



## Linda Swindling JD, CSP

### LOOKING OUT FOR NUMBER ONE

Tough times are ahead and you've got to look out for you. Sounds selfish, right? Well, truth be told, you are concerned about you. Many of us are concerned about our livelihood and are fearful of the future. The solution is to address these concerns outright. Psychology has shown us that you must ensure you and yours will be provided for before you approach and care about others. Remember Maslow's hierarchy of needs? Make sure you have food and shelter before you self-actualize into a Level 5 leader. (There maybe a little Jim Collins mixed in that last statement but you get the point.) Here are 10 ways to address your needs before beginning to negotiate with others:

**1. Clean up your own financial house first.** Personal financial health is as important as anything right now. If you are simply working to pay money you owe to someone else, it is hard to get motivated to get up each morning. Pay off your credit cards and do everything you can to zero out the balances. Move to a lower interest rate. Downsize if needed. Simplify and leave beneath your means.

**2. Establish your "see you later" fund.** We can learn a lot from the restaurant industry. Smart waiters and waitresses have enough of a stash that they can pay bills for the next three to six months. It's their "see you later" money. This is the money that can tie them over if they lose a job or if work or a manager gets too much to tolerate. Most of us refer to this as an emergency fund. If you don't have an emergency fund, do what you need to and get one. Delay purchases, work a second job, sell the things you don't need, eliminate luxury expenses and watch eating out. With some careful spending, you can stretch this money, especially if it is supplemented with a severance, unemployment payments, consulting and part-time jobs.

**3. Determine your net learning for the year.** Yes, net learning not earnings. If you had to go get a job tomorrow would you be competitive and current? If you wonder about your competitiveness, it may be time to sign up for a course or ask for a project to expose you to those needed skill sets. Have you learned so much this year that you must update your resume to reflect your accomplishments and the responsibility you took? If not, figure out what you should be doing to advance your career. This competitive analysis of you will pay off not only if you have to find a job but also if your employer is looking at which employees to keep.

**4. Compile your earning potential.** This is not just a survey on what income you could you make in the working world, but also what you are earning your company. Right now, could you put a dollar amount to the amount you earned for your employer? Did you save the company money? Where did you make money for the company? It is critical to know how much the company recovers from its investment in you. Look at your salary and your ben-

efits and determine if you had to choose employees would you be one worth keeping? Maybe you know how to perform a skill no one else does. Perhaps you save the company money by not outsourcing your services. Maybe you are a natural leader and motivator. Defining the things that make you valuable to your company will aid you whether you are fighting for the job you have or interviewing for another.

**5. Recognize yourself and others for contributions.** Professionally and with tact, make sure people know what you do. Find a way to let your boss and company know the good things you've been up to. Recognize those team members who have gone the extra mile. A little celebration and communication about good results goes a long way when work is challenging.

**6. Take good care of you.** Times are stressful. This is an excellent opportunity to practice excellent self-care. Maybe you need to increase your exercise or vary the routine you have. Now maybe the time to decrease alcohol consumption and make sure you are getting that good night's sleep the health experts encourage. Start taking vitamins. Check in with your dentist and doctor. If you smoke and don't want to, this may be the time to use the company employment assistance resources and give it up. The same holds true with your diet. If you are not happy with how you look or what you eat, use this time to change your eating habits. Eliminate what isn't working and start doing what you need to. Stress takes its toll on your body. Figure out what, if anything, needs to change and do it now.

**7. Surround yourself with positive energy.** Today could be the day to take a news holiday. Turn off the television and stop watching the market go down on the internet. Instead watch and listen to positive messages that can uplift and support. Take a walk in nature. Read an encouraging book. Make good memories with your family and friends. Look for the good. It's out there.

**8. Network with the keepers.** Reconnect with your friends and business associates. Find out what others are doing and how you can be of service. Avoid those energy drainers. Worriers, doomsayers and the negatively imbalanced are not only depressing, they can be contagious. Instead of confusing or emotionally challenged people are seeking like minds, you need to be surrounded by people who want you to succeed.

**9. Be grateful for what is going well.** There are many things that are good in your life right now. Make a list of 3 to 5 things everyday that you are grateful for and write them down. Visit your church or your mosque or synagogue or place of worship regularly. Be thankful and appreciative for what is right, right now.

**10. Give back. Seems inconsistent to tell you to help others in an article all about you, doesn't it?** However, you will receive more than you give by reaching out to others. Someone always has it worse. This is the time to determine what you can do to improve your community. Clean out your closet, garage, attic or storage unit and give what you don't need to others. Visit elderly. Help a scout. Volunteer at a shelter. Repair a house. Clean up a park. Read to school children. Collect food. You know what needs to be done or you know the person who does know. Give your time and attention where it is needed. The ability to give shows you just how much you have.

*A recognized authority on negotiations, workplace issues, and persuasive communication, Linda Byars Swindling, is an author, television expert, a former employment attorney, and a Certified Speaking Professional. As a chair for Vistage International, the World's Largest CEO Development Organization, Linda has more than 2,000 hours as a CEO advisor and facilitator. She can be reached at [linda@lindaswindling.com](mailto:linda@lindaswindling.com) or 972-416-3652.*