enhancing my LinkedIn profile and getting up to speed on Facebook, but actually going out and trying to find a new job just wasn't a huge priority for me. As time went on, the meetings became less and less productive, primarily because they had already done so much for me that the only thing left for me to do was to pick up the pace on what they had suggested.

After I joined Right Management, I sat down at my computer and put together an action plan. In one column I listed my target companies, in another column I listed tasks related to my career, in another column I listed people to contact, in another column I listed tasks not related to my career, in another column I listed activities to engage in, and in the last column I listed the books I wanted to read. I color coded high priorities in green, middle priorities in yellow, low priorities in red, ongoing activities in orange and completed activities in blue. This was my dashboard for the next phase. I am still using this file, which has greatly expanded since its inception. It is a great way to remind myself of what needs to be done, what takes priority, and what I have accomplished.

So I got to work. I started in on all sorts of activities and tasks, but I didn't contact anyone yet. It was getting close to the holidays and I figured I would wait until after the holidays to start contacting people. I read a bunch of articles and watched a bunch of webinars provided by Right Management, all of which were extremely informative and useful. I learned so much about what it takes to find a job I thought, geez, maybe my next job will be as a job counselor! No kidding! I had so much advice and so many tools to work with, I felt very empowered and felt when the time came, I would have a really good chance at getting the job I wanted. But I knew it would not be easy. (Sharing what I learned about finding a job was a major reason I decided to write this book. I will share these things throughout the book).

So the holidays were just around the corner, and I was out of summer mode and getting into job search mode. But there was one thing on my action list that was holding me back. A very BIG thing that made me very reluctant to do any networking or even apply for a job. Court.

While I cannot talk about how or why I lost my job at Wells per the severance agreement, I can talk about something that happened at Wells not directly related to that. Back in 2011, after all the hullabaloo of Wells buying Wachovia and our two economics teams merging, there was something else going on that was making my life miserable. We have all had the joy of working with annoying co-workers or people on our floor that we don't really work with. For me, it was the latter. A certain woman, let's call her Kathy (as in Chatty Kathy) was driving me absolutely NUTS! My cubicle was only a few feet away from hers. Many times while I was either working or on an important phone call, she would have her team meet in her open air office cube. They would talk loud, talk in cartoon voices, make crazy noises and such. The worst, though, was that every time she laughed she would pound the desk and then let out this other-worldly noise that was not even a laugh, I just can't explain it. But it was always loud, always obnoxious and always incredibly disruptive.

So, one day it happened again, and I had just had enough. She laughed, pounded the desk, let out the noise, and I popped up and yelled at her; "Kathy!!! Really? Enough! You have been doing this for a while now and you really need to tone it down. Please understand there are other people around here trying to get work done, and your behavior is completely unprofessional and unacceptable!" Or something like that. I can't remember my exact words, but one thing is for certain; she was stunned. She was a team leader (but in a different department), and how dare anyone talk like that to her, was the expression on her face. A few days went by and it happened again. So I sent her an email to meet and discuss the matter, and I got NO RESPONSE!!! I was trying to be proactive, trying to solve a workplace problem, and was getting absolutely no help.

It was time to escalate the issue. So I spoke to my supervisor and he contacted Kathy's boss. Nothing happened. Again the disruptive behavior continued, and still no action was taken. Finally I decided that the only way to resolve the situation was to move me to the office around the corner. Well, the protocol was generally that only directors and managers got offices, even though on my very first day as an economist ten years prior I was given an office, which I held for several years before being moved to a cubicle. Well, I told them that either Kathy tones it down and acts more professional, or I'm moving into that office. Our two supervisors finally agreed that the best solution was to move me into the office...with a beautiful view of the city! So, not only did I get away from the most annoying person on the planet, I got myself a nice office to boot!

I admit, I probably should have spoken to her first, before things got out of hand, but things got out of hand so quickly, and they got so much worse than I could have ever imagined. So that was one lesson learned. Would it have helped? I doubt it. She was just a very loud and obnoxious person by nature, and I was not the only one who noticed. As a matter of fact, several employees left the company due to her horrible management skills and personality. One woman even came into my new office one day in tears, telling me she just couldn't take Kathy anymore. She said Kathy was so nice in the interview but turned out to be a real bitch once she started her job. A couple weeks later that woman had quit. There was a real pattern here, but Wells did *nothing* to rectify the situation, choosing to watch several people walk out the door rather than firing Kathy, or at least giving her a warning. Unreal.

Anyway, after I got my office, the next few days I alternated back and forth between getting work done and moving my things to the new office. Although I was happy as a clam with my new office, it had been a very stressful past couple of weeks. It was also Memorial Day weekend and I was looking forward to a nice four day weekend as I had taken Friday off. So here it was, Thursday afternoon, and I got an email from a friend inviting me to have drinks after work. I had already planned to go see a band that night, but that wasn't until later, so I figured I'd meet up with him for drinks. I have a very eerie inner sense of when something just doesn't feel right, and even though I *really* needed a drink after dealing with Kathy and moving into my office all week, something told me happy hour wasn't a good idea. I do not know why, but I just had a bad feeling. Well, happy hour went fine, we had a few drinks and I took a cab home. On the way home I distinctly remember gazing at the sun as it descended toward the horizon of a bright blue sky and thinking, man, I need some music! And, of course, a couple more cocktails!

I got home, had a few more drinks, then headed out to go see the band. Yes, this was unfortunately my routine at the time. Going out drinking and watching bands. Although I had not been in a band for quite some time, I still loved to go out and see live music. This time, though, it wasn't just one band, it was several New Orleans-style jazz bands playing one after another at one of my favorite clubs. It was a great time, I got my groove on, had a few cocktails and headed home. I am a pretty shy person so I should have realized I was too drunk to drive when I went up to a gorgeous woman and gave her a compliment on her looks and her outfit. I then wobbled off to the car and sat there a couple minutes trying to decide if I should go to the card club to play some poker or just head home. I was feeling a bit tired so I decided to skip the card club and just head home.

On my way home, as crappy luck would have it, my usual route was blocked by road construction, so I took an alternate route. I went down the street a bit, got on the on-ramp to the freeway and as soon as I got on the freeway, everyone's worst nightmare entered my life. Cherries!!! Yup, a cop had been laying in the weeds waiting for his prey. He pulled me over, administered a few field sobriety tests and determined that I was not fit to drive. I was under arrest for DWI. Awesome. This was what I had feared when I got that email from my friend inviting me for drinks. For some reason, when I deviate from my plans, things tend to go wrong. I'm not sure why, but that's just the way it is with me. That's why I had a funny feeling when I changed my plans from going home and having a couple drinks and watching some baseball before heading to the club, to instead meeting for drinks with my friend. Nothing against him of course, but I was deviating from my plan, and I knew that could be a bad thing. It most certainly was. My eerie sense of when something just doesn't feel right had proven prescient again.

I was valedictorian of my high school class, had a college degree and an MBA, had been quoted in the media many times in articles about the economy...and I was sitting in jail with a bunch of deadbeats. Heck, maybe I was a deadbeat myself, I thought. Naw, I'm better than this, and I will get through this. I'll get out of jail, pay my fines, lose my license, do some community service, get my car and my license back, and things will be better in a few months. Well, all of that pretty much ended up being true, but instead of a few months, it was a couple years. You see, I got arrested for DWI on May 27, 2011. By late 2012 my case was still on hold pending some other state class action case about some search and seizure laws that impacted my case.

Thus, in late 2012, on my action list was a big, giant ugly task: court. Because I did not know what my fate would be, if I would have to serve jail time or what have you, and because the holidays were coming up, I decided to wait until after the holidays and after my DWI case was settled before I did any networking or applied to any jobs. How horrible would it be to get a new job and then a week later have to walk into your new boss's office and ask for time off for, um, jail???! I would probably be fired on

the spot. No reason to go through all of that. My bank account was in good shape, it was winter and the holidays were coming up. Might as well just stay home, do a little research, reading and online Christmas shopping. I would tackle the DWI case after the holidays.

One thing was for sure though, I vowed to never drink and drive again. Ha ha ha you might say! Whatever. Good luck with that! Well, rather than just saying I would never drink and drive again, I promised myself that I would never even have *one sip* of liquor and drive again. For me, it was zero tolerance, for the rest of my life. I am proud to say that I have kept that promise. I have not had one sip of liquor on my breath while being behind the wheel in over six years now. In addition, it was actually a blessing in disguise. For one thing, I didn't lose my job because of my DWI because, well, I didn't *have* a job! More importantly, my lifestyle of going out drinking and watching bands suggested it was bound to happen sooner or later. It just so happened that my DWI arrest came just weeks before the laws changed, which doubled or vastly increased fines, jail time and added mandatory ignition lock for first time offenders. I had gotten in just before the deadline! So, you see, you can always find a silver lining in life's adversities if you try hard enough. They say things always happen for a reason. Maybe the reason this happened to me was to not only wake me up, but also to escape even bigger fines and possibly bigger problems down the road.

The holidays came and went, but of course, while I told my friends about my DWI, I did not tell my family. How could I face them being unemployed *and* going through a DWI case? I absolutely couldn't. My pride got in the way of telling the truth. While I didn't exactly lie, it was a lie of omission, and I felt horrible about it, but I felt it was the best way to handle the situation at the time. I felt horrible about telling my family I could not make it to Easter or Mother's Day celebrations, making up lame excuses to preserve what dignity I still had left. **In fact, reading this book will be the first time my family will even find out about my DWI from six years ago. Sad, but true.**

After the holidays came the real fun, the actual court date. I had had a couple court dates prior, but those basically ended up in further postponements. It was not fun not knowing what my punishment would be, if or how long I would lose my license, whether I would go to jail, etc. It was getting in the way of my job search. But finally in February 2013, after my lawyer did a little negotiating with the prosecutor, my sentence was handed down. The fine was a mere \$50, I would lose my license for 90 days and I would have to provide 16 hours of community service. No jail time, no whiskey plates, no ignition lock. I was relieved. Due to my interest in poverty reduction, I decided to work a few days at a food shelf to complete my community service requirements. I was amazed at how much food was in that place. I was also amazed at how nice some of the cars were that were being driven by some of the recipients! Well, that's a subject for a whole different book I think!

Make no mistake though, this ordeal cost a lot more than \$50. The lawyer fee itself was \$4,000. Throw in various other fees, higher insurance rates, cab fares getting to and from everywhere while my license was suspended and so on, and the total cost was over \$8,000!!! I wonder if they put that on a commercial if people would stop drinking and driving. I doubt it. Although the cost is great, the perceived probability of getting caught is very low in most people's minds, so they gamble. But if you get caught, the cost is huge. Also, admitting to a DWI on job applications is no fun. Worse yet, instead of getting caught by the cops, you or someone else may get caught by the grim reaper. As a matter of fact, I lost a friend back in 1997 after he was hit by a drunk driver while walking on the side of a road. That should have set me straight for life, but it didn't. Drinking and driving is incredibly stupid. Don't do it. EVER!!!! Take a cab, take Uber, call You-Drink-We-Drive, do what you can, but NEVER drink and drive. Take a vow of zero tolerance. Either you drive and don't drink, or you drink and don't drive. PERIOD!!!

No exceptions. Not...even...one...sip. You'll be so glad you did! No amount of fun you have at the bar or the party is worth the possibility of paying big fines, going to jail, killing someone or losing your own life. It...just...is...not...worth...it!!!

After completing my community service, I got my license back. Life was looking a little better again. But throughout all of this I never cried, I never got down and I never got depressed. Wait, what? You were unemployed, convicted for DWI, lost your license and you never got down? How is that possible? Well, partly because losing your job, I think, is worse than getting convicted for DWI. The intense pain of losing my job prepared me for the lesser pain of getting a DWI. Also, I kept thinking about all those people who lost their lives in the Rwandan Holocaust that I read about in that book my mother gave me. I knew this DWI thing was bad, but it was small beans compared to what other people had gone through or were going through around the world. I had read many books about poverty and corrupt governments and continuous conflict and terrible tragedies across the globe. As with my job loss, I came to the conclusion that this DWI was just really no big deal. I will get through it.

An even bigger reason I didn't get down or depressed was my faith. I have always been Catholic, although not always a practicing one. I have always had faith in God and believed in Jesus and Heaven and all that, but I have gone through periods of life when I went to church almost every Sunday, and other periods when I barely went at all. Needless to say, when I lost my job I started going to church more often. In addition, even before I lost my job I was on a mission to read the entire Bible. I think I was about halfway through when I lost my job. It took me several more months to complete the whole thing. By the time I lost my license, I had completed the Bible. In my DWI case I had to face the judge, as it were, and take my punishment. So I definitely saw Biblical overtones in my situation, and dealt with it accordingly. Getting down wasn't going to do me any good. I had to face the music like a man. Reading the Bible and understanding that redemption and forgiveness was a big part of my faith helped me to get through my ordeal. I hoped God would forgive me, but I also had to forgive myself.

Daily devotionals were also a huge help. Little books with short Bible verses or inspirational quotes helped me to start my day on the right foot. A little over a year after I lost my job I took a short course on Catholicism which helped me to learn more about my faith. I ended up buying the DVD series for myself and my sisters, and now I watch the series during Holy Week every year. Several months after that course I attended a morning retreat for men at the church given by a deacon. I got on the deacon's mailing list and have received a daily email with Bible verses every single day ever since. All of these methods of increasing my faith have helped me to get through some very difficult times. When you put things into perspective and lean heavily on your faith, you can get through pretty much anything and still remain positive and in good spirits.

Almost exactly two years since the day I got arrested for DWI and almost one year since I lost my job, my DWI case was over. It was time for me to move on, to get back in my car with my renewed license and hit the networking scene with a renewed sense of vim and vigor. It was also time for me to beef up my skills. Job opportunities were awaiting...or so I thought.

Lessons from Chapter 2

If you have the option to use outplacement services as part of your severance package, use the services.

Before looking for your next job, put together an action plan of some sort to guide you in your daily activities and longer term goals.

If you are having a workplace issue, try to talk to the person giving you problems before it gets worse. Don't wait too long to go to your supervisor either.

If bad things tend to happen to you when you deviate from your plan, stick to your plan!

Don't drink and drive...EVER!!! The joy you get from your drinks does not even come close to offsetting the pain you will feel if you get caught, or worse, kill somebody. Just...don't...do...it!!! I suggest a policy of zero tolerance. Either you drink and don't drive, or drive and don't drink.

If you ever find yourself in jail, use it as a learning experience and an opportunity to improve yourself. Understand that it's a wake-up call and you need to make changes in your life.

You can always find a silver lining in life's adversities if you try hard enough. They are there.

Never lie to preserve your reputation or your dignity. Sooner or later you will have to tell the truth, at which point you will lose respect. It's not worth it. The truth may hurt, but it's better than lying.

Many of us need to face the judge at some point in life. We need to face the music and deal with the consequences of our actions. Next time, try to have better actions!

Getting a DWI sucks, but losing your job is worse.

Perspective and faith can get you through a lot of life's challenging moments.