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VIEW FROM THE CUBE

Double-team attack on job market makes pair stronger

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Last year, my husband and I looked out on the world with a sense of possibility. I was re-entering the work force after taking time off from my job in public relations to be at home with our newborn daughter. My husband had just been laid off from his job in information systems for a human services company.

Although it was scary, we felt we had a chance to reevaluate our lives and to find work that used our abilities and balanced the needs of our family. Now, a year later, both of us are still unemployed, continuing to search for work.

We've both experienced unemployment before. We had each been laid off at different times in the early 1990s. Then, like now, the job market was slow, but after a few months of searching, new opportunities came along. So there was reason to believe that while it would be challenging for us both to be out of work, it could also offer us a chance to find the right jobs with the right fit for our family.

Then the world changed on Sept. 11, 2001, and so did the prospect that the economy would rebound as fast and as robustly as experts had thought. We took a deep breath, hunkered down, and began an earnest effort to rise above our sadness and focus on our job search.

And that's when reality kicked in. We quickly realized that two people who live under the same roof, eat the same meals, sleep in the same bed, and care for the same child would start to do one more thing together: look for a job.

When you look for a life partner, you aren't really looking at what they are like at work. You hear stories and see glimpses, but most of us don't really know what it would be like working with your spouse on a day-to-day basis. Sharing unemployment, however, is a way of getting a firsthand look at what your loved one is like on the job. It's your chance to be a spouse and a co-worker, a chance to meld together

the roles you play at home, and work to one goal: finding a job.

My husband and I share very different work styles and those differences came through loud and clear when we both started job hunting. My husband is very process oriented and very organized. These skills have served him well in his career managing information systems, so he naturally brings them to his job search.

He has developed a process to track, report and manage all facets of his job search. He has a database of companies and contacts, schedules for meetings, weekly task lists of people to call, and a system to remind him who to follow up with and when. He keeps track of each conversation had and each letter sent. If he receives a call from a potential employer, he is ready with all of the vital information he needs to have a valuable conversation.

I take a more casual approach to the organization of my information, relying on manila files, copies of letters, and, well, scraps of paper. I know I have sent out a lot of letters, but to find out when and to whom would require some digging. My strengths tend to lie in the more creative areas of work. So while I don't have a database of letters sent, I know that each letter was written so that it skillfully highlighted my experience as it related to the job.

Networking is an important part of my job search, and I find professional events and meetings with colleagues a great use of time. These meetings provide me a chance to learn and to feel supported, as well as the opportunity to speak to someone who might know someone who knows someone who is looking for a public relations manager.

My husband doesn't always see the value in these types of meetings. To him, networking and industry events are valuable only if someone has a job at hand.

Recognizing our differences was the easy part. The real challenge came when we started to be critical of each other's job search efforts.

I would roll my eyes and wonder why someone needed to spend so much time



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organizing. He would look askance and note in his Palm Pilot when I had another networking event. We spent so much time together that we knew the small details of each interview, each phone call, and each potential opportunity.

This intimate knowledge of each other's search efforts, combined with the slowness of the job market made it difficult to be objective. So when both our efforts were not producing results, we began to look at each other with skepticism, wondering if this person would ever be able to find a job.

But after a year of working so closely together and analyzing our different styles, we have both come away with the firm belief that there is no right way to do a job search. The right way is the way that works for you and keeps you motivated and excited.

Over time we even opened up to the idea that we could actually learn from

each other, each taking lessons from the others' successes. There can still be a tendency to think that your way is the right way, but it happens less and less. We both agree that as long as we are taking steps that advance our search and will help us get to the next opportunity, we are doing all right.

Our time being unemployed has clearly been a struggle, but there is a tremendous benefit in going through this together. Searching for work can make one feel very vulnerable — a statement of how worthy you are based on your resume and a half-hour interview. It is easy to get discouraged. But we don't. Because we know firsthand how hard this process is, we are better able to support, encourage, and comfort each other. We know when to just listen, offer our best motivational lecture, and when to give a kick in the pants.

In the end, this period has strength-

ened us as a couple and helped us appreciate each other even more. We were right last fall when we thought unemployment would be a chance to reevaluate our lives — we just didn't know the extent to which that would happen.

This time together has given us a better understanding of who we are as individuals, as workers, and as a couple. It has helped us to better appreciate the value we bring to our work. We are fortunate that unemployment is a temporary problem, and that at some point we will find new jobs. And when we do, we will have a new respect for the roles that each of us play at work and at home.

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