

Exp jobs from Living City July 2009

Downsizing uncertainty

What love can do in a tight job market

By Jim Webber

Just about everyone in the current economic crisis is facing uncertainty. In speaking to some of my friends who have been living the Focolare's Gospel-based spirituality of unity, I have come to realize there is a way to prepare for uncertainty – keep loving in the present moment. Here are four examples.

1. Tommy Hartmann, California

Working at Bank of America, Tommy was told last November that his position would be eliminated as of January and he would be given a severance package that would last just two months.

At work he managed a small finance group, and they were all scheduled to be cut. Together they looked for openings posted in the firm's other divisions. One member of Tommy's group, with whom he often carpooled, found a position online that actually looked just right for Tommy and e-mailed him the opportunity.

As he read the job description, Tommy was appreciative and anxious to apply. It was a good fit and would provide the necessary support for his wife and three children. But then he also realized that his friend could equally meet the qualifications. Love of neighbor, pure and simple, urged him forward. He emailed his friend back and encouraged him to apply for the same position as well. They were "competing" with love.

In the end, the opening was withdrawn, but this small step of "loving your neighbor as yourself" created a kind of musical background that kept playing for more than five months while Tommy continued to look for other opportunities. Eventually he and his family relocated to New Zealand, where he continues his job search.

2. Nick Sanna, Virginia

Nick Sanna was named president and chief executive officer of Netuitive Inc. in September 2002. By the middle of 2008, it became obvious to Sanna and other members of the Netuitive management team that the economic crisis was going to impact their company in a big way. In the early years, the company was identified with rapid growth and innovative products and solutions. Now, the economy was crashing fast and perhaps that vision of the company along with it.

Nick wondered, "How can I manage to love my workers and keep the company alive at the same time?" Once all other cost savings options were explored, the decision was made to resize the company by 30%, affecting the lives of 25 workers.

Here is where options come into play. Love of neighbor urged Nick to do as much as possible for the 25 people who would be facing the difficult task of seeking new employment in a tight job market. The management team extended the amount of severance each person would receive, offered additional financial support to those with

seniority and provided real support for each person to find a new position. Before the severance package was used up, all 25 were able to find new positions.

“Instead of ‘breaking’ the dream, this experience brought us all together in a common cause to help our co-workers,” Nick said. “A new adjective can be added to the company’s resume: ‘people oriented.’”

3. Cesar Maureal, California

During the third round of layoffs in nine months, Cesar Maureal, a human resources manager for a division of National Semiconductor, discovered his name was on the list. It came as a shock. As his boss notified him, his mind was filled with anxiety over many things. Perhaps better than others, he knew that the market would be very difficult in the short term. How many months could he manage before he might need to make drastic changes in his family life, which included his son, a high school senior who had his heart set on college next fall?

His boss then asked Cesar if he was willing to manage the layoffs in his group before he would be laid off himself. Cesar was stopped in his tracks. Up to that point, his universe was centered on his own situation. He understood the implications of this request. If he said no, he would not have to make hard decisions as to who might be cut. Nor would he have to face close to 50 employees, many of whom would be hard hit by the cuts. He decided to say yes anyway.

“I wanted to stay in the loop because I knew the people better than anyone else, and I might be able to help relocate some of them within the company. I let go of my own ‘hurt’ in order to do the right thing for the people in my group,” Cesar said.

Over the next few weeks, this decision to “keep loving his neighbors” made a big difference in the lives of more than 25 members of the group, for whom Cesar was able to seek out and find openings in other departments. He met the company’s goal of cost reductions in one division and found experienced workers for another division. He is now working full time on his job search from home.

4. Rod Vega, New Jersey

Rod Vega was working as an IT contractor with UPS when his wife lost her job due to outsourcing. They decided together that she would accept relocation to Massachusetts, thinking that this would mean a temporary separation.

Months became a year, and having two households to maintain, one mortgage and one rental, financial pressures were mounting. Rod then heard of an opportunity at a financial company in New Jersey with a higher salary. The trade-off was difficult — remain separated from wife and teenage daughter but earn enough money to hold onto the house. After only three weeks in his new position, the company, along with several others in the industry, filed for bankruptcy. Massive layoffs followed. “I felt challenged to continue to believe in the love of God for me, even in this moment,” Rod said.

He moved to Massachusetts to be with his wife and daughter. “There is no amount of money that could replace the unity in my family,” Rod said, looking back. “I learned that my physical presence as a father is much needed. I earned respect from both my daughter and my wife. We’ve learned how to live within our means. We spend for what is essential and nothing else; we even reduced our credit card debts by 75%. The love and providence

of God was so evident.” Last April Rod started his new job at Raytheon, not far from his home in Massachusetts.