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## People First

# Control what you can in tough times

Especially in tough times, attitude is everything; it's important to keep moving forward

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The unemployment rate has reached a high this year that we have not seen in decades. There are many great people out of work in the United States — although Dallas is better off than most cities. The problem is that there's not much any of us can do about that, but what we can do under these circumstances is control our attitudes. Viktor Frankl, who lived through Hitler's death camps, came out realizing that people in the most devastating situations have the ability to choose from minute to minute how situations define them.

For most of us, 2009 was the hardest of times. We have been challenged on a multitude of levels. People have at least three obsessions that influence their attitudes and behaviors:

- The overwhelming need to know what's going to happen next;
- The question, "Am I smart, strong, savvy enough?";
- I need more.

Most obsess. What separates us isn't that we don't fixate on things; it's in our capacity to manage the thoughts that fuel our fears to an end that makes us better people.

Nancy Sobota, a marketing executive with international experience at some of the world's leading brands, including Nokia, Samsung, Nortel and Citibank, lost her position as part of a companywide downsizing in 2009.

Sobota is just like most of us. She isn't independently wealthy and has a mortgage and family responsibilities.

However, Sobota kept her head by focusing on industrious actions. The secret to waiting is to find something to do in the meantime.

Sobota discovered Executives in Action, a Dallas nonprofit that engages transitioning executives in consulting projects with local nonprofits that otherwise could not access top-tier management support. Executives In Action paired Nancy with Girls Inc. of Metropolitan Dallas, which for 40 years has been the champion of girls and young women. They provide effective life skills and enrichment programs to empower girls to take charge of their lives. They provide learning opportunities designed around personal effectiveness, academics and career planning so that girls are inspired to be strong, smart and bold and to lead successful, independent and fulfilling lives.

Sobota was brought in to guide Girls Inc.'s branding and marketing strategy as part of a new five-year strategic plan to help the organization better support its mission. Deloitte — pro bono — has spearheaded this effort for Girls Inc. and has used Executives in Action to help guide various aspects of its strategy.

The payoffs for everyone involved are immense. For Sobota, she contributed her time and talents to a project that will directly impact the lives of girls and young women in Dallas. She has had a unique and uplifting experience while continuing to utilize her professional skills. Now when Sobota goes to job interviews and is asked, "What have you done lately?" her answer will undoubtedly set her apart.

People need to feel that their life has meaning; this is the primary motivation in their lives.

Being displaced is often more devastating emotionally than financially. Reining in emotions and attitudes is key to moving through any difficult situation.

**Steps to settle your thoughts:**

- Escape the injustices that you have endured; shake them off. Dwelling on them will rarely serve you. You control what you think.
- Concentrate on what you learned over the past year and how those lessons will serve you going forward. Literally make a list of all that you learned because of this situation. Knowledge is power.
- Focus on how you can put your strengths to work. Being productive is essential. You control how you present yourself to the world.
- Reach out. Networking with those close to you is the best way to find new opportunities, as they know you, trust you and are willing to be your advocate.
- Be grateful. Look around and take note that there are always people in worse situations, people who are struggling yet still manage to be kind and empathic to others. They are amazing to watch.
- Be aware. Regardless of the extent of your disillusionment, the day will come that you look back and wonder how in the world you made it through.

*"It's true that decent people are a minority. More than that, they always will remain a minority. And yet I see therein the very challenge to join the minority. For the world is in a sad state, but everyone will become still worse unless each of us does his best."*

— Viktor Frankl

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